

THE UNDERMINING OF THE SYNODAL INSTITUTION

Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis)

A series of four articles on the topic of Synod and Synodality were presented in the *VEMA* newspaper of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia (May – August 2008). Each article tried to show a concrete example of the ways in which the most sacred institution of the Synod has been manipulated and undermined in recent times. It is not my intention to present these texts here for a second time in their entirety, since they have already been published on the abovementioned dates in English translation, together with the Greek original.

For the benefit, however, of readers throughout the world who subscribe to the annual theological review *PHRONEMA*, there follows a summary of the main ecclesiological points relating to the theme of Synod and Synodality. The original title *The Undermining of the Synodal Institution* was, I believe, indicative from the outset of a new problematic concerning the manner in which we must examine the vital objective of proper (that is to say, healthy) Orthodox Ecclesiology.

A general evaluation of the falsification of the institution of the Synod (often *intentional* but to be fair not always so) was presented in the first, introductory article of May, followed by the more detailed presentations in the issues of June, July and August.

Part 1 – The Introduction (May 2008)

The decision of the writer to dedicate his entire ‘Keynote Address’ (at the 10th Clergy-Laity Congress of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of

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Australia held in Sydney, January 27-29, 2008) to what is, for the Church, an absolutely irreplaceable institution, namely the Synod, was certainly a move and a gesture adequately declarative of a denounced imminent danger.

However, the denunciative character of the Opening Address would definitely have been less effective had the same agonising Theologian and Shepherd not presented long ago and through authoritative systematic writings, the necessary ecclesiological foundation in relation to this contentious problem. Furthermore, this is an issue regarding the stability of the entire Church of God, always militant, that is, struggling (both regionally and globally), in the midst of a world that 'lies under the sway of the wicked one' (see 1 John 5:19).

With today's increasingly common induction of mainly celibate Clergy to the Courts of various Prelates, and without meritorious criteria at that, we have arrived at a situation where candidates with nothing more than un-enlightenment are 'rising' to the rank of Bishop through sheer favouritism. This is the main reason why the Bishops themselves, who comprise the most sacred institution of the Synod, have not adequately comprehended how frightful their responsibility is, when they show disregard for the latent derogation or for the flagrant oppression of the collective Body of Bishops.

Returning today for a further deliberation on the enormous problems created from time to time by the circumstantial weakening or complete discrediting of the institution of the Synod, as appears across the entire breadth of the Christian Churches or Confessions, we shall attempt to demonstrate briefly how the undermining of the institution of the Synod is perpetrated historically from within and from without. As a result of this analysis, it needs to be mentioned that *every* Bishop (and not only those who are Heads of Churches) is answerable to the Holy Canons, the lifelong observance of which was pledged through proportionate oaths, during the frightful hour of ordination to the Episcopate.

Part 2 – Means and Manipulations (June 2008)

If socio-ethical foundations are valid for every institution or organisation of ‘common benefit’ then there is all the more reason that they should apply to the Synod which is the pre-eminent institution of ‘common salvation’! In order to examine the gradual or unforeseen degeneration of the most sacred institution of Synod, we must be particularly careful so that our judgements and comparisons on the matter might be expressed in ‘the fear of God’, without these digressing to futile and impious ‘exercises on paper’.

An immovable foundation and criterion with regard to the integrity and sacredness of the Synodal institution through the centuries, can be none other than the already ‘fixed standard’ of the 34th Apostolic Canon¹, with direct reference to the ‘Christocentric’ motive preached by the Apostle Paul so absolutely: ‘No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 3:11). There are both external and internal factors with regard to Synodal decline.

External pressures

The primary and silent factor which, in advance, is able to externally diminish the freedom of the Synod in the Holy Spirit (leading to ‘Constitutional’ or ‘momentary’ compromises) is the imperative need for the Synod of Bishops to cooperate with or at least not to be confrontational towards the local political Authorities. This, of course, does not mean that a sincere and honest cooperation between Church and State is perhaps not legitimate and desirable. The cooperation between the two authorities can be mutually constructive, according to the degree to which their different responsibilities are recognised, since these analogously determine their different priorities and duties. Here, the axiomatic exhortation of St Paul ‘do not be conformed to this world’ (Rom. 12:2) constitutes a stable security valve.

The fact, nonetheless, that the need for such cooperation creates in the first instance a transition from the primary area of the Holy Canons (Κανόνες) to the spaciousness of secondary Regulations (Κανονισμοί) is already a dubious and dangerous window. Because no one can predict up to which point such a rift would leave the implementation and the spirit of the Holy Canons in the functionality of the Synodal institution unaffected.

Regulations are usually incorporated in a more general 'nomocanonical' arrangement, the so-called 'Constitutional Charter', which includes the Agreements arising from time to time and the conditions of cooperation between the authorities involved. This, understandably of itself constitutes a relativity which, in time and in accordance with socio-political concurrence, might unfold into an unacceptable enslavement of the Church to the State though the State rarely subjugates to the Church, if we exclude the singular case of the uncontrollably evolving Papism of Rome.

Regarding the external assault on the Synodal institution, impressive and most characteristic are the cases involving immiscible autocracy of worldly power, manifested frequently in more recent times as 'Military Juntas', not only in the under-developed countries of Africa or Latin America but also in traditionally Orthodox nations (even from the era of Byzantium, in Tsarist or Soviet Russia and in the Balkans generally). Hence, in the initial experimental phase there was an adoption of the so-called 'meritorious' Synod, with limited membership, under the ironic claim that the Dictators knew how to appoint the supposedly most excellent of Bishops with healthier criteria, although in reality they were nothing more than aligned Junta-supporters and acutely submissive Hierarchs.

This, at least in Greece, was demonstrated glaringly also in the case of the seven-year Dictatorship of the Generals (1967-1974) during which the 'pietist' Archimandrite and Chief Priest of the Palace Ieronymos (Kotsonis), gladly accepted his election as Archbishop of Athens and Greece by a seven-member meritorious Synod, thereby dethroning his own Primate (the aged and ill former Metropolitan of Philippi and Neapolis) Archbishop Chrysostomos II (Hatzistavrou) of Athens and all Greece.

G. Konidaris, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in Athens at that time, castigated this unprecedented case of profane audacity, stating epigrammatically that the Synod which elected him was not *aristindin* (meritorious) but *ahristindin* (useless). Unfortunately, judging from what ensued in the Church of Greece from then until today, this characterisation proved to be not merely a witty play on words but also a prophetic evaluation of the emerging general anomaly whose dimension was destined to be revealed completely in the monstrosities of the so-called *Chrysopigi* brotherhood!

The greatest irony, however, was the fact that all the members of the Cabinet and the Government were baptised 'Orthodox' citizens, though they behaved like ruthless foreign invaders. The recent history of the Church of Greece (which is our focus here) contains many such examples, and indeed from democratically elected Governments which one would assume had learnt some lesson from the tragic mistakes and the disastrous consequences which the Dictatorship of April 1967 ultimately had on Greece and Cyprus.

We are also obliged, however, to recall for the history of the matter, the ecclesiological most scandalous case because, even though it is relatively recent, there is the distinct possibility that it might be completely forgotten even by the protagonists who are still alive. In the Provincial Synod of the 'Apostolic Church of Crete' which always blew its own trumpet regarding its moral stature compared to that of any foreign violator or compatriot daredevil, there occurred an unparalleled event, almost immediately after the Fall of the Junta: A certain bishop of the Church of Crete, distinguished for his social work, aspired to be transferred to an Eparchy of the Ecumenical Throne in Western Europe - something which he secured with ease through blatant support and favouritism from one of the Junta's troika, the devout Cretan, Stylianos Pattakos.

Unfortunately, this most distinguished and tireless Hierarch, having created remarkable works in Germany, hastened just before the fall of the Dictatorship in Greece to pronounce himself a 'victim of the Junta'(!) demanding through all means that he return to his former Eparchy in Crete

(the Metropolis of Kissamos and Selinos). However, the Provincial Synod, having been informed of his retraction and insistence, had already elected to that Metropolis another cleric (Archimandrite Nektarios Hatzimichalis). The latter, unable even to approach the Metropolis to which he had been elected, because hot-headed supporters of the former Prelate ‘kept guard’ over it with flags at half-mast, threatening to cause unprecedented demonstrations, was compelled by the events to await the compromising intervention of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

As a result, the elected but never enthroned Metropolitan Nektarios (Hatzimichalis) of Kissamos and Selinos was then duly elected by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Phanar as Metropolitan of Karpathos and Kassos, whilst the aspiring past Prelate, claiming that he was being ‘held captive’ by his supporters in his former Eparchy (this being the supposed reason why he could not conform to the Patriarchal Synod’s command that he return to Germany), was in the end re-elected to his former throne following the intervention of a most powerful political figure from that area.

The only sentiments which every person who respects the institutions of Bishop and Synod in the Orthodox Church, could feel after such a calamity were indeed bitterness and frustration. For it was not possible for one to have expected such insincerity and irresponsibility towards the institution of Synod and the Holy Canons of the Church from a Hierarch who, as an Archimandrite and Deputy Principal of the Ecclesiastical Seminary of Crete, had inspired the most sacred of dreams in his young students, one of whom was the writer.

That is the reason why, with deep anguish, the not-ungrateful student was obliged from that time to sever every communication with his formerly admired teacher, in conformity with the dictum *‘Plato is a friend, yet truth is the greatest friend’!*

Part 3 (July 2008)

So far, attention has been drawn to two key points regarding the correlative concepts of ‘Synod’ and ‘Church’: (a) the inherent danger of the evolving

passage from the 'primary' authenticity of the Holy Canons (Κανόνες), to the 'secondary' value of formal Regulations (Κανονισμοί); and (b) the fundamental discernment between the 'internal' and 'external' violations and pressures that might act against the work of the Holy Spirit in the God-given institution of the Synod.

Related to this are the questions of the degree to which the presence of the Holy Spirit, at some point, might be 'hindered' as a result of the 'digressions' of the faithful - as individuals or in Synod - according to the express observation of the Apostle Paul (see 1Thess. 5:19) and the degree to which this hindered presence of the Holy Spirit causes local Churches not just simple sterility but even temporary or long-term falling away from the Faith 'which was delivered once for all' (see Jude 1:2).

Needless to say, of course, despite such digressions of individuals, it is not possible for the vital responsibility of those bearing the Episcopal function, for the salvation of the entire people of God, to be diminished, regardless of whatever personal or coincidental reasons. For, this responsibility can never be compared - even remotely - to the degree of responsibility borne by any other member or cleric of the Church.

Whenever we Bishops purport to theologise or preach with the fear of God what we have received, we are not permitted to ignore that which in the expiatory Prayer of the Divine Liturgy clearly distinguishes between 'the sins' of the Clergy and 'the omissions of the people'! In any event, the relevant declaration of the Lord is explicit when stating: 'he who knew much ... shall be beaten much' (see Lk. 12:47).

The 'internal' pressures

Strictly speaking, with regard to the undermining of the Synod, we should not be talking merely about 'pressures'. What we have, rather, are wilful manipulations which directly falsify the product itself rather than just indirectly influencing the process of its manufacture.

It shall not be necessary to refer to specific historical examples, primarily because from the 4th century (when the Church also enjoyed the direct presence and contribution of the Emperor in the constitution and function of the general scope of the Synodal institution), there appeared the fundamental and major theologico-dogmatic, as well as administrative problems for world Christianity.

The Christological, Pneumatological and various 'Iconoclastic' divisions of the first centuries, whose basic traits were definitively countered by the 12 Articles of the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith, do not always allow for a clear distinction between powers, according to the form that we are examining here (external-internal). As a result, that first 'Apostolic Synod' described in the Acts of the Apostles must always steadfastly remain an immiscible example of the 'ideal', we could say, functioning of the Synodal institution in the Church. There, in the original 'virginity' of the institution, the details are unambiguous as to who should participate in the Synod and what the jurisdiction is of each member.

However, in order for the ingredient features of the Apostolic Synod in the Acts of the Apostles to be evaluated more thoroughly and precisely, we should not restrict ourselves - as normally occurs - only to the brief reference in Chapter 15 of the Acts where, in summary, are expounded not only the problem for which the Synod was convened, but also the solution which finally was given and prevailed throughout the entire Church. It is imperative, therefore, for our study here of the Synodal institution that we 'read in parallel', commencing from Chapter 14 all that is characteristically described during the apostolic missions of Paul, and most especially the evangelisation of the people in the 'discipleship of Christ', but also the responsible direct counsel of preeminent members from the circle of the 'Apostles and Elders' in Jerusalem. Quantifying the data recorded in Chapters 14 and 15 of the Acts - and indeed with a glossary that reveals a much-developed 'ecclesiological sensitivity', as we would say today - we discern two inclinations, at first seemingly 'diverging' from one other, yet in continuation essentially 'converging' and fulfilling each other.

The first inclination is expressed by the 'Mother' Church of Jerusalem with protagonists, on the one hand Simon Peter and on the other, James the Brother of the Lord. Both speak up and remind all the Apostles that their voice must be respected, invoking, with a rather unconcealed exclusivity, an analogous apostolic responsibility emanating directly from the Lord, which the host of the Disciples (expressly referred to as 'Church'!), does not question in any way.

The second inclination - added to the horizontal of the traditionally acknowledged succession of the 'Apostles and Elders' in Jerusalem, is the vertical of Paul who is 'an apostle, not from men, nor through man' (Gal.1:1) - is represented in a unique way by his own self as the eminent 'Apostle of the Nations', and by his student Barnabas. These two Apostles, without in any way questioning their due hierarchical affiliation to those in Jerusalem by narrating in detail 'what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles' (Acts 5:12) contributed as catalysts to the final transcendence of the 'Law' through 'Grace'.

This transcendence of the Law, precisely, which does not abolish the Law but expands it to the 'fulfillment of Grace', is that which gives to Paul his irrefutable 'authority' to 'ordain' and appoint 'Elders in each Church' (see Acts 14:21-24) throughout the Christian communities which he established during his apostolic journeys. It is superfluous, of course, to say that - as revealed by research into the development of the ecclesiastical constitution - the 'Elders' of the local Churches in mention were those called, in continuation, to become 'Bishops'. Having the above as a stable criterion, we can proceed now to a somewhat concise review of the forms and ploys by which the institution of the Synod developed in various places throughout the centuries, especially following the cosmogonic changes of secular rule on a global scale.

During the First Millennium which, for the most part was characterised as the 'Byzantino-Romaic Empire', it was inevitable that the familiar 34th Apostolic Canon would be established as the nomocanonical basis for the shaping of the 'Pentarchy of Patriarchates'. Nonetheless, following the Schism of 1054, the institution of Synod, even in each of the

four Patriarchates of the East remaining in communion, witnessed almost Ovidian transformation, according to the prevailing local circumstances.

These occasional changes, which it is presumed could not theoretically have influenced the smooth functioning of the Synod in the East, in practice, however, over time and almost impalpably, brought about a misbegotten autocracy. Because, ‘we wrote and preached otherwise, but we also thought and acted otherwise’(!) always sheltered adequately under the general anonymity of the most revered name of the ‘Holy and Sacred Synod’.

If the transfer of the capital of the Empire from the West to the East became an absolutely fateful temptation for the Bishop of Rome, provoking him to pay for the created void through the development of his own hitherto peculiar secular Vatican State, then for the Bishop of New Rome (Constantinople) the temptations towards secularisation should not be considered non-existent. How could it have been possible for the Church to engage in a harmless interaction with the Byzantine Emperor, and later, under the eventual Invader, the Sultan of Constantinople (1453), maintain that ‘acrobatric’ and acutely painful ‘Ethnarchy’ known as ‘*millet-başı*’?

Yet, the Bishop of Rome, degenerating into a worldly ruler, in his efforts to survive and prevail over the barbaric tribes of the West, always managed to devise ‘sinful shifts and excuses’. In any event, nonetheless, he successfully achieved his transmutation (rather his ‘devolution’!) into a ‘Leader of a Worldwide State’. For the Bishop of New Rome, however, the voice of the Fathers and the Synods were always expected to constitute the impregnable ‘Wall’ against ‘all heresies’ (!) even when the Emperor himself spoke theology and prayed (the supreme example being the truly tragic 36-year-old Emperor of Nicaea, Theodore II Lascaris, who though suffering psychosomatically, composed the familiar ‘Great Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos’ and wrote his famous book ‘Concerning Acts of God’). As for the internal crisis of the Synodal ‘system’ and ‘spirit’ in historical Christianity, we must recognise that much can be attributed to the intrinsic predominant influence (exerted consciously or subconsciously) by the ‘Court’ model. It is, obviously, not by chance that the most scandalous

contortions regarding the structure and function of the Synodal institution, have been assigned by the impartial judgment of history to the three main Centres of historic Christianity:

Rome - New Rome – Moscow

The Papism of the Bishop of Rome, as is known, has since long ago abandoned the traditional ground of the concepts ‘Church’ and ‘Christianity’ of the first Christian Millennium and consequently must now be judged only as the strangest oligarchic form of regime. And we say ‘oligarchic’ because, especially in the case of the current Pope, Benedict XVI, it has become patently clear that the celebrated global ‘Monarch’ and sole ‘Vicar’ of Christ on earth - despite his powerful spiritual personality - has subsequently proven to be entirely captive to the all-powerful ‘Curia’ surrounding him. As a result, Papism, strictly speaking, should now only be studied in Legal Faculties, and specifically in those of Political Science, rather than in Theological Colleges of Christianity. Consequently, it is self-understood that in continuation we shall restrict our examination of the plight of the Synodal institution only to the two other Ecclesiastical Centres which are currently active on the world scene, that is, Constantinople and Moscow (imitated farcically by later or even senior(!) Autocephalous Churches of Orthodoxy!).

Part 4 (August 2008)

Probing the characteristic phases of the vicissitudes which the Synodal institution has undergone in the prominent ecclesiastical Centres of Eastern Orthodoxy, that is, Constantinople and Moscow, it should be remembered in advance that, in order to track the underlying causes of the differentiations that gradually led to the rather unappeasable and active rivalry between the two Patriarchates during the 20th century, one is obliged to continually move between two diametrically opposed ideological areas: (a) the ground of worldly history, full of contradictions and unpredictability which the Church ‘militant’ cannot ignore; and (b) the purely dogmatical ground of Orthodox Ecclesiology which tolerates neither violations nor ‘theological inconsistencies’.

And certainly it is a fact that, even in the studies of preeminent historians and theologians, the celebrated impartiality of the scholar constitutes an almost 'impenetrable objective'. This, however, in no way exempts anyone from the obligation of always reverting afresh to indisputable historical realities and to fundamental theological truths. Especially, indeed, when these truths are tacitly brushed aside, primarily by those who are the directly interested parties, for reasons of wrongly perceived 'self-preservation'(!), as if the Providence of the just God had not given adequate witness to the proceedings and sufferings of the historical Church.

Since the points expounded above with regard to the due impartiality of the contemporary scholar, in surveying the problems of the subject, sound somewhat abstract and rhetorical, we shall immediately provide some basic features from which it becomes clear that the impartiality of the Pastor and Teacher in the area of the Christian Church self-evidently presupposes not only a conventional honesty towards God and man but above all a tacit valour that does not hesitate at every call to deposit a 'witness to the truth' according to one's conscience, even if that should mean, almost always, unforeseeable dangers for the personal well-being and reputation (let alone the posthumous fame) of the one martyrically making the deposition.

In order, nonetheless, that the vicissitudes of the Synodal institution in the two Episcopal Thrones (Constantinople and Moscow) might be evaluated 'with the fear of God' and with the greatest possible degree of sincerity, by way of preface it is imperative to underline two crucial facts. And it is highly characteristic that precisely because these facts have weighed so decisively in the genesis and development of each of the Thrones under examination, they were for this reason meticulously suppressed according to the exclusive 'interests' of both sides at different times.

The first fact, undoubtedly common to both Thrones, is unfortunately the autocratic character of acquired hegemonism which commenced 'latently'(!) but, once adopted was never again overcome

internally. This hegemonism, fed unceasingly by the greatest temptation (that of vainglory) persistently devalued the inviolable rights of what is local and concrete. Whereupon, of itself, it inevitably precluded the true meaning of 'communion', upon which is based, as is known, the sacrament of the Synod and of the Church generally. The more peculiar aspect of this is that, by tragic irony, in both cases – as precisely occurred in the case of Ancient Rome - the supposed 'rights' of Sees answering to the titles 'Worldwide' or 'Ecumenical', were contested always precisely in the name of what is Local: *Roma aeterna!*

The second fact is more disagreeable and burdensome for the Throne of Moscow. Because, whilst in the beginning she intensely lived out a daughterly relationship with Constantinople, not only were attempts made by her to erase this as quickly as possible (through the development even of morphologically differential elements in her theology and her spirituality generally, as well as in her worship and ecclesiastical art), this ultimately and unfortunately degenerated into a rivalry of the worst animosity.

Analysing the autocratic hegemonism under which, as we have said, the meaning of ecclesiastical communion was eroded fatefully and perhaps sometimes unconsciously (most especially in the Episcopal Thrones which, in the same city with the Emperor and his immediate environment, evolved into a 'Court'), we must admit that such a development could not possibly have occurred only as the result of human vanity. It appears that to a greater degree, collaborating to this end, there was also a cold calculation of the practical needs which had to be satisfied through the mutual support of the two Authorities. And this, not only for the cause of continual and greater expansion, as a 'common' feat and interest but possibly for a reciprocal defence against each other, in their cohabitation!

In other words, the 'synodality' and the 'pluralism', so to speak, of the Bishops representing, at the same (horizontal) level, the 'communion' in the Holy Spirit between the faithful bonded to the same Body of the one Lord, in reality could not possibly conform to or even simply compromise with the meaning of the vertical, as expressed by the autocratic singularism

of 'Byzantine Theocracy'. Once, however, for any reason, the horizontal which recognises the Presiding Bishop as a Brother who is 'first among equals' (*primus inter pares*) and never as the 'highest' (*maximus*), is abandoned, then the concept of pyramid automatically imposes as self-evident the recognition and activity only of one-way traffic, without in essence permitting communion, in the sense of exchange and mutual enrichment.

We can comprehend how corruptive the vertical ascent to the tip of the un-communing pyramid was for the essence of the Episcopal office, only if we intensively compare this form to the form of the horizontal expansion of a solitary centre into concentric circles. Then, it becomes obvious that the Bishop, standing 'in the place and type of Christ', remains in consistent and unhampered communion with all of his brothers in Christ - wherever in the world they might be and in whatever period of history - only if he honours and reveres the unique centre and person of God Incarnate, that is, the only authentic source of truth, power and life (see John 14:6). It is neither accidental nor inexplicable that there eventuated historically the ecclesiastical twins - 'Rome' and 'new Rome' - and in continuation much later, we would say upon reflection, the 'inward' dream of a 'third Rome'.

For the impartial scholar of the first Christian Millennium it is an admirable fact that, whilst the 'Byzantine Theocracy', even during its most friendly relations with the two Authorities (Emperor-Pope or Emperor-Patriarch), was not a self-understood interaction of peace (*εἰρήνη*) and wisdom (*σοφία*) - the most characteristic names of the two central churches in Constantinople - nonetheless it allowed, in the midst of many external adversities and local conflicts, the formation of the eminent institution of the 'Pentarchy of Patriarchates'.

The enormous importance of the institution of the Pentarchy is obvious, even from the fact that it managed to successfully balance historico-political demands on the one hand, with ethico-theological requisitions on the other. This, in any event, is the main cause which rendered the dynamic synthesis between the senior Patriarchates a

canonistic measure (*norma normans*) of authenticity, since the measure itself was also fashioned to a great extent directly (*norma normata*) from the spirit of the Gospel.

However, at a time when in the West, the Pope, not tolerant for long of the ‘acrobatic diarchy’(!) in the same area, ensured that the Vatican be established as a ‘state’ amongst states, whilst in the East, every Patriarchal Throne, submitting at various times to the dominant Authority of the worldly Ruler, on the one hand under humiliation took lessons in ‘foreign morals’ (subservient collusions!), whilst on the other, as a matter of reaction, was internally rendering itself ‘a state within a state’! That briefly describes the gradual ‘erosion’ of the Apostolic ideal of Synod and of the spirit of Synodality.

Now is the appropriate moment to place our ‘finger in the mark of the nails’, adjudging with an impartial theological criterion the unforeseeably evolved ‘mentality’ or ideology of the ‘Autocratic Hegemonism’ of the Episcopal Thrones which exhibit the greatest deviation from the Apostolic ideal of the Synodal institution, with reference to the local Churches of Rome, New Rome and Moscow. From a purely theological viewpoint, therefore, it should be stated here unequivocally that the Autocratic Hegemonism in the Church was underpinned by a most audacious ‘fabrication’(!), and a double fabrication at that: firstly, on the concept of an ‘Ecumenical Church’ which is an entirely fictitious and deceitful reality; and secondly, on the equally fictitious authority of ‘Emperor’, and indeed as one alone.

Both axes of this double ecclesiological fabrication are entirely contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and belong to the area of fantasy which critical Philosophy most aptly named Nominalism (*nominalismus*). And indeed, a careful analysis of the terms convinces us immediately as to the completely unfounded concept of an ‘Ecumenical Church’, as well as that of a ‘Worldwide Authority’ (Emperor, King, President)

The ‘Church of God’ (*Kahal Yahwhe*), already from the Old Testament denotes a tangible and specific community (‘Synagogue’, a host of faithful) in *place*, and in no way an abstract and imaginary reality. In

the New Testament, the local and geographic designation of the Church is of even more decisive importance. For this reason, the so-called ‘loose ordination’ (*ἀπολελυμένη χειροτονία*) was prohibited by the Canons of an Ecumenical Council!

The Church, which God Incarnate has established by His own blood (1 Cor. 11:25) remains one and undivided even when she is commemorated in the plural in order to express her various manifestations in time and place, which are always ‘homologous’ and ‘consubstantial’. For this reason, the highly indicative characterisation ‘The Church of God in...’ has been used even from the time of the Apostles. The fact that all local Churches, collectively and individually, of themselves bear equally the four fundamental qualities (One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic) of the Nicene Creed is the unshakeable dogmatic basis not only of unity in Christ, but also of their equality with each other, as well as of the Presiding Bishops therein.

Therefore, the aggregation of local Churches does not constitute a Worldwide Totality, as if they were merely ‘portions’ of the Church, nor would it be possible to consider this notional Totality as the ‘Universal or Ecumenical Church’! Such a fragmentation of the living and undivided theanthropic Body of the Church cannot be supported by anything in Scripture or Tradition. On the contrary, no matter how numerous they are, or how near or far in distance and time, the Local Churches are not simply the ‘total’, but rather the ‘identity’ of one consubstantial Body of God Incarnate.

Yet, the ‘primacy of honour’ among the Local Churches is a necessary and beneficial reality, which is purely historical and possibly sociological but by no means sacramental (!) in nature. Otherwise, the Church of Jerusalem, where the Lord suffered and was resurrected, would have to be recognised as the first and only sanctifying source of salvation, while, as we know, it is last in line of seniority among the ancient Patriarchates of the Pentarchy even though she is called the ‘Mother of Churches’.

Following all that has been systematically presented, not even a ‘student of theology’ would be justified to overlook how misguided and

corruptive the Papal ideas and ‘camarillan’ manipulations are by definition, whenever they have dared to be implemented in the past and unfortunately even to this day, not only within the Patriarchal Court of the truly suffering Church of Constantinople but also within other local Churches, which naturally reacted by way of imitation.

The fact that, within the one undivided Body of the Hierarchy of Bishops, it became possible to establish – even within the Standing Synod – a special group of Synodal Bishops around the First Presiding Bishop, was of course an unacceptable discrimination and attempt to force the freedom in God of the other members of the Synod. Thus, there prevailed for centuries within the Synod of the Church of Constantinople the system of ‘Elders by title’ which until today has produced many more problems than one would have perhaps expected it to solve, during critical moments of the Church’s life. The same, and possibly worse, example was given by the Church of Moscow when institutionalising, without any basis or canonicity, an analogous group of Synodal Hierarchs which, as known, is distinguished by its white hat veil and permanence, whenever there are changes in the members serving in the Synod.

The dangers of the undermining of the Synod, as denounced above, become clearer if one realises more deeply the concrete possibilities afforded by modern technology for the responsible Senior Celebrant of the Church to move from the fallacy of ‘nominalism’ to the consciously or unconsciously enacted deceit of ‘machiavellianism’. In other words, most people now know that today it is possible for just very few persons around the First to venture with complete ease to ‘manage’ the highest responsibilities of the Church, without giving any account to their fellow Bishops or to the faithful in general, as if everything were conducted with angelic perfection – not just with legendary Papal Infallibility!

Here, then, in conclusion, are two blatant and extremely problematic facts, which have been pointed out from afar on many occasions: (a) the lifelong office of every Head of Church – in contrast to the political leaders who are elected at regular intervals – makes a Church Leader, and indeed a President of the Church, more and more vulnerable, not only *vis-à-vis*

his friends and co-workers but also in terms of the less noble weaknesses of his own nature!; and (b) the complete lawlessness, in the preparation of the so-called 'Agenda' of the Synod enables not only the President but also his immediate and special co-workers, to 'obliterate' forever any documents which might be undesirable for their own personal expedience, though these Memoranda concerning the honest interests of the Church may have been selflessly written and wholly substantiated when submitted to the Holy Synod by Bishops or other faithful.

May this be enough for the present, and for our own adverse misfortune!²



Acknowledgement

Translated by Father Steven Scoutas and abridged by Dimitri Kepreotes.

Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis) is Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia and Dean of St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College.

NOTES:

¹ 'It behoves the Bishops of every nation to know the one among them who is the premier or chief, and to recognize them as their head, and to refrain from doing anything superfluous without his advice and approval; but, instead, each of them should do only whatever is necessitated by his own eparchy and by the territories under him. But let not even such a one do anything without the advice and consent and approval of all. For thus there will be concord, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (*The Rudder*, by Priest-Monk Agapios and Monk Nicodemos, translated by D. Cummins, Chicago, 1957).

² It has unfortunately become apparent that the new Patriarch Kirill I of Moscow and All Russia, has commenced his duties this year with dynamism, but also with a degree of haste and even phyletism. One can therefore appreciate how timely are the above observations especially when they are from a Professor of Systematic Theology and Dean of an Orthodox Theological College.