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*The Whole Truth About
The Ukrainian Church Issue*



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The Whole Truth About the Ukrainian Church Issue

Cover image

The First Council of Nicaea

Zacharias Kastrofylakas, 1779

(from the Sacristy of the Holy Monastery of Pantocrator)

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It is known that the issue of the Autocephaly of the Church of Ukraine has troubled the entire Orthodox world –and not only. It is the biggest ecclesiastical topic of the last decades, not so much because of the creation of the fifteenth Orthodox independent Church, but because of the reaction of the Church of Russia that provoked division within Orthodoxy with the termination of the commemoration and communion with its faithful and all that recognise the new Autocephalous Church of Ukraine.

Based on some rules selectively, they try to convince the others that they behave according to those rules, while they willingly ignore many other of them, even the holy tradition and the ecclesiastical practice, which negate their claims. The same people, of course, continue the polemic against the Ecumenical Patriarchate, without paying attention to the word of the Gospel: *‘if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God’*¹.

As an answer to the assertions made by those that represent the Patriarchate of Moscow, we expound –knowing and participating in the ecclesiastical issue that has arisen– our views on the subject, aiming to present its truth and enlighten the faithful.

1. THEY CLAIM THAT THERE WAS AN INTRUSION INTO THEIR TERRITORY BY THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

In 988 took place the Christianisation of the Rus by the Byzantine Empire. The baptism of the people took place at the Dnieper River in Kyiv. The first metropolitan see was in Kyiv and ever since fell under the Ecumenical See in Constantinople. During the 14th century, political power was transferred from Kyiv to Moscow. The whole region, however, remained under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical See. The regions of Ukraine had been annexed to the Polish-Lithuanian King-

1. *Acts* 5:38-39.

doms. In 1589, the Metropolitan of Moscow claimed and was awarded the title of the Patriarch. In 1685, Patriarch Joachim of Moscow together with Tsar Peter the Great asked from Ecumenical Patriarch Dionysius IV for the subsumption of the eastern provinces of Ukraine, which had been annexed to the Kingdom of Great Russia, under his ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The Ecumenical Patriarch turned down the request made by the Patriarch of Moscow but signed the so-called Synodic Act of 1686.

In this Patriarchal act, the permission to the Patriarch of Moscow to ordain and install the elected Metropolitan of Kyiv on the throne, – under the absolute and necessary condition that the Metropolitan of Kyiv will commemorate the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch² in every divine Liturgy, which means that he was to stay under the canonical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, – is given under ‘economy’³. By ordaining the Metropolitan of Kyiv, the Patriarch of Moscow would act as a trustee and representative of the Ecumenical See. In fact, Patriarch Theophanis of Jerusalem, as a delegate of the Ecumenical See, acted similarly when he ordained a Metropolitan in Kyiv in 1620. Theophanis, however, did not consider that by ordaining the Metropolitan of Kyiv, its metropolis would come under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem⁴.

Nevertheless, no written source is there to indicate that the Ecumenical Patriarch handed over the Metropolis of Kyiv to the canonical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow fully and definitely – quite the contrary. Apart from that, the Patriarchate of Moscow never observed the conditions of this letter, and also annexed on its own the Church of Ukraine after the end of World War II, in 1945, relegating it to an Autonomous Orthodox Church of Ukraine, because of her newly an-

2. «*Ἡνίκα δὲ ἐκτελῶν εἶη ὁ μητροπολίτης οὗτος Κιόβου ... τὴν θεῖαν καὶ ἱερὰν καὶ ἀναίμακτον Θυσίαν, μνημονεύη ἐν πρώτοις τοῦ σεβασμίου ὀνόματος τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ πατριάρχου, ὡς ὄντος πηγὴ καὶ ἀρχὴ καὶ ὑπερκειμένου πάντων τῶν πανταχοῦ παροικιῶν τε καὶ ἐπαρχιῶν*».

3. «*δοθῆναι ἄδειαν τῷ μακαριωτάτῳ πατριάρχῃ Μοσχοβίας χειροτονεῖν μητροπολίτην Κιόβου*» καὶ «*δίδοντας οἰκονομικῶς ἐκείνῳ τὴν τοιαύτην ἄδειαν*».

4. Al. Massabetas, *Ἡ Τρίτη Ρώμη. Ἡ Μόσχα καὶ ὁ Θρόνος τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας*, Athens 2019, p. 161-162.

nexed provinces to the Soviet Union. Later, in 2000, with the new constitution of the Church of Russia, it relegated anew the Autonomous Church of Ukraine to a self-governed Church, in order to integrate it obliquely and secretly into the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow, so that it could identify it indirectly as its canonical ground⁵. That is, in this instance, the Patriarchate of Moscow acted without the blessing of Mother Church. And what is done without blessing, does not have a good ending either. The Ecumenical Patriarch was never commemorated, as commemoration means, as we very well know, that the spiritual reference befits the person that is commemorated. For example, every region that commemorates the Patriarch of Serbia has its reference in the Patriarchate of Serbia; every region that commemorates the Patriarch of Romania has its reference in the Patriarchate of Romania, and so on. Wishing to grant Autocephaly to the Church of Ukraine, the Ecumenical Patriarchate nullified the validity of this letter, that is the permission of the Patriarch of Moscow to ordain and install the Metropolitan of Kyiv on the throne.

In effect, this letter was not nullified just now, but during that time by the Patriarchate of Moscow. It was never applied because never were all of its conditions observed. It is also not weird that, on the part of the Church of Russia, nothing is mentioned about this. They only call upon the ecclesiastical conscience, which, however, is formed through the ecclesiastical practice, that is how the Church acts throughout the centuries. This does not deny the right of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to recall the validity of the letter and put things in the right place for the redemption of the faithful.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate, despite the intrusion of the Church of Russia into its territory, acted only now that the people was condemned to be characterised as schismatic for no particular reason. It did not act out of its own interests, as it could have done, but out of love for the salvation of the Ukrainian people at the time when it was most needed.

In 1991, Ukraine became an independent state. As a natural consequence, the Church of Ukraine asked the Patriarchate of Moscow to

5. B. Feidas, *Το ζήτημα της Αυτοκεφαλίας της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας της Ουκρανίας εκ πηγών απευδών*, Athens 2019, p. 26.

proceed with the necessary steps for its Autocephaly. The whole Hierarchy of Ukraine signed the request in 1992 with a unanimous decision. It was very difficult, however, for the Church of Russia to grant Autocephaly to Ukraine because, if it did so, that would imply that she would lose many important regions and sacred places that are directly connected with her history, while at the same time she would lose her influence on Ukraine. She thus preferred to create a schism in Ukraine than accept its Autocephaly. In effect, two sides emerged: the one that supported the independence of the Church of Ukraine (the schismatics) and the other that was attached to the Russian Church.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate repeatedly asked the Patriarchate of Moscow to offer a solution to Ukraine's problem. But when it became aware of its unwillingness, it acted responsibly as the Mother Church that has the responsibility and providence for the resolution and settling of ecclesiastical matters and, based on the privileges it received from the Ecumenical Councils, 'it called all the rivals to unity'⁶ so that peace descended on the local Church of Ukraine. But to those that accepted the invitation of the Great Church of Christ, it granted the coveted Autocephaly. If the Church of Russia wished for the union within the Orthodox Church, things would be simpler. Unfortunately, however, as it appears, she was more interested not to lose her influence on Ukraine. That, in turn, created serious problems in global Orthodoxy, since she ceased the commemoration and communion of its faithful with those of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and all that recognise the new Autocephalous Church of Ukraine.

The stance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, however, is different. While it could easily have taken revenge with the equivalent exclusion of Russia's Church or any sort of other sanctions, it acted as the real Mother Church, tolerating everything and anticipating patiently the return of its ungrateful children. This is what God blesses, not vengeance.

It is indeed true what they say about the Autocephaly, that this one is not like others. It has a profound difference; it is much more pleasing to God because, thanks to it, we witness the return of millions of schi-

6. Cf. *Kontakion of Pentecost*.

smatic people to canonicity. Moreover, they claim that the Autocephaly did not bring the result that the Ecumenical Patriarch wanted. But what would his desire be except for the redemption of all those former schismatics? This is also what Christ desires: people's salvation. Any reactions that currently exist are temporary and are going to weaken, as they oppose God's will, who *'desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth'*⁷.

2. THEY CLAIM THAT THE FORMER SCHISMATICS SHOWED NO REPENTANCE

It is claimed by the Church of Russia that there was no penitence on the part of the former schismatics that have been restored, that is Metropolitan Philaretos and Metropolitan Makarios. The dissolution, however, of the 'ecclesiastical formations' that they served shows the opposite. Apart from that, they did not renounce the Orthodox faith and doctrines. Their request was made for the Autocephaly, that is for administrative issues, which they had every right to demand. The main accusations against Metropolitan Philaretos of Kyiv were: a) that he was put in charge of the request for Ukraine's Autocephaly and b) that he did not resign after the pressure put on the Patriarchate of Moscow by the Metropolis of Kyiv. As he realised that the Patriarchate of Moscow did not wish to allow the granting of Autocephaly to Ukraine, he created the schismatic Patriarchate of Kyiv, with the result of being deposed and excommunicated by the Church of Russia.

The question is, how can we say that Metropolitan Philateros has not repented for that? His decision to dissolve the 'Patriarchate of Kyiv', which he served for 27 whole years, actually showed his true repentance. If he had not repented, there would be no way that he would have signed its dissolution. When, however, those from the Church of Russia say that he did not regret, they mean, in fact, that he did not regret pursuing Ukraine's Autocephaly. They actually want him to regret and apologise to those that have deposed him. That is, they want him to apologise be-

⁷ 1 Timothy 2:4.

cause he wanted the Autocephaly for the Church of his country instead of its dependence on the Church of Russia. Apart from that, he made six times an appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarchate for his restoration, and the Ecumenical Patriarch eventually restored him. Through him, he also restored the many millions of the faithful in Ukraine that were schismatic, as they belonged to the schismatic Patriarchate of Kyiv. Maybe he changed his opinion after his restoration, but that is a matter of personal choice.

Apart from Metropolitan Philaretos, the Ecumenical Patriarchate also restored Metropolitan Makarios, whom they accuse of having been self-ordained. Through him were also restored the millions of the faithful that followed the schismatic Autocephalous Church of Ukraine. But Metropolitan Makarios was falsely accused of being self-ordained. All the documents of his ordination can be found in the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He patiently bore and still bears this gross and unfair slander. But this sanctifies him. Without any ambition, – for he could have easily asked for many ‘rights’ as the head of the former schismatic Autocephalous Church of Ukraine, – he works for the benefit of his flock and his country.

Somebody ought to have been interested in these millions of faithful people. He ought to have left the 99 sheep and go to find the lost one⁸. Everyone expected that solution to be provided by the Church of Russia; but in vain. Millions of Ukrainians were in a schism for 27 years, without knowing the reason. We should all be glad, as the Ukrainian people eventually found the ‘*way of salvation*’⁹. Many millions of new members are now included in Christ’s Church.

8. *Luke* 15:4.

9. *Acts* 16:17.

3. THEY CLAIM THAT THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE DOES NOT HOLD THE CANONICAL RIGHT TO CONSIDER AN APPEAL ALSO FROM OTHER PATRIARCHATES

The Ecumenical Patriarchate did not recognise the schism, as many from the Church of Russia claim, but cured it. No schismatic is there any more in Ukraine. The Ecumenical Patriarchate had the right to rectify things because, as proved later, Ukraine belongs to its jurisdiction, but mostly because Church through the Ecumenical Councils gave the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as the first Church among equals, the privilege to intervene decisively wherever necessary, but also to hear an appeal from other local Churches, examine and settle their matters¹⁰. Furthermore, it is the one responsible for the return of heretics and schismatics back to the Church¹¹. It regulates, in other words, ecclesiastical matters as a supreme court. It enjoyed that privilege since ancient times when the Pope of Rome handled cases of other Patriarchates. For the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the privilege to hear an appeal also from other Patriarchal thrones of the East is connected with the 28th canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, according to which 'equal legateship' was

10. Kallinikos Delikanis, *Τὰ ἐν τοῖς κώδιξι τοῦ Πατριαρχικοῦ Ἀρχειοφυλακίου σωζόμενα ἐπίσημα ἐκκλησιαστικά ἔγγραφα, τὰ ἀφορῶντα εἰς τὰς σχέσεις τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριαρχείου πρὸς τὰ Ἐκκλησίας Ἀλεξανδρείας, Ἀντιοχείας, Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ Κύπρου (1574-1863) περισυλλεγένητα καὶ συναρμολογηθέντα κελεύσει τῆς Α.Θ. Παναγιόττος τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχου Ἰωακείμ τοῦ Γ΄*, Constantinople 1904, p. 4-5: «Ὁ μόνον περὶ δογμάτων ... ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς σχετικῶς σπουδαίοις ἐπὶ μέρους ζητήμασι τοῖς ἐνδιαφέρουσι ταύτην ἢ ἐκείνην τὴν Ἀυτοκέφαλον Ἐκκλησίαν, ἢ κηδεμονικὴ πρόνοια καὶ ἀντίληψις τῆς Μεγάλης τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἐκκλησίας παρεμβαινούσης – ποῖ μὲν αὐτεπαγγέλτως καὶ ὡς ἐκ καθήκοντος, ποῖ δὲ κατ' ἐπίκλησιν τῶν ἐνδιαφερομένων – καὶ παρεχούσης τὴν ἀποτελεσματικὴν αὐτῆς συμβολὴν πρὸς διαίτησιν καὶ ἐπίλυσιν διαφορῶν ἀναφεισῶν μεταξὺ τῶν ἁγίων τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἐκκλησιῶν, πρὸς διευθέτησιν διαφοριῶν μεταξὺ ποιμένων καὶ ποιμνίου...».

11. Matthew Blastaris, *Σύνταγμα κατὰ στοιχείων τῶν ἐμπεριελημμένων ἀπασῶν ὑποθέσεων τοῖς θείοις καὶ ἱεροῖς κανόσι*, ed. G. Ralli – M. Potli, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, Athens 1859, vol. II, p. 7: «τῷ δὲ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Προέδρῳ ἔξεστι ... καὶ τὰς ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις Θρόνοις γινομένας ἀμφισβητήσεις ἐπιτηρεῖν καὶ ἀνορθοῦσθαι καὶ πέρας ἐπιτιθέναι ταῖς κρίσεσιν· ὡσαύτως καὶ μετανοίας καὶ ἐπιστροφῆς ἀμαρτημάτων καὶ αἰρέσεων, αὐτὸς καὶ μόνος καθίσταται διαιτητῆς τε καὶ γνώμων».

given also to the throne of the New Rome as with the Old Rome¹². This is also safeguarded by canons no. 9 and 17 of the same Council¹³. The Church of Russia is based solely on a comment by Ioannis Zonaras, a canonist of the 12th century, on the 17th canon mentioned already («οὐ γὰρ δεῖ καὶ τοὺς ἄκοντας ἐλκῦσαι δικάσαι παρ' αὐτῶ») ¹⁴, ignoring Ioannis Zonaras' contemporary interpreters of the same canon¹⁵, but also the holy tradition and ecclesiastical practice which are above any interpreter. This was so well entrenched in the holy tradition of the Church that, in the question of the Russian clergy towards the Patriarchs of the East in 1663, whether the Ecumenical Patriarchate had the right to examine cases of other local Churches, all the Patriarchs answered affirmatively, and added that only the Ecumenical Patriarchate had this privilege¹⁶.

The history of the Church is full of cases of appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarchate by other local Churches. The Patriarchate of Moscow, in particular, has made good use of it in the past to face complex problems.

12. «τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς πρεσβυτέρας Ῥώμης, διὰ τὸ βασιλεύειν τὴν πόλιν ἐκείνην, οἱ Πατέρες εἰκότως ἀποδεδώκασι τὰ πρεσβεῖα. Καὶ τῷ αὐτῷ σκοπῷ κινούμενοι οἱ ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα θεοφιλέστατοι ἐπίσκοποι, τὰ ἴσα πρεσβεῖα ἀπένευμαν τῷ τῆς Νέας Ῥώμης ἀγιωτάτῳ θρόνῳ».

13. Canon 9: «Εἰ δὲ πρὸς τὸν τῆς αὐτῆς ἐπαρχίας μητροπολίτην, ἐπίσκοπος, ἢ κληρικὸς ἀμφισβητοίη, καταλαμβάνετω τὸν ἑξάρχον τῆς διοικήσεως, ἢ τὸν τῆς βασιλευούσης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως θρόνον, καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῷ δικάζεσθω». Canon 17: «Εἰ δὲ τις ἀδικοῖτο παρὰ τοῦ ἰδίου μητροπολίτου, παρὰ τῷ ἑξάρχῳ τῆς διοικήσεως, ἢ τῷ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως θρόνῳ δικάζεσθω».

14. Ioannis Zonaras' comment, in effect, refers to whether or not the Ecumenical Patriarchate has the right to intervene on its own and outside its jurisdiction; that is, whether it can intervene after a request put in by another Church or unasked for when it determines that it should. Not under any circumstances does it doubt the right to appeal, which is a voluntary petition to the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the resolution of any kind of an issue of the interested Churches.

15. T. Barsof, *Ο Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως και η εξουσία του επί της Ρωσικής Εκκλησίας*, Saint Petesburg 1878, p. 198-199.

16. «Εἰ τῷ Κωνσταντινουπόλει θρόνῳ ἐφεῖται πᾶσα κρίσις ἄλλων Ἐκκλησιῶν ... Ἡ ὁμόφωνη ἀπόκρισις τῶν τεσσάρων Πατριαρχῶν ἦταν σαφής: Τὸ προνόμιον τοῦτο τῷ πάπῃ Ῥώμης ἦν πρὸ τοῦ διαρραγῆναι τῆς Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας ... ἥδη δὲ διαρραγέντος, αἱ ὑποθέσεις αὐταὶ τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν εἰς τὸν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως θρόνον ἀναφέρονται καὶ παρ' αὐτοῦ τὰς ἀποφάσεις λαμβάνουσιν, ὡς τὰ ἴσα πρωτεῖα κατὰ τοὺς κανόνας ἔχοντος τῆς παλαιᾶς Ῥώμης». See B. Feidas, *op. cit.*, p. 74-75.

For example, Patriarch Adrianos of Moscow (1690-1700), being under pressure by tsar Peter the Great to ordain the Latinised Dionisius as bishop of Lutsk, addressed the Ecumenical Patriarchate, calling for an immediate intervention to avert the ordination¹⁷. There is no exception to date in the history of the Orthodox Church that shows that an appeal was made to a Primate other than the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It is obvious that the Patriarchate of Moscow is trying to revoke the canonical privilege of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to consider the appeal of the deposed Metropolitan Philaretos of Kyiv and restore him in ecclesiastical communion. Because whoever recognises this privilege of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, i.e. the hearing of an appeal, also accepts the restoration of the former schismatics in Ukraine.

4. THEY CLAIM THAT THE RECOGNITION OF THE FORMER SCHISMATICS IS INVALID AND THAT THEY REMAIN SCHISMATICS

Unfortunately, people from the Church of Russia ignore (maybe deliberately) many similar and more difficult cases, which the Orthodox Church faced in her very long history. Indicative examples of this are the following:

a) Saint Cyril of Jerusalem was ordained as a bishop by Arians. He then came to Orthodoxy and not only was he received as an Archpriest but also all those that had been ordained as priests by him were accepted without a reordination.

b) All those that had been ordained by heretic Peter the Mongus, having renounced the heresy of Eutychnianism and recognised the Council of Chalcedon, were received by Christ's Church to the same degree of priesthood without reordination.

c) In the *Life* of Saint Sabbas the Sanctified, it is mentioned that when Patriarch Elijah of Jerusalem died, Ioannis was ordained to the Throne by Seberians for being like-minded, but later embraced the Orthodox

17. B. Feidas, op. cit., p. 75-76.

faith upon proposal by Saints Sabbas and Theodosius. He was not accused, however, of having been ordained by heretics¹⁸.

Something similar also happened with the Church of Bulgaria, which was in schism for 75 years. In 1945, the schism was lifted and, naturally, all the bishops, priests and deacons were not reordained, even though they were formerly schismatics.

It should be noted, furthermore, that Saint Ephraim from Katounakia, the new Saint of the Church, was ordained as a priest in 1936 by Old Calendarist Archpriest Germanos of the Cyclades, whom the official Church had deposed. Thus, although Saint Ephraim had not been ordained by an ordinary archpriest, the Church accepted him without reordination (after the revelation of Saint Joseph the Hesychast, which resulted in his as well as Saint Ephraim's abandoning of zealotism) and included him in the company of her Saints¹⁹.

It is unfair that the Patriarchate of Moscow accuses the Ecumenical Patriarchate of recognising non-canonical ordinations, at the time when, in 2007, it did precisely the same with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR). Those people whom the Church of Russia considered for almost a century as schismatics were restored with just a signature²⁰ and Russia's Church accepted all their mysteries for the sake of unity. No mention is made, however, of the apostolic succession.

Such decisions are taken by the Church throughout the centuries under 'economy' to provide unity and salvation for man. The Church does not function in a formalistic and rationalistic way. She functions in a soteriological way. Her aim is man's salvation. How to save and not how to condemn. The canons did not create the Church, but the Church created the canons, and, where necessary, *'of necessity there is also a*

18. For other examples, see the study by Metropolitan Gregory of Chios, *Περί ενώσεως των Αρμενίων μετά της Ανατολικής Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας*, 1871.

19. See the article by Hieromonk Antipas, «Σχισματικοί που επέστρεψαν στην Εκκλησία και αγίασαν»: <https://orthodoxia.info/news/σχισματικοί-που-επέστρεψαν-στην-εκκλ/>

20. The signing of the Act of the Canonical Communion between ROCOR and the Patriarchate of Moscow.

*change of the law*²¹. As we have seen, far more scandalous things have taken place, namely the recognition of bishops ordained by heretics, who caused great harm to the Church. The case of Ukraine is much easier compared to the complex difficulties the Church had to face in the past with the heretics. The differences here are administrative (the petition for Autocephaly) and not doctrinal. There they accepted ordinations performed by people whose faith was contrary to the Church dogma, i.e. by heretics.

Furthermore, let us not forget that the Church even accepts aerobaptism, which is performed by laypeople to infants before they die. Also, in the Life of Saint Athanasius, we read that, when he was a child, he baptised other kids while playing, and the Church accepted those baptisms²². The Holy Spirit '*blows where it wishes*'²³. There is no rational explanation. Cannot God even '*raise up children to Abraham from these stones*'²⁴?

5. THEY CLAIM THAT THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH WANTS TO BECOME FIRST WITHOUT EQUALS AND THEY CHARACTERISE HIM AS THE POPE OF THE EAST

It is known that the honour of the ambassador was bestowed on the Ecumenical Patriarch through the Ecumenical Synods. With decisions from the 4th and 6th Councils, the equal honour of the ambassador of the Pope of Rome was conferred on the Patriarch of Constantinople. Therefore, after the schism of the Churches (1054), he was the only Patriarch who kept this honour. Both history and the canons of our Holy Councils show the primary role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and also what the essence of this role is²⁵. The honour of the ambassador is

21. *Hebrews* 7:12.

22. This tradition is treasured in *Ecclesiastical History* by 4th-century historian Roufinos and from there it passes on to the relative Byzantine hagiographical tradition about Saint Athanasius of Alexandria.

23. *John* 3:8.

24. Cf. *Matthew* 3:9.

25. T. Barsos, op. cit., p. 232-233.

not merely precedence, but also entails canonical responsibilities, among which is the granting of Autocephaly. All the Autocephalies and Patriarchal values of the newer local Churches were granted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which gave Autocephaly to all the local Churches from Russia in the 16th century and then to others, the last one being the Church of Ukraine²⁶. On the issue of Ukraine, the Patriarchate of Moscow is now asking for the granting of Autocephaly to be given only by consensus among all the local Churches, in some form of a Panorthodox Synod. No Autocephaly, however, has ever been given with such a Synod, so long as this is the exclusive privilege of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The Ecumenical Patriarch does not take the decisions on his own, but with the Holy Synod around him, for in the Orthodox Church, there is the synodical spirit and not the Papal infallibility. Many decisions have been changed or delayed with the further examination of issues by the synodical Archbishops. The natural is for all the synodical Archbishops to change at regular intervals so that the objectivity and credibility of the decisions are ensured.

The Patriarchate of Moscow, wishing to nullify the privilege that the Church has accorded to the Ecumenical Patriarchate through the Holy Councils, devised a new way of starting a Council by the consensus of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Such a meeting was held in Amman in Jordan and naturally was doomed to fail, since it had no connection with the holy tradition of the Church. It is now obvious that some people cannot or do not want to follow the trodden and safe path of the tradition and history of the Church and, instead, they are looking for new 'platforms' for convening Councils.

Undoubtedly, the head of the Orthodox Church is Christ, and, undeniably, the synodical spirit is always present in the Orthodox Church. But one person convenes every Council and presides. Patriarch Cyrill in the Patriarchate of Moscow, Patriarch Irinej in the Patriarchate of Serbia, Archbishop Ieronimos in the Autocephalous Church of Greece, and so on. Thus, according to the long-established canonical tradition

26. Russia 1589, Greece 1850, Serbia 1879, Romania 1885, Poland 1924, Albania 1937, Bulgaria 1945, Georgia 1990, Czechia 1998, Ukraine 2019.

and ecclesiastical practice, the one who calls and presides over the meetings of the Primates of all the local Churches is always the Ecumenical Patriarch.

There are many opinions that have nothing to do with the holy tradition of the Church. Even in *'that in the meeting of Amman all were equal, sitting at a round table, and this is the right thing and that this is how Panorthodox meetings should be held. Without a head, because Christ is the head'*. No one doubted that the head of the Church is Christ. But these things are strange and dangerous to the Orthodox tradition. The Church never acted like this. There was always someone who was first in the form and place of Christ. We see, for instance, in the divine Liturgy that there is always one priest that performs the Mystery. There may be other priests with the same rank, but someone needs to be first in the form of Christ. Even in the first Apostolic Synod, there was someone in charge: Saint James, brother of the Lord. They were all Apostles, but someone presided at the Synod and controlled the conversation. A Synod, therefore, cannot exist without a head.

In the meeting of Amman, we have a blow to the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church. All the thoughts of the contributors of this 'brotherly meeting' became apparent. Their purpose was (and still is) to degrade the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Orthodoxy. The battle is for him not to have the right to regulate the ecclesiastical affairs, grant Autocephalies, hear appeals from other local Churches, and so on. In other words, to have the honour of being first only symbolically, without all the privileges that the Church has accorded him through the Ecumenical Councils.

All these, however, are well-established in the tradition of the Orthodox Church, who walks this path for many centuries. And we, walking along what has been delivered to us by the Church, walk safely. Everything else is a dangerous innovation and opinion of those that are bothered with the privileges the Church had granted to the Ecumenical Patriarch. It is also important that he did not have them on his own neither did he demand any such privileges, but he was given them with the Ecumenical Councils and, unfortunately, whoever doubts them, also doubts the decisions of many God-bearing fathers. All things are fruits of the Holy Spirit who is perfect God, and whatever God created

is perfect and does not need correction. It cannot become better. If we intervene, we can only make it worse.

The Patriarch, therefore, is not the Pope and the first without equals. He does nothing more than what is dictated by the privileges that the Church has granted him, which assign him the responsibility and care for the stability of all the other local Churches²⁷.

6. THEY CLAIM THAT THEY ARE RIGHT, SINCE NOT AUTOCEPHALOUS ALL THE CHURCHES RECOGNISE THE FORMER SCHISMATICS

The recognition of a new Autocephalous Church is a process that can last many decades. For example, the Patriarchate of Bulgaria was recognised by others after 75 years, while the Church of Poland was fully recognised after 24 years.

The penalties that the Patriarchate of Moscow imposed on the Churches that recognised the new Autocephalous Church of Ukraine are expulsion from communion, withdrawal of economic support and, naturally, the threat of illegal intrusion into their territories with the foundation of parishes without the blessing of the local Archpriests. The pause of commemoration and the distancing from the communion are measures that the Church implements for pedagogical purposes. Unfortunately, in the case of the Church of Russia, we see that they are taken as an act of revenge for those that disagree with her self-serving purposes.

As a penalty for the recognition on the part of the Church of Greece, the Russian Church made an unprecedented decision in all the recorded ecclesiastical history: she terminated communion with the Greek Metropolises whose Metropolitans were in favour of the recognition of the new Autocephalous Church of Ukraine, while she continued communion with the few Metropolises whose Metropolitans were against the recognition. Thus, the effort of the Russian Church to divide the Greek

27. Kallinikos Delikanis, op. cit., p. 11: «ἔφθασεν ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς Οἰκουμενικός Θρόνος Κανονικὴν πλουτισθῆναι δύναμιν ὡς καὶ τὰς προβαλλομένας ἐπὶ διαίτησιν αὐτῶ ἀνακρίνειν ὑποθέσεις, τὰς τ' ἐπισυμβαινούσας ἀταξίας ταῖς ἐν ἑτέροις κλίμασι τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἐκκλησίαις καταστέλλειν, καὶ τὸ εὐθετον ματαρρυθμίζειν τὰ τοιαῦτα».

Church on a Metropolitan level is obvious²⁸, as well as the veiled warning she gives to other local Churches, who are fully aware of the problems that the politically and economically powerful Russia can cause to their territories, as has already done to global Orthodoxy, by cutting off the Russian faithful from the communion with those that have already recognised the Church of Ukraine. She is, after all, the biggest Church in the number of faithful.

It is true that the Russian faithful are very good and pious. They do not consider the toil and sacrifice. But, most importantly, they obey their Church. No one can accuse them of being obedient. Nevertheless, most of them have their objections, but they cannot do anything without a command from their Church. Some others act according to conscience, without paying attention to prohibitions. They were under atheism and communism for so many years and now that they have begun enjoying Orthodoxy they cut them off.

CONCLUSIONS

We observe that the Ecumenical Patriarchate acts responsibly, being the first Church among equal Churches; It acts according to the responsibility it bears through the privileges given to it by the Ecumenical Councils. And the Ecumenical Patriarch knows that he would be liable to God if he let those millions of people remain in schism. He had the obligation to do it and provide a solution.

We could liken the Ukrainian ecclesiastical issue to Lord's miracles. The Pharisees witnessed the miracles, but they accused the Lord of not observing the holiday of Saturday. They were attached to the ordinances of the Law²⁹. They could not understand the magnitude of God; that He is above everything, even the Law. They accused Him of having a demon³⁰ when He saved people.

28. See. A. Massabeta, op. cit., p. 419.

29. *Mark 2:27: The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*

30. *John 8:48-49.*

We see that the Church of Russia falls into all that with which she charges the Ecumenical Patriarchate:

a) She charged the Ecumenical Patriarchate with intrusion into its territory, whereas she has intruded into Ukraine's territory, which belonged to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and continues to intrude into other territories that belong to it. Moreover, she threatens with intrusion into all the Churches that recognise the new Autocephalous Church of Ukraine.

b) She charges that there has been recognition of former schismatics, while she has done exactly the same (without having the canonical right) with the recognition of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR).

c) She falsely calls on ecclesiastical conscience, ignoring the holy tradition of the Church which creates the ecclesiastical conscience and dictates to us the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch and acts in a way that is strange to the well-established canonical tradition and this very ecclesiastical practice.

d) She accuses the Ecumenical Patriarch of wanting to be first without equals, while at the same time she tries to convene Synods (without having the canonical right) intending to degrade the Ecumenical Patriarch so that she gains control over the issues of Orthodoxy.

e) She charges the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the creation of a schism, while at the same time she forbids the communion and commemoration of those that recognise the new Autocephalous Church of Ukraine. The schism was created by the Church of Russia and not the Ecumenical Patriarchate. All the local Churches have communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. On the contrary, the Church of Russia terminated the communion with those Churches that recognised the new Autocephaly.

The Autocephaly of Ukraine is indeed an inescapable ecclesiastical fact. As time passes, we should all accept this. The Autocephalous Church of Ukraine is under the blessing of the Mother Church, who granted the Autocephaly to all Churches, and this graces the Orthodox brothers of Ukraine. Time will prove that *'what happens in the Church is not exaggerated'*.

Many people believe that they become confessors of the faith by criticising and disparaging the Ecumenical Patriarch. The true confession, however, is the support of the truth that is dictated to us by the canons and the holy tradition of the Church. On this specific Ukrainian issue, it is the support of the Ecumenical Patriarchate which acted according to them. People behaved in a similar way towards the Saints of the Synaxaria. They slandered, charged and disparaged them, but they still forgave and blessed their enemies. This is what happens today with those people who think that they protect Orthodoxy and confess their faith by blackguarding and slandering the Ecumenical Patriarch, who blesses everyone. *'For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God'*³¹. No matter how far they accuse him of anything and wish to make people hate him, they will not succeed, because God knows the truth.

If someone dealt fairly with these issues, he or she would understand where the truth lies and would get to know what the will of God is. If someone were well-meaning and believed that he or she was not infallible, then he or she might think that some opinions on this issue are erroneous. The problem is when someone believes that he or she is infallible. This person will only have his or her opinions, which he or she will consider as the only correct.

There were always such turbulences in the Church, as wherever there are people there are also problems. But the Church always goes ahead, based on the Holy Scriptures, her holy traditions and everything that the God-bearing Fathers have well established.

Hieromonk Niketas of Pantocrator

31. *Romans* 10:2-3.

