

## THE BISHOP AND/OR THE ECCLESIAL RECEPTION OF THE CATHOLICITY (ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΉ) OF THE CHURCH

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### ABSTRACT

*In the Symbol of Faith, we profess that the Church is Catholic. Therefore, we can understand this catholicity in several ways. First of them, the Church is catholic because it proclaims the apostolic faith in its entirety; she is the place where we meet Christ in his sacraments and receive the spiritual gifts needed to grow in holiness together with our brothers and sisters. The Church is also catholic because its communion embraces the whole human being, and she is sent to bring to the entire world the joy of redemption. Not eventually, the Church is catholic because it reconciles the wonderful diversity of God's gifts to build up His People in love, unity and harmony.*

**Keywords:** Church of Christ; hierarchy; episcopate; bishop; catholicity; universality;

### INTRODUCTION

The teaching on the Church can rightly be considered the most *neuralgic* part of inter-Christian dialogues, which has created, and certainly will create more tensions between the members of the interdenominational area of all times and all places. This present study aims to be a detailed presentation of terms and concepts that compose the dogmatic *architecture* of Orthodox ecclesiology.

### 1. THE BISHOP AND THE EPISCOPACY OF THE CHURCH

*Nulla ecclesia sine episcopo* (No church without a bishop) is the *sine qua non* condition of ecclesial realism.

Bishops (from the Greek *ἐπίσκοπος*<sup>1</sup> and the Latin *episcopus* = overseer, guide, respectively), form the highest step of the hierarchy of the Church of the post-apostolic period. The bishop is *chosen and delegated*, by ordination, to exercise the role of a leader of the Eucharistic synaxis, that of a teacher of the Gospel and that of a coordinator of the activities of the local church – the eparchy.

In the New Testament, the notion of a *bishop* is mentioned five times: in *I Peter* 2, 25, where Jesus Christ is called „shepherd and bishop”, then in the *Acts of the Apostles* 20, 28; *Philippians* 1, 1; *I Timothy* 3, 2; *Titus* 1, 7; where the bishops who were active in the Apostolic Church are mentioned. In the terminology of the Apostolic age, the same honor was given multiple names, although the steps of the hierarchy were different amongst themselves. One of the most frequent changes was made between the terms „elder” and „bishop”. Thus, in several places (*Philippians* 1, 1; *I Timothy* 3, 2; *Titus* 1, 7), the notion of

<sup>1</sup> The word comes from the verb *ἐπισκοπέω* = to watch, to oversee (See *Hebrews* 12, 15 and *I Peter* 5, 2).

„bishop” does not seem to point toward the first step of Church hierarchy. In two typical places, which indicate the qualities of the one who enters the clergy, the terms *elder* and *bishop* are applied to the same step, which is *priesthood*<sup>2</sup>. In these cases, the terms refer to the same step, and they can be switched. Elder-priests were also called bishops when their function as overseers of the Christian communities. This does not mean that there were not bishops as a standalone superior step, but this title of bishop was not given to all elders, but only to those who have a unique position (that of leaders of church life, having received a special ordination).

Timothy and Titus are successors of Saint apostle Paul. Although they were active in a certain ecclesial community – Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete – they oversaw several communities, not being linked to one in any particular manner: „For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you (*Titus* 1, 5). Timothy was ordained as a bishop by Saint apostle Paul (*I Timothy* 4, 14) and had the power to judge elders<sup>3</sup>. Titus receives the responsibility of ordaining priests in every city, as a bishop of the community of Crete. In this way, the succession between the apostles and the first leaders of the Christian communities, who had all the authority of priestly mission, is established.

In the early period of Christianity, every local establishment which was ecclesiastical in nature was led by a group of priests. Such is the case of the Christian community outside the Holy City: „Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question”<sup>4</sup>; „So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed”<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, if there were several priests in a city, the main responsibility came to a elder-bishop. The distinction that was made amongst priests was honorific, not hierarchical. Saint Apostle Paul recalls „elders who rule”<sup>6</sup> and „shepherding elders”<sup>7</sup>, the *προϊσταμενος*, meaning „he who leads”<sup>8</sup> and the *ηγούμενος*, meaning „ruler”<sup>9</sup>. In time, these rulers of local communities in which there were several elders turned from shepherding priests to bishops. Therefore, it follows that amongst all of the priests of a church, only one was a bishop, invested with special prerogatives, although he could be named with both names: bishop and elder.

In the beginning of the second century, we find a bishop in every local church, as its main ruler. This development could not be explained if, early on, all of the elders were bishops.

The orthodox theology differentiates between apostolate and episcopate. This succession should not be understood as a line of historical continuity from apostle to bishop in the communities that were founded by the apostles, or from bishop to bishop in the

<sup>2</sup> According to *Acts of the Apostles* 20, 17 and 28, *Titus* 1, 5 and 7.

<sup>3</sup> *I Timothy* 3, 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Acts of the Apostles* 15, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Acts of the Apostles* 14, 23.

<sup>6</sup> *I Timothy* 5, 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Acts of the Apostles* 20, 17 and 28.

<sup>8</sup> *Romans* 12, 8. The term comes from the Greek verb *προϊσσημι* = to lead, to guide, to administer, to govern (according to *I Thessalonians* 5, 12; *I Timothy* 3, 4; 5, 17), to lead, to be in charge of, to preside (according to *Romans* 12, 8).

<sup>9</sup> From the verb *ηγέομαι* = to lead, to guide, to govern (according to *Matthew* 2, 6; *Luke* 22, 26; *Acts of Apostles* 7, 10; 15, 22; *Hebrews* 13, 7).

communities that were founded later on. The apostles ordained the first bishops, but they were not called bishops and did not exercise this responsibility, because they had their own authority and mission. They acknowledged, in the person of the bishop, through the act of ordination, a special charisma for that particular church. Thus, succession begins after the apostles.

The Church does not have its origins in the episcopate, but the episcopate has its origins within the Church. But the community cannot acknowledge itself as a Church without a bishop, who is the face of Christ. Therefore, the Church designates a bishop from amongst its own priests. Because the local Church cannot ordain its own bishop, it asks bishops of neighboring churches, to gather in order to invoke the gift of the Holy Ghost for the purpose of publicly confirming its bishop.

The authority of the bishop in leading the local Church is not legal in nature, but is grounded upon charisma: „And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers”<sup>10</sup>.

Any act of service is exercised in the unity and reciprocity of the Church of Christ, because personal charisma has a dimension that is grounded in community. The service of the bishop is accepted by the *body* of the Church in the act of ordination. The bishop is not imposed from without, but he has authority because his service is received from within the Church. The bishop cannot exercise his functions without the *body* of the Church. He is only a bishop if he celebrates together with the priests and deacons, in the presence of the right-worshipping people *λαός του θεοῦ*. The church is in apostolic communion through its bishop, who immutably confesses and teaches the doctrine of apostolic faith. The charisma of the bishop is not an individual possession, transmitted through ordination, but the expression of the will of the Church. For this reason, one cannot speak of the infallibility of the bishop in matters of faith, but of the infallibility of the church.

The bishop is the representative person at an ecclesiastical level, of a certain geographical area. Under his leadership are the clergy and the laypeople of said territory. Bishops are the main factors through which the grace of the Holy Ghost is spread within the Church, and their decisions stand directly under His assistance. In this regard, Christian history reveals the fact that bishops have expressed their truth of faith in the ecumenical synods. They took their decision-making pattern from the Holy Apostles, making decisions in matters of faith. Also, the bishop is the person who transmits, through ordination, to priests and deacons, the power to officiate the Holy Sacraments and hierurgies. The step of the episcopate is mentioned in several texts within the New Testament, of which we mention: „Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseer”<sup>11</sup>.

In the history of salvation, „truth and grace”<sup>12</sup> are shared with us not just in a linear manner via *Christ-apostles-bishops*, but also as a sustained *Pentecost* which transform the path of Grace-filled *delegation* of grace in a sacral present. From this perspective, the ordination of the high priest only takes place during the Eucharistic Liturgy. In the Christian East, the feast of Pentecost is remembered at any *ordinatio episcopii*. This is why the *circle* of bishops that accomplishes the ordination of the bishop represents the apostolic *college*.

The two dimensions of ecclesial substantiality, uniqueness and multiplicity, must be interwoven in an establishment that entails a double service: service to the *first* (πρώτος) and

<sup>10</sup> *Ephesians* 4, 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Acts of the Apostles* 20, 28.

<sup>12</sup> *John* 1, 17.

service to the many (πολύπληθεια)<sup>13</sup>. There is a fundamental mutuality between the bishop and the community. In other words, there can be no bishop without a community, and neither can the community manifest itself in its sacramental dynamic without the bishop. For this very reason, there is no ordination of a bishop outside of the community, for ordination is the act of *birth* for a bishop, in his mission as an *archpastor* linked to the community as a part that constitutes the Church. There are a few fundamental reasons regarding the life of church, dogmatically and canonically:

- a. The Church cannot exist, pan-globally speaking, without the assistance of the bishop, and, particularly, as a local community, without the presence of a bishop: „All of you shall follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows the Father... No one should do anything that pertains to the Church without a bishop. Where a bishop can be seen, there shall also be a multitude of the faithful, as, where Jesus Christ is, the Universal Church shall be”<sup>14</sup>.
- b. From a sacramental point of view, one cannot admit the accomplishment of the Holy Sacraments, because the bishop is the main condition for the charismatic life of the Church: „Let that Eucharist which is performed by the bishop or the one whom the bishop has allowed be deemed as good... without the bishop, there can be no baptism, no agape; for that which the bishop approves is well-pleasing to God, for all that is done shall be done certainly and with good cause”<sup>15</sup>.

The first to be *remembered* in Orthodox liturgies is the diocesan bishop, in his quality as the *first in line* of that diocese, but also as the *president* of the Liturgy, with the community praying that he be *given* unto the church in his jurisdiction „in peace, whole, long for days”<sup>16</sup> and most of all, steadfast in keeping the unity of the dogmatic truth of the Church. One capital mission of the *one* bishop is that of *encompassing* into himself the multitude of the faithful. Found upon the highest *pedestal* of priestly service, the *first* amongst servants has the power of consecrating the Eucharist of the Church to God, raising the pleasant aroma of the sacrifice of the Son of God to the very throne of the Holy Trinity<sup>17</sup>. There are a few elements which compose, within the bishop, the unity of the Church and the Eucharist: one *Feast* of salvation, one *Body* of Christ, one *Grail* of Life, one *table*, and, of course, only one bishop: „Seek, therefore, to take part in one Liturgy; for one is the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one is the cup for the union with His blood; one is the Sacrifice, as the Bishop is also one”<sup>18</sup>.

## 2. THE CATHOLICITY (κατ-ὅλον) OF THE CHURCH OR „THE FULLNESS OF HIM WHO FILLS ALL IN ALL” (EPHESIANS 1, 23)

„Only the divine-human being of the Church can embrace all through itself; she alone can be catholic, total, conciliatory (...) Actually, the divine-human reconciliation of the Church represents a ceaseless Christ like transfiguration through grace and through virtues: it is all summed in Christ, the God-Man, to have lived through Him, as His, as a divine-human organism, one, indivisible, for life within the Church is a human-divine conciliation”<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Saint Ignatius of ANTIOCH (Theophorus), *To the Tralians*, I, Migne, PG 5, 675 B.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *To the Philadelphians*, VIII, Migne, PG 5, 704 B.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> \*\*\* *Liturghier (Missal)*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2000, p. 168.

<sup>17</sup> Ioannis ZIZIOULAS, *Ființa Bisericii (The Ecclesial Being)*, translated by Aurel Nae, Bizantină Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, p. 161.

<sup>18</sup> Saint Ignatius of ANTIOCH (Theophorus), *To the Philadelphians* VIII, Migne, PG 5, 699 B.

<sup>19</sup> Iustin POPOVICI, *Philosophie Orthodoxe de la verité. Dogmatique de l’Église Orthodoxe*, tome quatrième: „L’Age de l’Homme”, Lausanne, 1987, pp. 182-183.

The catholicity<sup>20</sup> of the Church depends upon the orthodoxy of the faith<sup>21</sup>. Terminologically speaking, in Romanian, the word was rendered as „sobornicească”, having been grounded upon an element of vocabulary which comes from the Slavonic language (*sobornost*), which designates the synod-grounded or conciliatory character of the Church. Thus, the communion which exists between different parts of the church, regarding matters of faith and the decisions about them which are made in common – the Greek word *Σύνοδος* (meaning *way together*, or *together upon the way*), which is to say together in Christ, who is The Way<sup>22</sup>. But here, it is very important to notice a nuance that may surprise many of our readers: the word in the Creed translates the original Greek word *καθολική*, which means the orthodoxy and the catholicity of the Church are not at all opposites of one another, as we have grown accustomed to opposing the two notions, catholic and orthodox. But in the Romanian language, to avoid the confusion, the Greek word *καθολική* was translated with „sobornicească” after the Slavonic one<sup>23</sup>. The meaning that catholicity has always had for the conscience of the Church was that of the orthodoxy of faith, the two being complementary, and sometimes even considered synonymous. Although we have become accustomed to translate the word *catholic*, generally speaking, as „universal”, the meanings of this word are multiple, as it is revealed by its etymology as well. The word *catholic* comes from the Greek *κατ-ὅλον*<sup>24</sup>, which, word-by-word, is translated as „after the whole, according to the whole or in accordance with the whole. „When it refers to the faith of the Church it refers to the particular faith of every part (community) of the Church and which is Catholic, meaning, in accordance with the whole, with the whole of the Church (as every piece of Holy Communion includes Christ as a whole within it, and at the same time, every piece together constitutes the entirety of the Body of Christ), which is why Communion or Eucharist is constitutive of the Church, also being conditioned by the right faith, which is why before the transubstantiation or consecration of the gifts, the members of the church utter the Symbol of Faith in common, and those who partake of communion publicly declare, before the act, a confession of faith. Basically, the orthodoxy and catholicity of the faith condition and complete one another. Therefore, when we speak of the Church, it is both catholic and orthodox in regard to its faith at the same time. Basically, the Church confesses the same

<sup>20</sup> The quality of the Church of being „sobornicească” – term that comes from *sobornost* or *gathering*. In Greek, *Ekklesia* means „gathering”.

<sup>21</sup> Saint Maximus the Confessor affirms that the *Catholic Church* is the right confession of faith in Jesus Christ. In most of the texts in which Saint Maximus uses the term *the Catholic Church*, the context is that of the understanding of the right faith from a position that is superior, opposed to heretical teachings (see Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, mediator între Răsărit și Apus (Saint Maximus the Confessor, mediator between Orient and Occident)*, translated by Daniela Cojocariu, Doxologia Publishing House, Iași, 2010, pp. 199-2015).

<sup>22</sup> *John* 14, 6.

<sup>23</sup> „In older documents, the term *εκκλησία καθολική* was never used quantitatively, to refer to the geographical expansion of the Church: rather, it referred to the integrity of the faith or the doctrine, the fidelity of «The Great Church» to the entirety of the Primary Tradition in opposition to the sectarian tendencies of heretics, who have separated themselves from this initial fullness, each following their specific line of thought, meaning more orthodox than universal (according to George FLOROVSKY, *Le Corps du Christ Vivant, Cahiers theologiques de l'actualite protestante*, HS 4, 1948, p. 24).

<sup>24</sup> From the preposition *κατά*, meaning, in the context, *on the surface of, in, on, along, toward, near, in front of, in the direction of, according to Luke*, 8, 39; *Acts*, 2, 10; 13, 1; 15, 23; 27, 7 and 12, where: that which concerns, as far as smith is concerned, that which refers to, according to *Romans*, 1,15, *Ephesians*, 1,15, and the noun *ὅλος, η, ον* = entire, complete, whole (according to *Matthew* 5, 29; 16, 26; *Mark*, 6, 55; *John*, 4, 53; *Acts* 11, 26; *Romans* 8, 36 and *Titus* 1, 11).



orthodox faith everywhere, always, and by everybody, wherever it may gather, thus being in accordance with the whole and wholly catholic. Thus, it is the conscience of some people, a few consciences, that make the Truth conquer within the entirety of Church, for they are pure of any subjectivity: for the conscience of those who do not speak in their own name, but speak in the name of the Church, is the one that speaks, making the Church the unique personal subject of multiple consciences. If we wish to apply the notion of conscience to the reality of the Church, we will, therefore, need to find several personal consciences, but one object of conscience, one self-conscience, which is the Church. In this regard, the Fathers of the Church, and all those who keep their pace, freeing themselves from their individual limitations, are the fathers of the conscience of the Church”<sup>25</sup>.

As we know, catholicity represents one of the characteristics of the Church in the Creed, mentioned in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol<sup>26</sup>. To explain the overwhelming importance of this characteristic, we add the following statement: „In what follows, however, we shall underline that until lately, the Church has never characterized itself using the attribute *orthodox*, it only called itself *catholic*”<sup>27</sup>. But how can „catholicity” be understood in relation to catholicity? Catholicity, in relation to universality, is affirmed in a much more pronounced manner. Although the Catholic Church is universal, its universality is not a geographical universality, nor is it a jurisdictional and authoritative one, but a universality that encompasses, in space and time, the sum of redeeming truths that constitute the orthodox faith at any time and any place, as well as those who, at any time and any place, continue to confess this faith. Only through the common confession of the same faith in the Holy Trinity – God, and the same Christ – real God and real human being – the local churches and their members are united within the same catholic Church; we are looking at a confession that brings together Christians from all places and all time<sup>28</sup>.

„The Church is called catholic because it spreads over the entire world, from one end to another, because its teaching is catholic and complete: it gives man all the required teachings to know both that which is seen and that which is unseen, both the heavenly and the earthly; for it subjects all of humankind to faith in God, both rulers and subjects, both the learned and the unlearned, for it heals and soothes at the same time all sorts of different sins that are committed through body and soul, and it has in its power all sorts of virtues in words and deeds and shares all sorts of spiritual gifts”<sup>29</sup>.

A thoughtful approach toward this text shows a quantitatively extensive image of catholicity, which regards the total number of believers of all places and times. This accentuation of the spatial universality of the Church is thought to be essentially specific to the Roman-Catholic Church. On the other hand, the quoted passage underlines the fact that the Church is the owner of the fullness of truth, of the redeeming dynamic and the holiness of grace.

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<sup>25</sup> Vladimir LOSSKY, *După chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu (In the Image and Likeness of God)* translated by Anca Manolache, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, pp. 185-187.

<sup>26</sup> Article IX of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: „Πιστεύομεν εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν” (meaning «We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church») represents the synodal-ecumenical ecclesiology of the Church Fathers of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>27</sup> Vassily KRIVOȘEIN, *Biserica Sobornicească – texte ecleziologice (The Catholic Church – ecclesiological texts)*, translated from Russian by Nicolae Crețu, Sophia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012, p. 118.

<sup>28</sup> Saint Cyril of JERUSALEM presents these multiple directions of orthodox ecclesiology in the definition that he gives to the Catholic Church (see *Catecheses*, XVIII, 23, Migne, PG 33, 1044 A).

<sup>29</sup> Saint Cyril of JERUSALEM, *Cateheze (Catecheses)*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2003, p. 33.

## CONCLUSIONS

To conclude with, within the Church, understood as committed communion as well as life experience, the relationships between person and community, both locally and universally, are fulfilled in the meaning of the mysterious body of Christ. Thus, in the Grace-filled, sacramental area of the *ecclesia* of Christ, the Lord, we live what the *apostle of the gentiles called*: „the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (*Ephesians* 1, 23).

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