

THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL AND THE ORTHODOX DIASPORA. NATIONAL TEMPTATIONS AND MISSIONARY CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT. This article explores the issue of the Orthodox diaspora from an ecclesiological, nationalist and missionary perspective. To achieve these themes, the article is divided into four main parts. In the first part, is evaluated the new situation of the Mother Orthodox Churches, founding new canonical territories. At the same time, the rule of having only one bishop in a city was violated, leading to parallel canonical jurisdictions. Unfortunately, most of the time this reality is created because of national interests and not missionaries. However, the solution can only be obtained synodically. In the second part, where he talks about the document *Orthodox Diaspora*, approved at the Holy and Great Synod in Crete, the article criticizes certain decisions, as well as the lack of reaching a final consensus regarding diaspora. Exploring this non-canonical situation, the article proposes two solutions that do not exclude each other. The first of these refers to the possibility of an ecclesiastical emancipation of the Orthodox diaspora. The second concerns the establishment of a “First” by delegation. The last part of the article talks about the missionary witness of the diaspora. In essence, the mission is just a natural continuation of the Liturgy. That is why the article proposes as a typological model the proclamation-dialogue-cooperation.

Keywords: diaspora, mission, unity, ecumenism, Holy and Great Council, ecclesiology

The Orthodox diaspora between integration and national claims

Since the twentieth century, old borders between East and West, North and South, were replaced by new geopolitical, geo-cultural, and geo-religious spaces. International public space is now defined by the interaction of different ideas, especially after the collapse of old ideological blocks (like the “Iron Curtain”),

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the direct exchange of information from one corner of the planet to the other (*social media*), the mass-migration movements, and the dynamic cohabitation of people of different national and cultural backgrounds (the modern megacities). National and cultural de-territorialization (*glocalism*) means that people's self-awareness is not anymore subjected exclusively to the conditions of a given geographical territory or of a circumscribed civil entity (as was happening, for example, in pre-modern Empires or in the modern national states)². For this, the dominance of mono-religious political centers (Constantinople, Moscow, Vienna) is today disputed, as new multi-cultural environments have become carriers of new networks of culture, either local or trans-national (San Paolo, London, New York). Besides, postmodernity has challenged not only the supremacy of finance and technology over religion, but it has also questioned the ideological achievements of modernity itself. This, among other effects, has encouraged the dynamic return of religions into the public sphere.

In this complex landscape, Orthodox migrants realize that their departure from their home countries means their integration into new ones; in other words, *diaspora*, is at the same time a *spreading out*, that is, scattering in the space, and *settling* in new socio-cultural contexts³.

The so-called "Orthodox diaspora" showed an admirable ability to adapt to the social conditions of the hosting countries. It is sufficient to recall, by way of example, the impact that Russian emigres of Paris had to the promotion of

² Historically the Churches in the East exercised their jurisdiction within the boundaries of the Roman *limes*, which they adopted (with some adjustments) establishing a wide network of dioceses, Archdioceses, and Metropolitanates. From their side, modern Orthodox Autocephalous Churches, though certainly post-imperial, reflect the "Constantine" Church-State model as envisaged in the foundation of the local Churches (e.g., the Orthodox Church of "all Greece", of "all Russia", etc.).

³ In the last century, the number of Orthodox Christians in America and Western Europe (Germany, Spain, France, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy) increased significantly. Today, about 1.000.000 Orthodox live in Germany (compared to only 4.000 in 1910) while in America (Brazil, Canada, Mexico) the number exceeds 700.000. In the U.S.A. – where Orthodox presence dates to the Russian missions of the eighteenth century and was strengthened mainly with the migratory flows of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – is estimated that about 1.800.000 Orthodox (immigrants or second-generation immigrants) are settled, originating from the Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the Balkans and the Middle East (instead of 500.000 in 1910). Finally, it is estimated that about 700.000 Orthodox are based in Australia. See Pew Research Center, Nov. 8, 2017, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century", 24-25. These data do not change fundamentally the demographic barycenter of Orthodoxy (which retains the largest number of her approximately 260 million believers within the jurisdictional territories of the Patriarchal and Autocephalous Churches) but prove the need to administrate the ecclesiastical structures of these communities according to the data of 21st century, considering the new migratory flows that have further broadened the horizon of Orthodoxy from East to West.

Orthodox spirituality and to the creative dialogue with the intellectual debates of their time. According to Metropolitan of Dioclea, Kallistos Ware, the reality of the diaspora is an expression of divine providence, as it prevented the Orthodox from isolation and helped them to bear witness to their faith by projecting the Orthodox heritage and listen carefully the other Christians and the secularized world. "It is surely not by chance that God has allowed Orthodox to be scattered throughout the west in the twentieth century. This dispersal, so far from being fortuitous and tragic, constitutes on the contrary our *kairos*, our moment of opportunity."⁴ Others, like John Meyendorff, in a somehow optimistic tone, saw the Orthodox diaspora as a "welcome phenomenon" that encouraged the Orthodox to develop their spirituality, sustain the ecumenical movement and emphasize the return to the tradition of the ancient Church⁵. On the contrary, others have noted that "it is unimaginably difficult" to be today an Orthodox in the West, for this implies a rupture with the context in which one was born and grew up, and a "decoration" of his/her religious belief with Western elements⁶. It should not be ignored also that the Orthodox who live in the diaspora are potentially in a situation of "ecclesiological heresy"⁷ – the reference here is to the condemnation of "ethnophyletism" by the Major Synod of Constantinople of 1872 as an "anti-evangelical teaching" and of those who accept religious nationalism as "schismatics"; these condemnations were reiterated by the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016).⁸

⁴ See Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin 2015, 5th ed.), 181.

⁵ John Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church. Its past and its role in the World Today* (New York, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1981, 4th ed.), 170: "We are therefore confronted today by the gradual emergence of a Western Orthodoxy, a welcome phenomenon, which will assist the Orthodox youth who had adopted the language, culture and customs of the countries where they were born, and are to all intents and purposes as Western as their Latin brothers, to preserve the Orthodox faith."

⁶ Cf. Christos Yannaras, "Nationalism, the denial of Greekness," (in Greek) in Id., *Finis Graeciae* (Thessaloniki: Ianos 2014), 386, 394.

⁷ Cf. Gregorios Papathomas, "Autocephalism and Diaspora. A cause-and-effect relationship," (in Greek) in Id., *Κανονικά Έμμορφα. Δοκίμια Κανονικής Οικονομίας II* [Ecclesial-canonical Questions. Essays of Canonical Oikonomia II] (Katerini: Epektasi, 2015), 409.

⁸ See the "Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church", accessed October 25, 2021, www.holycouncil.org, para. 3 (where the Council reminds the condemnation of ethnophyletism in 1872) and para. 15, which reads: "In opposition to the levelling and impersonal standardization promoted by globalization, and also to the extremes of nationalism, the Orthodox Church proposes the protection of the identities of peoples and the strengthening of local identity." From his part, Archbishop of Cyprus, Chrysostomos, noted in his address to the Council: "It is ethnophyletism that did not allow the issues of Autocephaly and Diptychs to come to our Council; it is also the reason that the quasi-canonical solution provided to the issue of the Diaspora. In our time, when national barriers are being abolished one after the other, we Orthodox are not only self-contradicting ourselves but we are also making ourselves fools by making the nation a constitutional element of our ecclesiology and our ecclesiastical identity."

At any rate, the diaspora has raised the (difficult) task to apply ancient ecclesial institutions to new geo-social conditions and to territories whose jurisdictional status remains unclear because of the existence of parallel co-jurisdictions. Moreover, having in mind that the *genesis* of Orthodox communities beyond the boundaries of the Patriarchal and Autocephalous Churches was largely determined by the national origin of the faithful, one could say that the diaspora was called since the beginning of its existence to reconcile the eschatological, that is, the supra-national vocation of the Church, with the “national” function of the different ecclesiastical jurisdictions.

It should be stressed that condemnation of “ethnophyletism” does not concern national and ecclesiastical pluralism *as such*, for pluralism does not contradict the practice of the ancient Church, where different liturgical and theological traditions were able to coexist with each other (Antiochian, Alexandrian, Jerusalemite, Roman, Ambrosian, Gallic, etc.). Yet, the Orthodox Church observes to date the provisions of the ecumenical councils on the existence of one sole bishop in each city or geographical area (see canon 8 of the first ecumenical council, canon 8 of the third ecumenical council, canon 12 of the fourth ecumenical council) and, by extension, on the need to avoid overlapping jurisdictions, especially if motivated by national motives⁹. In particular, the problem the diaspora lies in the fact that:

1. The various Patriarchal and Autocephalous Churches claim to have universal jurisdiction, as they appoint hierarchs beyond their territorial jurisdiction.
2. The so-called “Orthodox States” aim at the political influence of the West (or at least at securing its political favor), by encouraging the dependence of the communities of the diaspora from the national Church-Mothers.
3. The more ecclesiastical nationalism is emphasized the less the diaspora is integrated into the situations and needs of Western societies.

The break of the unity of the “one” ecclesiastical body around the “one” bishop has not only canonical and ecclesiological impacts,¹⁰ but ecumenical

⁹ “‘Racial (religious) nationalism’ expresses the idea of establishing either an Autocephalous Church in a state context or an ethno-ecclesiastical community in the context of the so-called ‘Diaspora’, based not on the local-territorial [eucharistic-ecclesiastical] criterion, but on the *ethno-racial*, national or linguistic and common ethnic origin.” G. Papatomas, “Ethnophyletism and [the so-called] Church ‘Diaspora’,” (in Greek) in Id., *Κανονικά Έμμορφα*, 375.

¹⁰ National co-jurisdictions in the diaspora introduce the “messianic” function of Nation as a means of “another form of confession of faith, [a messianism that] consciously or unconsciously is emphasized more than anything else, while at the same time there is a lustful relationship and dependence of the Church on the Nation and on the dominant national ideology”. Gregorios Papatomas, “The contrasting relationship between the local Church and the Ecclesiastical ‘Diaspora’ (Ecclesiological unity *versus* ‘co-ownership’ and ‘multi-jurisdiction’),” (in Greek), accessed October 25, 2021, <https://www.academia.edu/18004585/25>.

effects as well, not only for the fact that the canonical order is not respected but also for it gives the impression that Orthodoxy tolerates a disorder which infects her position on issues like the admission of heterodox, the pastoral administration of mixed marriages, the translation of liturgical texts into Western languages, Orthodox social teaching, and so on¹¹. Indeed, when Orthodox are questioned on their spirituality, they immediately clarify that their answer concerns, depending on the case, the “Greek”, the “Russian”, the “Romanian”, or the “Serbian” tradition¹². Therefore, Orthodox diaspora inevitably lives in a hermaphrodite situation of many diverse “Orthodoxies”, a reality that perpetuates a painful ecclesiastical fragmentation¹³.

One must also add that young generations in the diaspora face today diverse challenges, like religious and cultural diversity, the growing difficulty to

¹¹ Another problem of the diaspora is the different use, until today, of the ecclesiastical calendar, resulting the separate celebration of the great Christians feasts, which is a deficit for the common witness to the other Christians. Unfortunately, the issue of the ecclesiastical calendar (and the common celebration of Easter) did not reach the conciliar discussions of Crete.

¹² In the 1960s Christos Yannaras had stressed that “if a Protestant Christian of New York decides to convert to the Orthodox faith, he is obliged to choose a new nationality if he happens to be only American. This is because he must be subordinated to one of the thirteen Orthodox bishops who shepherd an equal number of Orthodox flocks in a single city!”. Yannaras had diagnosed correctly that the cause of this surrealistic phenomenon is precisely nationalism (for the sake of which “the Orthodox Churches have renounced the conditions of their spiritual hypostasis”) and that universality, for Orthodoxy, “is not a territorial term, it does not mean the extension of the Church nor a global organization” but is expressed “in the identity of faith, in the identity of the worshipping life, and the administrative identity associated with apostolic succession.” See Christos Yannaras, *Η κρίση της προφητείας* [The crisis of prophecy] (Athens: Ikaros Books 2010, 4th ed., PDF ebook). Of course, Yannaras did not deny, some years later, the right of the Greek State to exploit “the Greek universality of Orthodoxy.” See Christos Yannaras, “The separation between Church and State,” (in Greek, in Id., *Κεφάλαια Πολιτικής Θεολογίας* [Chapters of Political Theology] (Athens: Gregorios 1983, 2nd ed.), 199-200. One could ask, following Yannaras’ latter statement, whether Orthodoxy’s universality is only “Greek” or if at the same time there are other “national” universalities (Greek, Slavic, Arabic, and so on). It seems thus that the post-national spiritual awareness of the Orthodox cohabits with the tendency to defend national religiosities.

¹³ The principle of the establishment of Churches based on territorial rather than on national criteria extends the universality of the Church, while ethnophyletism divides the faithful between “same-race” and “hetero-race”, a distinction completely foreign to the Gospel and Christian practice. According to John Zizioulas, “the bishop gathers in his person all the local Church, above all other differences, and there must be no bishops for certain categories of people. We are therefore faced with a very serious matter, and we cannot say that the Diaspora has nothing to do with the canonical practice of the Church. Therefore, in my opinion, it is essential to mention this ecclesiological and canonical principle, otherwise, we do not respect our tradition and ecclesiology.” See Secrétariat pour la Préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de l’Eglise Orthodoxe, *Synodica XI* (Chambésy: Centre Orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique 2015), 77.

understand the “traditional” liturgical language of the Church, and the reception of Western culture without denying the “Eastern” characteristics of their religious background¹⁴.

The resolution of this issue is, therefore, of primatial importance, since it has already been established that Orthodoxy should exercise her ministry “in a rapidly developing world, which has now become interconnected through means of communication and the development of means of transportation”, which presupposes “overcoming the internal conflicts of the Orthodox Church through the surrendering of nationalistic, ethnic and ideological extremes of the past.”¹⁵

Of course, the issue of the diaspora does not concern one or some Churches, but Orthodoxy as a whole, and therefore the only way to resolve it is synodically. On the other hand, definitive decisions should not be taken with the “aphonia” of the diaspora, which is increasingly aware of its *own* specific identity. Finally, the organization of the diaspora must consider the ongoing ecumenical dialogues and the existence of heterodox structures in the same territories as the Orthodox.¹⁶

The teachings of the Holy and Great Council on the diaspora

Considering all the above, one should ask if the provisions adopted by the Holy and Great Council of Crete can lead to the definitive ending of the existing fragmentations and the attenuation of the nationalistic temptations the Orthodoxy experiences in her body¹⁷. The questions that will concern this essay are:

¹⁴ The question of the reception of the West remains one of the thorniest problems in Orthodoxy. Often, movements of spiritual or theological renewal (Slavophiles, Greek theology of the 1960s) dedicated themselves to a sterile anti-Western criticism, whereas other schools of thought were able to meet fruitfully with the West in the fields of theology, intellect, and culture (like the Russians of Paris). The issue can be summed up as follows: the more Orthodoxy becomes “ethnocentric”, the more the differences and, by extension, the opposition to the West is emphasized, while the more she discovers her evangelistic and, therefore, supranational hypostasis the more she embraces the problems not of the one or another nation, but of the entire world. For this issue see Georges Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds., *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press 2013); Dimitrios Keramidas, *Ortodossia greca ed Europa* (Assisi: Cittadella Editrice 2016).

¹⁵ “Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches: October 12, 2008,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 53, no. 1 (2008): 305-312, here paragraphs 4 and 2.

¹⁶ See O. Clément, “Tous, préparons ensemble le Concile,” in Secrétariat pour la Préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de l’Eglise Orthodoxe, *Synodica I* (Chambésy: Centre Orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique 1976), 117-118.

¹⁷ The issue of Orthodox diaspora was officially raised in 1923, at the Pan-Orthodox Congress of Constantinople, where Patriarch Meletius IV proposed the annexation of the diaspora to the

1. What is – or what can be – the mission of the Orthodox diaspora in relation to the amendments of the Holy and Great Council?
2. Will the Orthodox of the diaspora continue to live in a problematic canonical *status*, or will it be able to propose itself as a valid component of the twenty-first century global Orthodoxy?

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in his opening address to the Holy and Great Council, stated that “the phenomenon of the Orthodox Diaspora assumed unforeseen dimensions prior to the past and present centuries through the rapid migration of peoples, from Orthodox regions to Western countries, who require pastoral care. This led to the well-known, and not strictly canonical situation whereby more than one Bishop exists in one and the same city or region, proving a scandal to many people inside and outside the Orthodox Church.”¹⁸ From his part, Archbishop of Albania Anastasios stressed that “the greatest heresy, the mother of heresies, [is] egocentrism; personal, collective, racial, localist, ecclesiastical, and so on, which poisons human relations as well as any form of harmonious and creative coexistence [...] The opposite to peace is not war but egocentrism; [between] individuals, States, and different groups.”¹⁹

At any rate, the Council’s deliberations were taken within the framework of the provisions adopted by the fourth Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (2009), which, after examining the works of the third (1990) and fourth (1993) Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commissions, established “Episcopal Assemblies”

direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. According to his proposal, the national communities would have remained parishes with their own shepherds while their Presidency would have been exercised by a Patriarchal Exarch. Thus, the Ecumenical Patriarchate would have been the “major” canonical link between the Orthodox Churches in America. In 1930, the Preliminary Committee of the Orthodox Church proposed as a subject of the “Pre-Synod”, the study of the canonical state of the Orthodox Church in America. In the 1960s the diaspora figures among the 105 topics of the agenda of the Holy and Great Council, as a sub-section on the subject “Relations of the Orthodox Churches to one another.” See Ioannis Karmiris, “The Panorthodox Conference of Rhodes,” (in Greek) *Theologia*, 32, no. 4 (1961): 511. It is worthy of mention that from the outset theologians of the diaspora (O. Clément, J. Meyendorff, and others) argued in favor of the rapid canonical solution of the issue. The First Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (1976) placed the issue first in order in the list of the 10 most urgent and needed immediate resolution issues. See Secrétariat pour la Préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de l’Eglise Orthodoxe, *Synodica II* (Chambésy: Centre Orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique 1978), 125.

¹⁸ Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Opening Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Inaugural Session of the Holy and Great Council,” accessed October 24, 2021, www.holycouncil.org.

¹⁹ Anastasios (Archbishop of Tirana, Dures and all Albania), “Inaugural Speech at the Holy and Great Council,” accessed October 24, 2021, www.holycouncil.org.

in the territories of the diaspora (hereinafter: EA),²⁰ composed by the canonical hierarchs of the Churches, under the presidency of the hierarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate²¹. In Crete it was thereby reiterated that “during the present phase it is not possible, for historical and pastoral reasons, an immediate transition to the strictly canonical order of the Church on this issue, that is, the existence of only one bishop in the same place”²². Having that clarified, the Council decided to maintain the structure of the EA “until the appropriate time arrives when all the conditions exist in order to apply the canonical exactness (*akribeia*)”, that is, until a definitive solution should be achieved, in accordance with “with Orthodox ecclesiology, and the canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church”²³.

Members of the EA are “all the bishops in each region who are in canonical communion with all of the most holy Orthodox Churches” as well as “those Orthodox Bishops who do not reside in the region, but who have pastoral ministry in parishes in the Region”²⁴. The competencies assigned to the EA are:

- To safeguard and contribute to the *unity* of Orthodoxy through the fulfillment of her theological, ecclesiological, canonical, spiritual, philanthropic, educational, and missionary obligations.
- To coordinate *activities of common interest* in each region in areas of pastoral care, catechesis, liturgical life, and religious education²⁵.
- To *represent* the Orthodox to the heterodox, to non-Christians and the wider society and civil authorities.
- To prepare a plan to organize the Orthodox of the region on a canonical basis²⁶.
- To maintain, preserve and develop the *interests of the communities* that belong to the canonical Orthodox bishops of each region, as the competencies of the EA “should in no way interfere with the

²⁰ See *Episkepsis*, no. 452 (January 15, 1991): 21-22, and no. 498 (November 30, 1993): 23-24.

²¹ Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, “The Orthodox Diaspora,” (hereinafter: OD), 3. EA were created in the following regions: i. Canada, ii. United States of America, iii. Latin America, iv. Australia, New Zealand and Oceania, v. Great Britain and Ireland, vi. France vii. Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg, viii. Austria, ix. Italy and Malta, x. Switzerland and Lichtenstein, xi. Germany xii. Scandinavian Countries (except Finland), xiii. Spain and Portugal.

²² OD, 1.b.

²³ OD, para. 1.a. The institution of EA by the Preconciliar Conference had a temporary and transitional character, as it would have paved the way for a canonical solution of the issue by the Holy and Great Council. See *Synodica XI*, 291.

²⁴ OD para. 2.a-b.

²⁵ Specifically, the promotion of “collaboration between the churches in all areas of pastoral ministry,” OD, para. 2.

²⁶ See OD, para. 2.c; cf. also arts. 2 and 5 of DOS.

responsibility of each Bishop for his eparchial jurisdiction, or restrict the rights of his Church, including its relations with international agencies, governments, civil society, mass media, other legal undertakings, national and treaty organizations, as well as other religions”²⁷.

The purposes of the EA, therefore, are:

1. To reveal the unity of Orthodoxy.
2. To promote cooperation and joint actions in each region²⁸.
3. To safeguard the specific “interests” of each community²⁹.

Of the above-mentioned priorities, the first two have a “centripetal” tendency, that is, they converge towards a virtual “center” (that of “unity” and “joint action”), while the third represents a “centrifugal” movement, as it legitimates the “interests” (*sic*) of each ecclesiastical community, as reiterated in para. 2, art. 5 of the approved “Rules of Operation of Episcopal Assemblies in the Orthodox Diaspora” (hereinafter: ROD).

The authority of the EA is thus restricted to sole coordination, without excluding the authority these have to decide on pastoral matters, on the condition that each jurisdiction addresses to the respective Church-Mother what requires common actions. In short, the administrative autonomy of the EA seems limited, as it neither constitutes an independent ecclesiastical entity nor puts any limitations to the canonical rights of the “national” bishops.

As Metropolitan of Switzerland Damaskinos (Papandreou), Secretary of the third Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, specified, the institution of the EA was meant to be an “analogical” application of the metropolitan system by bringing together three concentric circles; in the first, there is the *Eucharistic* manifestation of the Church, that is, the liturgical experience of the worshipping community. Then, the *ecclesiological* cycle of the organic unity of each community

²⁷ OD, para. 5.1-2.

²⁸ According to para. 11 of DOS “upon the decision of the Episcopal Assembly, it is possible to form from its members Committees for Mission as well as for Liturgical, Pastoral, Financial, Educational, Ecumenical and other issues, chaired by one of the Bishop-Members of the Assembly.”

²⁹ As for the decisions of the EA, the principle of unanimity (*consensus*) was adopted, which, by one view strengthens the unifying role of Assemblies (see 2.c and DOS, art. 10). According to another approach, unanimity does not negate the possibility of the prevailing the opinion of the majority (see canon 6 of the first ecumenical council). Former Archbishop of America, Demetrios, pointed to the principle of unanimity as the main reason for the non-submission of proposals on behalf of the Orthodox of America in the preconciliar procedures, as the U.S.-Canada Episcopal Assembly did not achieve mutually acceptable positions. Archbishop Demetrios (Elder) of America, “Orthodox Diaspora. Perspectives following the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church,” *The Ecumenical Review*, 72, no. 3 (2020): 479.

around its bishop comes to the fore, and, finally, the *synodical* communion of the bishops affirms the “regional” unity of the different jurisdictions. According to Damaskinos, the connection of the three circles to the canonical tradition should offer a solution of the existing anomaly: thus, the Metropolis (or Archdiocese) should reflect the canonical order, the diocese the national origin of the communities, and the parish the sacramental origin of these communities.

This threefold circle (Eucharistic, episcopal, synodal) had a double ambition: to highlight the Eucharistic awareness of the Church as the very source of the ecclesial *hypostasis* of the communities of the diaspora, and to solve pastoral problems, encouraging a spirit of convergence, understanding, and cooperation among the local hierarchies. In this respect, the positive intentions of the institution of the EA cannot be called into question. However, this configuration has a significant structural deficiency that compromises its conciliatory intention, for it formalizes the canonical bond of the bishops of the diaspora with their Church-Mothers, a bond that intervenes between the Eucharistic/parish level and the synodical unity of the hierarchs. “National” bishops can mediate between their local communities and the Autocephalous Churches and, thus, ecclesiastical unity (the third circle of the model) remains incomplete, as it does not recognize the existence of a “First” with clear administrative prerogatives, but it urges the Churches to communicate more with the “national” Church-Mothers than with each other³⁰. According to OD:

The Episcopal Assemblies do not deprive the member bishops of their administrative and canonical competencies, nor do they restrict their rights in the Diaspora. The Episcopal Assemblies aim to form a common position of the Orthodox Church on various issues. In no way does this prevent member bishops from remaining responsible to their own Churches and expressing the views of their own Churches to the outside world” (para. 5).

Hence, the EA are *sui generis* ecclesiastical realities, as – although they exercise their competencies “in accordance with the principles of the Orthodox conciliar tradition” (OD, para. 9) – they are neither “Synods” of self-governing Churches nor extraordinary “Assemblies of Bishops”, given that they meet regularly “once a year, at the invitation of the Chairman” (OD, para. 7.1).

³⁰ The Chairmen of the EA convene the sessions and preside over them; they have the responsibility to supervise – without imposing – the actualization of the decisions taken by the EA (DOS, art. 9), and maintain the competence to represent before civil authorities, the society, and other religious organizations the common stance of the Orthodox Churches of the region. Cf. DOS, 4.b. The other hierarchs don’t have this right *ex officio*, except by delegation from the Chairman.

It becomes, therefore, clear that the emancipation of the Churches of the diaspora is conditioned by their dependence on the Church-Mothers³¹. Of course, a provision was made that “for matters of a more general concern that require, by the decision of the Assembly of Bishops, a pan-Orthodox approach, the Assembly’s chairman refers it to the Ecumenical Patriarch for further pan-Orthodox actions in accordance with the established pan-Orthodox procedure” (OD, para. 6; cf. ROD, art. 10.2). In addition, the EA have the right to communicate and cooperate with the other jurisdictions “for specific linguistic, educational and pastoral issues of a particular Church,” so that “the diversity of national traditions may secure the unity of Orthodoxy in the communion of faith and in the bond of love” (ROD, art. 5.2)³². At any rate, the communities of the diaspora continue to be annexed *de jure* to their ecclesiastical centers, making impossible to recognize a “First” in each region. In short, there is the risk that ethnophyletism, which, although already condemned in 1872, returns triumphally and with synodical approval!

Therefore, the ecclesiastical identity of these communities, although strengthened by the Council, remains pendent, as they find themselves in a state of continuous *transition*, unable to enculturate in the local geo-social and geo-cultural contexts.

The diaspora as a local Church

But how can the “part” coexist with the “whole”, that is, how can the “specific” actions of every single Church be organically integrated into a single whole? In other words, in what way the diaspora can adapt to the circumstances of Western societies? Is it possible to abandon the model of the Assemblies in favor of proper Synods without causing further fragmentations between the communities? The dilemma is whether the ecclesiastical emancipation of the diaspora will be further advanced (at the expense of the “rights” of the

³¹ This structural or constitutional impossibility of forming a common Orthodox position in the diaspora due to the prevalence of the “specific” positions of the (Autocephalous) Churches is evident, for example, in the question of mixed marriages, a frequent reality in the diaspora, which pastoral treatment depends not on the local ecclesiastical communities, but on the judgment of the Autocephalous Church-Mothers. In the synodal text “The sacrament of marriage and its impediments” we read (II 5.c): “Concerning mixed marriages of Orthodox Christians with non-Orthodox Christians] the possibility of the exercise of ecclesiastical *oikonomia* in relation to impediments to marriage must be considered by the Holy Synod of each autocephalous Orthodox Church according to the principles of the holy canons and in a spirit of pastoral discernment.”

³² DOS, 5.2; see also *Synodica IX*, 258.

Autocephalous Churches) or the stagnant waters of this canonical anomaly will be maintained in order to avoid causing further tensions in inter-Orthodox relations³³.

These points lead us to the question of diversity and unity. According to Orthodox ecclesiology, a regional Church is constituted territorially and does not exclude, in principle, the diverse character (linguistic, cultural, national) of its single components³⁴. Such diversity, nevertheless, cannot be expressed outside the synodical frame where, as all Orthodox recognize, emerges the recognition of a “regional” ecclesial entity with a head or “First”, who enjoys concrete authority (see apostolic canon 34 and canon 9 of the council of Antioch). Without the consent of the “First” no bishop can be appointed (see canon 6 of the first ecumenical council). For the same reason, there cannot be two or more bishops in the same place (canons 8 of the first and 12 of the fourth ecumenical councils). The Orthodox Church has always recognized these canonical rules as an inviolable criterion of ecclesiastical communion at a regional level³⁵. In other words, communion between the members of a regional Church is realized not only horizontally (with each other), but also – and

³³ Former Archbishop of America, Dimitrios, referring to the case of the U.S., reported that “in our case, during the six successive Assemblies (2010-2015), a methodical and responsible study was conducted, and several proposals to overcome the canonical anomaly were presented [...] Some church jurisdictions in the United States ... presented the view – and indeed insisted on it – that on account of the objections raised, it would perhaps be preferable for the so-called Orthodox Diaspora to remain in its present state rather than to proceed with changes. They argued that despite being in a state of “canonical anomaly”, a change to the current situation would cause turmoil and confusion within the Orthodox Jurisdictions in America (and by logical extension the other areas of Orthodox Diaspora).” Archbishop Demetrios, “Orthodox Diaspora,” 479.

³⁴ See canon 2 of the second ecumenical council.

³⁵ John Zizioulas, “The Synodal Institution. Historical, ecclesiological and canonical problems,” (in Greek) *Theologia* 80, no. 2 (2009): 13: “The episcopal composition of the Synod has an essential theological basis and therefore it was rightly imposed ecclesologically in the ancient Church. The Bishop, as the head of the Eucharist, is the expression of the unity of the local Church herself, but also of her unity with the other local Churches since the synods have always aimed towards the unity of the Church.” It is necessary to mention, of course, the claim that the canons issued by the Ecumenical Councils cannot be applied literally to the conditions of the twentieth-first century, as the “cities” of the ancient councils are not the same with modern megacities. See also *Synodica XI*, 90-91. In support of the above view, one example is sufficient: thanks to the evolution of transportation and the opening of the market regulations, an Orthodox can be some days of the week (or of the year) member of the diaspora and in other days or week return back to his/her mother Church. What determines in this case his/her ecclesial identity? It would be unrealistic to argue that sojourn in the diaspora, even if only temporarily, has no impact on his/her view over the international environment in which s/he lives or works and that s/he remains indifferent to the fellowship with believers of other Christian denominations.

necessarily – vertically, with the “First” of each “regional” ecclesial entity who represents it to the other Churches. Anything different from the order “many Bishops ↔ One Synod ↔ One/First” is a deviation from what Orthodoxy considers to be the “golden rule” of church unity.³⁶

One could ask if it is possible to apply this principle to the specific conditions of the diaspora. This would inevitably imply removing all dependencies from the Autocephalous Churches and recognizing a “First” among the various communities. Following the footsteps of the Council of Crete, we believe that two options can be projected: a process towards the full ecclesiastical emancipation of the diaspora or the establishment of a “First” by delegation.

Solutions of ecclesiastical emancipation³⁷

1. Consolidate the structure of the EA and officialize their character and gradually strengthen the “common” actions of the communities at the expense of the specific “interests” of each jurisdiction. This would facilitate the formation of a “many jurisdictions → many Church-Mothers → one Assembly” structure, i.e. a *sui generis* ecclesiastical reality, different from the order “one Church ↔ one Bishop.” Yet the latter, though being the only accepted at a pan-orthodox level, seems unable to ensure the unity of the diaspora, due to the interference of the “national” Church-Mothers.
2. Give the mandate to the Chairmen of the EA to exercise the ordinary prerogatives of the “First”³⁸. This would either lead gradually to the

³⁶ A bishop representing a local Church does not express his “own” positions, but what is “common” in the Church he presides over, i.e. that that belongs to his flock and can be shared with the worldwide Church. The conciliar text on the diaspora rightly states that the EA express the “common will” (para. 1.a.), the “joint action” (para. 2.c.), the “common position” (para. 5; see ROD, art. 4), and the “common interests” (ROD art. 5.b), the “common representation” (para. 2.c.) of the communities.

³⁷ “Emancipation” here does not imply the detachment of the Orthodox of the West from their roots nor the “existential struggle” between Eastern and Western Christendom, but the liberation from ethnocentric ideologies, which will favor the synthesis between East and West, the “dynamic meeting of these two traditions of Christianity, based on an authentic approach and redefinition of the ‘Orthodox origins’ of Christian faith”, especially at a time when the vision of a unified Europe has taken shape. P. Vassiliadis, “Orthodoxy and the West. The entrance of Western spirit in the Orthodox space,” (in Greek) in Id., *Η Ορθοδοξία στο σταυροδρόμι* [Orthodoxy at the Crossroad] (Thessaloniki: Paratiritis 1992), 125-126.

³⁸ Such was the proposal of the late John Meyendorff in 1983: “In areas and countries where two or more Orthodox autocephalous Churches are sending clergy to exercise a permanent ministry, canonical order requires the establishment of a united Church. Procedures to be followed are to be elaborated by consultation between all parties involved on the universal or

ecclesiastical emancipation of the diaspora jurisdictions from the Church-Mothers or to the complete fragmentation of Orthodoxy in the West³⁹. Of course, such an option would make able the diaspora to witness, through the “First” hierarchs, its proper identity through statements, pastoral actions, and other outward initiatives, especially in the fields of inter-Christian and interreligious encounter.

Solutions of “First” by delegation

1. To assign the supervision of the diaspora, in whole or upon a case-by-case basis, to a particular Autocephalous Church. This solution has already been applied in the past (see the assignment, from 1908 to 1922, by the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the Church of Greece of the spiritual direction of the Greek-Orthodox communities of Europe and America, or the provisional administration of the so-called “New Lands” by the Church of Greece). The Church (or Churches) that will assume such responsibility will have to carry out this mandate far from national aspirations or state dependencies. Such an arrangement should have a temporary and transitional character, while the supervising Church will have the responsibility to transcend the various communities into “one” sole community.
2. The annexation of the diaspora to the direct administrative authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. This proposal can be justified *de jure* (on the basis of canons 3 of the second, 28 of the fourth, and 36 of the fifth ecumenical councils) and *de facto*, as the Church of Constantinople have survived thanks to her long supra-national

local level. Pluralism of languages and traditions will be maintained and guaranteed wherever necessary, through the establishment of appropriate structures organized on a temporary basis.” John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church* (New York, Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press 1983), 109.

³⁹ In the area of the diaspora the granting of Autonomy, according to para. 2.e of the conciliar text “Autonomy and the Means by Which it is Proclaimed”, is possible “except by pan-Orthodox consensus, upheld by the Ecumenical Patriarch in accordance with prevailing pan-Orthodox practice.” In the preface of the document, it is clarified that “[it is] the exclusive prerogative of an autocephalous Church to initiate and complete the process of granting autonomy to a certain segment of its canonical jurisdiction – autonomous Churches shall not be established in the geographical areas of the Orthodox Diaspora.” It should be stressed that the canonical regulation on diaspora should consider that when communion with the Church of Rome will be restored the latter will exercise the pastoral administration of the Orthodox of Western Europe.

conscience in the context of the Byzantine and later of the Ottoman Empire, as well as through her inter-Orthodox, inter-Christian and interreligious initiatives during the last two centuries. This mission along with collaboration with international organisms and ecclesial bodies (Catholic Church, European Union) has rendered the Church of Constantinople an important international religious subject with a long-standing experience that has constantly stimulated the openness of the Orthodox Church to modern challenges.

Diaspora and missionary witness

God knows only one “diaspora”: that which operates the conversion of the world. In the early New Testament literature, the Jews, along with the Gentiles, formed God’s “new people” with the task to bring the whole of human gender to communion with God. James greeted “all God’s people scattered over the whole world” (Jm. 1:1). Just as the scattered Christianized Jews were a means for the Gentiles to meet Christ, today the scattered Christians can offer their faith so that all nations come together in the one Lord⁴⁰.

A starting point, therefore, for the reflection on the role of the diaspora could be art. 5.1a of ROD, that refers to the fulfillment of its “missionary obligations”. Although such obligations are part of a wider set of duties (including charity, education, pastoral care), the mission is, by its very nature, the greatest challenge of twenty-first century Orthodoxy. In general, the term “mission” signifies the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in all global situations as well and the unifying and sanctifying work of the Church towards those “inside” and “outside”. More specifically, the Council stated that:

The Church of Christ in the world is called to express once again and to promote the content of her prophetic witness to the world, grounded on the experience of faith and recalling her true mission through the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the cultivation of a sense of unity among her flock. In this way, she opens up a broad field of opportunity since an essential element of her ecclesiology promotes Eucharistic communion and unity within a shattered world⁴¹.

⁴⁰ See entry “Diaspora,” (in Greek) in *Λεξικό Βιβλικής Θεολογίας* [Dictionary of Biblical Theology] (Athens: Artos Zois 1980), 261.

⁴¹ Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, “The Mission of the Church in Today’s World,” accessed October 25, 2021, www.holycouncil.org, F.9.

But how this “prophetic witness” can be effectively promoted today? According to Crete, the mission of the Church consists of *the preaching of the Gospel* and the *apostolic work*⁴². The proclamation of the Gospel concerns those who live today in a “pre-Christ” situation or ignore Him. The apostolic work, on the other hand, is manifested wherever the Gospel has been already spread but the enculturation of faith in the life of the people has not been yet accomplished⁴³. In either case, it is a Lord’s commandment the missionary *exodus* of the Church to the world, to every expression and dimension of human existence, to manifest prophetically the eschaton, that is, the Kingdom of God, *within* the history⁴⁴.

On the other hand, re-evangelization designs the special need to update the “apostolic work” to the needs of today’s globalized and secularized world. Re-evangelization embraces the preaching of the Kingdom to those peoples whose faith is weakened and reminds what defines human history: Christ and His gospel⁴⁵.

Evangelism and re-evangelization are accomplished by inter-Christian dialogue, which’s purpose is to project to the heterodox the Orthodox faith and tradition in the goal of restoring Christian unity,⁴⁶ and by interreligious cooperation, which contributes to the promotion of mutual trust, reconciliation, and peace⁴⁷. In all these cases, the mission is at the core of Christian action, which is the bearing of witness to the truth about God (which implies the sharing of the life of Trinity), the ecclesiasticalization of the world, and the sharing of the Eucharistic altar (the “liturgy after the Liturgy”), which distributes to the “near or far off” what was been already offered in the Eucharist gathering⁴⁸.

It follows that mission is a ministry of a continuous “liturgy” offered by the Church to the world, in every part of the universe. This liturgy derives from

⁴² See Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, “Encyclical,” accessed October 25, 2021, www.holycouncil.org, para. 6.

⁴³ See Holy and Great Council, “The Mission,” B.3: “In the face of this situation, which has led to the weakening of the view of the human person, the duty of the Orthodox Church is, as it has been projected today, through its preaching, theology, worship and pastoral work, the truth of freedom in Christ.”

⁴⁴ Cf. Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, “Message,” accessed October 25, 2021, www.holycouncil.org, para. 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 2.

⁴⁶ Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World”, accessed October 25, 2021, www.holycouncil.org, para. 4.

⁴⁷ Holy and Great Council, “Message,” para. 4 and 10.

⁴⁸ Holy and Great Council, “Encyclical,” para. 6: “Participation in the holy Eucharist is a source of missionary zeal for the evangelization of the world. By participating in the holy Eucharist and praying in the Sacred Synaxis for the whole world (*oikoumene*), we are called to continue the “liturgy after the Liturgy” and to offer witness concerning the truth of our faith before God and mankind, sharing God’s gifts with all mankind.”

a center, Christ, and is transmitted to all creation, revealing the truth about God and distributing His gifts to humankind. Mission invites humans to reject whatever keeps them away from the center-Christ and seek what in the various socio-cultural contexts can lead to communion with God⁴⁹.

Proclamation-dialogue-cooperation

Can the above missionary values be applied to the diaspora? The Orthodox who migrated to the West brought with them the heritage and values of their homeland and the nostalgia for their religious and cultural tradition. Often, their confrontation with the West did not avoid apologetic attitudes and was expressed as a denial of everything that had a Western imprint. Other times, this encounter led to the overcome of old sterile anti-Western mindsets and to the re-evaluation of Eastern theology. At any rate, the “territory” where the mission is realized is not that of the one or the other State but that of the “discipleship of all nations” (Mt. 28:19), while its *raison d’être* is not found in being an extension of national Churches, but in giving birth to communities that worship God’s eschatological Kingdom. In this way, the various national references can become “courtyards” through which the light of the Gospel can illuminate the lives of peoples and cultivate a sense of spiritual unity beyond all partial ethno-religious narratives.

Orthodox diaspora is not located to any particular “center”, but it is spread out to the edges of the earth (Acts 1:8), even if it lives in heterogeneous and multiform environments⁵⁰. The diaspora can synthesize the most relevant elements of Christian witness:⁵¹ the proclamation of the Gospel to “those outside”; the dialogue with the heterodox and faithful of other religions;⁵² the collaboration with other Christians to recover the world’s Christian spiritual

⁴⁹ For Archbishop of Albania Anastasios, the Church is always “Apostolic” and offers the gospel of Salvation to the whole world, continuing the work that Christ started 2.000 years ago. See Anastasios, “Inaugural Speech”.

⁵⁰ After all, “the word ‘diaspora’ alludes *conceptually* to scattering and dispersion, while *ecclesiologically* and *canonically* it alludes to nothing!” Papatomas, “Autocephaly and Diaspora,” 411.

⁵¹ It should be noted that the diaspora is a result of the migration of Orthodox and not of missionary activities (except for the Russian missionary presence in North America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries). For this reason, no Autocephalous Church – the Ecumenical Patriarchate perhaps being excepted, on the basis of canon 28 of the fourth ecumenical council – can claim any kind of “maternal” rights” on these communities.

⁵² Holy and Great Council, “Message”, para. 3.

roots;⁵³ the use of ethno-diversity as a means to transcend national narratives, which insofar have exercised a negative impact on inter-Orthodox relations.

Can, therefore, the presence of the diaspora in the complex global reality be based on the triptych “proclamation-dialogue-cooperation” and recover all the authentic elements of the Orthodox tradition, transforming them into evangelical means to unify the modern societies? The answer is “yes”, on the condition that one accepts that the diaspora needs communities less contingent on national “centers” and more missionary-orientated, which function is not to be a mirror of national aspirations but to act as Eucharistic and missionary bodies that share their pastoral experience with all Autocephalous Churches (as provided by the ROD, art. 5.2) and facilitate Pan-Orthodox solutions to major problems. Following this path, the diaspora will be indeed beneficial to the worldwide Orthodox Christianity of the twenty-first century.

⁵³ On the one hand, Orthodoxy is becoming more “Western” and, on the other, the West has recognized her co-habitation with the Orthodox as an inevitable element of her *Christian* identity.