

Archbishop of Ohrid and
Metropolitan of Skopje Jovan

ECCLESIOLOGICAL HERESY IN THE SCHISM OF THE RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

1. INTRODUCTION

The misinterpretations of the catholicity (conciliarity) of the Church may be motive for the occurrence of ecclesiological heresies. For the orthodox tradition, it is a fact that each local Church, lead by a canonically confirmed Bishop, is a Catholic Church. However, the Church is as well One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, as it is expressed by the Creed of Faith. Actually, it is when trying to coordinate these two truths that the problem of misinterpretation and ecclesiological heresies occurs. How is it possible for each local Church in the world to be full, Catholic Church, when the Church is only one and this is why it can only be full, Catholic, that is, conciliary?

The answer to this question is of essential importance to the Church, but it is also essential for the abovementioned topic. Namely, it is undeniable that the schismatics in the Republic of Macedonia have an external appearance of catholicity which stems out from the liturgical structure of the Orthodox Church, that they claim to have accepted. Starting from this point they deem that this is sufficient to call themselves a Church. Yet, it is not only utterly suspicious whether they have an authentic liturgical structure, and with it authentic local Church, but being in schism, they are in disunity with the other local

Churches, which is most definitely the second, but not the less necessary condition to be a Catholic Church.

The issue which we would try to view from an ecclesiological stance could be posed in the following: Is it sufficient to imitate (act in the manner of) the liturgical structure and to be a full, Catholic (conciliary) Church by it? Does the schismatic organization in the Republic of Macedonia, in the effort to present itself as a Church, make an ecclesiological heresy by not fulfilling the second condition of catholicity of the Church?

2. CATHOLICITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The Church is not a creation of the world. It is God's creation. This is why its identity lies in nothing being the product. Its identity is beyond the domain of history, and it is in some kind of metahistory, but this does not imply that it is not present in history. The metahistoricity, where the church draws its identity from, is called eschaton in the ecclesiological vocabulary, or liturgically, to be more precise – Kingdom of God.

The Church is an icon of this final reality — the Kingdom of God; of what historically speaking, has not yet come to be, and what is present in this world only as an icon. This is grasping of the history and its penetration into the presence is translation of what yet has to happen in the ambience of contemporaneity. This is why the Church is the one which exists¹ in the world. It has no place of permanent residence because this place is beyond this created space and time. Its permanent place of residence is the New Jerusalem, which has not yet been established in its final form; still it is in this world as an icon.

The place and time where the New Jerusalem is proclaimed

¹ Ever since the beginning the Church has been called “*παρικοῦσα ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ*”, which is, the one that merely exists in the world, wherefrom comes the term parish. In reference see: Јевтић, А., *Литургијски живот - срж парохијског живота*, Теолошки погледи 3/80, Belgrade 1980, pg. 89–90.

in an icon is the liturgical space and time. This is why the Liturgy of the Church is identified with the final advance of the ultimate reality — the Kingdom of God, and in support to this, the Liturgy is identified with the Church itself. So, the Liturgy is Church and the Church is Eucharist.

All of this is of essential importance for this is the Eucharistic ontology on which the teaching that every local Eucharistic community is a full, Catholic Church lies. In every local church community headed by a Bishop, who is in Christ's stead, where the Eucharist is served, the ultimate reality of the Kingdom to Come is iconised and this is why it is complete, full, lacking any flaws, conciliary, that is, Catholic Church. Every local Church is the full Body of Christ. It is not just its part. The eschatological Christ appears in every eucharistic community, that is, in every local ecclesial structure. This is why, from rather early days, the local Church was called "Catholic Church", and Saint Ignatius of Antioch is the first to call it so. Saint Ignatius says: "The Eucharist presided by a Bishop or by a person given permission by the Bishop, is to be considered certain. Where the Bishop is that is where the majority should be, just as where Christ is that is where the Catholic Church is."²

It is clear that Saint Ignatius of Antioch relates the Catholic Church to the Eucharist, that is to the local eucharist community headed by a Bishop.³ This eucharistic community is not just a part of a larger whole. It is complete (full) in itself because it includes everyone. In other words, it is not an announcement of something partial and incomplete, but of the whole of Christ, Who is announced as a corporative person in the eucharistic community itself. He is sacramental to everyone who takes part in the eucharistic communion and everyone can receive Him completely, fully, and not merely partially. Thus, the local Church emerges as an icon of the ultimate

² Saint Ignatius the Godbearer (Smirn. 8, 1–2).

³ On the issue of the Eucharistic community and the emergence of the unity of the faithful in Christ one might consult the study of Ioannis Zizioulas, presently Metropolitan of Pergamum: Eucharist community and catholicity of the Church, published in the collection of texts: *Соборност Цркве*, Belgrade 1986.

reality of the emergence of the many (the people of God) in the One (Christ).

After the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the abovementioned is undeniable to the Roman-Catholics as well, and this ecclesiology is agreed upon by the Anglicans and Lutherans as well, even by some other somewhat more serious protestant communities.

3. CATHOLICITY (CONCILIARITY) OF THE CHURCH AS AN EXPRESSION OF ITS UNITY

One gets the impression that in the section of the Creed of Faith: “I believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” its universal dimensioned unity is much more emphasized than the unity of the local eucharistic community. Mostly under the influence of Roman-Catholicism, which ever since the time of Saint Augustine started accepting and emphasizing the universal character over the local character of the Church, catholicity and unity are interpreted even by some “Orthodox” theologians as a distinguishing feature of the universal Church. The Church is one, they say, consisted of many members as local Churches, but these Churches are incomplete; they are just fragments of the one universal Church.

The mere emphasis of one or the other character of the Church is of seminal influence to the development of its structure. The emphasis of the universal character over the local character of the unity of the Church led the Roman-Catholic Church to papal-centrism. As it may be noted in the decisions from the Second Vatican Council the Roman-Catholic church reconsidered this problem (which obviously was not such in the early Church) and reassessed the perception of the local Church, recognising a complete catholicity, that is conciliarity.⁴ Yet, what remains

⁴ Among the Roman-catholic theologians there are some, such as Henri de Lubak, who had emphasized the catholicity (conciliarity) of the local Church even before this was done by the Vatican Council, but, unfortunately Henri de Lubak did not fit this one into the already existent overemphasising of the universal character of catholicity. It has been known that this theology strongly influenced the decisions of the Second Vatican

confusing is the fact that the Second Vatican Council had not reassessed or weakened the term of unity in the universal (cosmic) Church. Thus, starting from 1965, there are two parallel ecclesiological principles in the Roman-Catholic Church which have not been naturally connected in a unique ecclesiology. It needs to be highlighted that the Roman-Catholics, at least until today, perceive catholicity as a predominant feature of the universal Church, which is imposed over the perception of catholicity of the Church as a local community.

This erroneous ecclesiology of overemphasising the universal catholicity did not only produce papal-centrism, but it also placed the Ecumenical Council in the position of the Pope, or in better wording, it placed the Ecumenical Council as a superior ecclesiological criterion which is imposed over the ecclesiological criterion of the local Church. This has been most explicitly expressed with the supporters of the old calendar who denying the dogma about the infallibility of the Pope, reached at the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), overemphasised the role of the Council.

To be honest, many of the Orthodox may easily stumble over this temptation. Nowadays, many are those, even among the theologians of the Orthodox Church who accept that the place of the Pope in the Orthodox Church is given to the Ecumenical Council. However, both perceptions are product of an incorrect ecclesiology which superordinates the universal character of the Church over the local one.

Every local Bishop who is a prelate of a local Church manifested in the Liturgical communion, is completely autocephalous regarding the issues related to his local community.⁵ Neither Ecumenical Council may “force” a local Bishop to ordain a certain person into the rank of deacon or presbyter, what methods he would use to spiritually support his reasoning flock, or where he shall give a blessing for a church or a monastery to be built. Still, regarding the issues of general

Council. See: Lubak, de H.: *Catholicism, A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind*, London 1962, pg. 14. See: *Dekret Orientalium Ecclesiarum, Documents from the Second Vatican Council*, Zagreb 1970, pg. 239–253.

⁵ Saint Cyprian of Carthage is widely known for his theology that the Bishop answers only directly before God for his service as a Bishop. See: *Er. 55/52*, 21.

interest for the entire Church, or at least most of the local Churches, it is necessary to decide in councils. In such a case, catholicity is not imposed, but it stems out of the structure of the local Church itself, which is catholic as well.

Something that is of general interest to all the Churches in the universe is certainly the selection of a Bishop of a local eucharistic community. The issue about who is going to be Bishop of a local Church surpasses the autocephaly (if it may be thus worded) of a local eucharistic community. This is very normal, because the service of the Bishop is not without influence over the other local Churches. It is not all and the same to the other Churches whether a local church elects an orthodox Bishop or a heretic, a man who is humble and God-loving or arrogant and quarrelsome. That is why this issue, which is of general interest to all the Churches in the ecumene, was not left by the Church as an internal issue of a local eucharist community.⁶ On the other hand, a confirmation or recognition for the catholicity of a local Church is the co-officiation in the Eucharist of its Bishop together with the Bishops of the other local Churches in the area or in the ecumene.

A necessary condition for conveying catholicity on a universal level and for manifesting the unity of the Church is the participation of all the prelates of the local eucharist communities in certain Synod. However, it is unacceptable, and must not be insisted that the decisions of such Synods are imposed on Bishops who did not partake in the session of the Synod for whatsoever reason and therefore had not the opportunity to express the stance of the Eucharistic community regarding certain issue; a community which partakes in the Synod through its Bishop. In other words, the Synod is not superior and gov-

⁶ Although it was an archaic practice, in order to recognize the election of a Bishop in a local Church the will of the people of the same local Church had to be respected; nevertheless, no one could be ordained into a Bishop if the Assembly of Bishops of the given area, or the Bishops present on the place and in the time of election of the Bishop, did not give their consent. See: Apostolic Constitutions, VIII, 4 (VEP. 2, 143 and 185). This is why the aforesaid is of essential value to the Church, which was confirmed at the First Ecumenical Council, as well, with the fourth canon.

erning over the local church structure, but it is an expression of the catholicity of every local Eucharistic community separately, and at the same time it is an expression of the unity of all local Churches in the Ecumene.⁷

This means that every Bishop who partook in the Synod is not only one part of the whole which would be in the entire episcopate as one body, consisted of many, but he is an articulation of the wholeness of the many from his diocese, which overlaps with the wholeness, fullness, catholicity of the other Churches, represented by their Bishops. The complete equality between the bishops in the ecumene stems out from the fact of equality of all the local Churches spread out across the world.⁸ All the Churches in the universe are catholic (conciliary) and apostolic, and not only the Churches founded by the Apostles. Moreover, not only all the Bishops together, but also every Bishop separately is successor and heir of all the Apostles.

Thus, the catholicity of the Church is a term denoting neither quantity nor geography. Universality, that is, the ecumenical character of the Church is a consequence, but not a reason (or grounds) of its catholicity. The outspread of the Church throughout the entire world is only its external mark, but it is a mark which is not necessary at all. The Church was catholic even when the Christian communities

⁷ One shouldn't overlook the fact that the motives for the appearance of Local or Ecumenical Councils were in connection with the Eucharistic communities themselves. These are products of the Eucharistic awareness of the catholicity of the local community which is to be confirmed through unity with the other Eucharistic communities. So, if someone is not allowed full liturgical communion in one local Church, that person cannot and should not be allowed the same in any other local Church, but certainly this would be confirmed with a Local or Ecumenical Council. Commenting on the V canon of the I Ecumenical Council, Metropolitan of Pergamum Ioannis in the above-mentioned column Eucharist community and catholicity of the Church, on pg. 146 concludes: "Its (the V canon of the I Ecumenical Council) deep meaning is contained in the idea that catholicity, that is synodality, was born in the faith of the Church according to which the Eucharistic communion in one community is an issue related to all communities in the world."

⁸ It is of key importance that in the Orthodox ecumene each local Church headed by a Bishop is autocephalous, but also, no Bishop has primacy in governance over the other Bishops.

were lonely and isolated islands in the sea of atheism and paganism, as Florovsky says.⁹

As big as is the mistake of overemphasising of the ecumenical character of the unity of the Church, just as big – or even greater – is the mistake to view the local Churches as independent, since each of them is full, that is a complete, Church.¹⁰ Balance is achieved in that so-called catholicity of the Church. And “catholicity - as is wonderfully worded by the Metropolitan of Pergamum, Ioannis – is an expression of the mutual unity of the local Churches in the world in a manner that does not fit in with any universal organisation.”¹¹ So, catholicity should not lead to a structure which would be above the local Churches because this structure would be a universal organisation.

It is undeniable that the Canonical Law of the Church makes a difference between Ecumenical Councils and Assemblies of the local Churches, but it seems to us much more important than this differentiation is the acceptance of the fact of “recognition” of the Assemblies themselves by the local eucharist communities. Through this fact of admission, the Ecumenical Councils really became conciliary (catholic), for the decisions of these were accepted by all the Churches in the Ecumene; and the Local Assemblies, through their acceptance, regard-

⁹ Florovsky, G.: Catholicity (conciliarity) of the Church, in the collection: *Сабороност Цркве*, book I, Belgrade 1986, pg. 59. In interpreting the incorrectness of Vincent of Lerin’s formula: *Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est* (that which is believed everywhere, at all times, by all), Florovsky says: “In any case, the truth of Christianity cannot be proven through universal concordance. In general no consensus can prove the truth. This would be a case of acute psychologism, and in theology there is less room for this than in philosophy.” (same, pg. 72)

¹⁰ Unlike the Roman-Catholic Church, which overemphasizes the universal (ecumenical) character of the Church, the Anglican Church overemphasizes the catholicity of the local Church. Anglicans, guided by the ecclesiology that each local Church is catholic, reckon that the Orthodox, Roman-Catholic and Anglican Church are branches of the one Church. In fact, the Anglicans are among the originators of the so-called “branch theory” which is accepted by most protestant communities. However, this theory is actually an expression of overemphasizing catholicity of the local Church over the catholicity of the Church in the ecumene. See: Shaw, P. E.: *The Early Tractarians and the Eastern Church*, Oxford 1930, pg. 33.

¹¹ See: Ζηζιούλα, Ίω., *Θέματα ἐκκλησιολογίας*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1995, pg. 69.

less of only being Assemblies of local Churches (no matter whether autocephalous or autonomous) they became Ecumenical Councils.

The catholicity of the local Church emanates from the gathering “ΕΙΠΙ ΤΟ ΑΥΤΟ” around the Bishop in the one and only Eucharist, which iconises the Kingdom of God and which is offered for everyone and for all. Yet, the catholicity of the Church in the Ecumene is reflected in acceptance (recognition), which at the same time is the meaning of confirmation of the authenticity of the other local eucharistic communities (local Churches) that have the right to organize a local Assembly.

Accepting the decisions of certain local Assembly or an Assembly of several eucharistic communities in a Local Council by other local eucharistic communities or Local Councils (Local Churches) in the Ecumene has more the meaning of accepting the Local Councils and confirming the unity with them than some kind of bureaucratic appraisal of the content of the decisions.¹²

The fact that the Anglican Church deems that it has preserved the same faith with the Orthodox Church, a faith later discarded by the Roman-Catholics,¹³ remains meaningless unless it has been accepted, that is “recognised” by the Church. Even if it were true that the Anglicans have the Apostolic succession and the true faith, this individual fact does not suffice for complete catholicity. They are in a schism,

¹² In our opinion the Metropolitan of Pergamum Ioannis is the one who has most concisely and most accurately articulated the catholicity of the local eucharist community and the Synod of all the local communities spread across the universe. He says: “The fundamental and difficult problem of the relationship within the Catholic Church (local and universal) should be decided upon in terms of single unity of identity, beyond of any concept of unity within collectivity. By explaining this schematically, in the case of unity within the collectivity of various local Churches, these make parts, added to one another, so that a unity may be formed, while in the unity within the identity of the local Churches, these create complex circles which cannot be added to one another, but they overlap, and ultimately with the Body of Christ and with the primitive Apostolic Church.” Zizioulas, I., *Eucharist community and catholicity of the Church*, published in the collection: *Саборност Цркве*, Belgrade 1986, pg. 148.

¹³ Pawley, B.C.: *An Anglican Views the Council, Steps to Christian Unity*, London 1965, pg. 117.

which means that they have not been accepted and recognised by the Church, thus, everything necessary for every catholic Church, such as Apostolic succession and true faith is not sufficient for them to call themselves a Catholic Church without being previously accepted and recognised.

The recognition, that is, the acceptance of a given local Church in unity with the Catholic Church is absolutely not an act of anyone's wilfulness. Without penetrating any deeper into the issue of whether the Anglicans have Apostolic succession or true faith, for proving this is not the subject of this study, we will emphasise that they are in schism and are considered to be originators of ethnophyletism in the Church. The Anglican Church is the first "National Church".¹⁴ It does not suffice only to fulfil certain standards in order to be a Church. This is how one can become member of a League or a Union. However, in order to be an authentic Church, besides the necessary conditions, such as: true faith and apostolic succession, unity with the other local Churches in the Ecumene is prerequisite as well; this is precisely what makes the act of acceptance, that is "recognition" of the other Churches as necessary. Until a given local eucharistic community is in schism with the other Churches, it cannot be treated as a Church. This is particularly because of the experience of the Church, because if the schism is not quickly overcome, it commonly ends up as a heresy.

Due to all of the aforesaid it is difficult to accept what the blessedly reposed Metropolitan of Pisidia, former Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain — Methodios Fouyias wrote: "...the three Churches – the Roman-Catholic, the Orthodox and the Anglican are all catholic ". He doesn't even take into consideration that besides the necessary conditions for a local Church to be catholic there is the condition for the same to be recognised, that is, accepted by the other local

¹⁴ While Newman was Anglican he wrote: "We are the English Catholics; abroad are the Roman Catholics, some of {192} whom are also among ourselves; elsewhere are the Greek Catholics,." See: Newman, J.H.: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, London new ed. 1891, vol. III, pg. 191-192

Churches. He deems that it is sufficient for a Church to be catholic if it has apostolic succession and apostolic faith.¹⁵

4. SCHISM OF THE RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA — ECCLESIOLOGICAL HERESY

Reckoning that the schism caused by the Donatists would stifle within itself if their provincialism is condemned and their disunity with the Catholic Church is emphasised, Saint Augustine overemphasises the element of universal unity of the Church over its catholicity in the local community.¹⁶ The Donatists, just as the contemporary schismatics in Republic of Macedonia, had their own eucharist community, which externally exhibited no essential difference from the appearance of the other local Churches. They had the same Eucharist, the same, that is, similar vestments, read from the same Holy Scripture and religious service books used by the Orthodox Christians, in simple terms, there was almost no external difference among them and the real Church.¹⁷

Viewing this from the aspect of Orthodox Christian Ecclesiology, it is wrong to overemphasise any criterion of catholicity of the Church: both the local and the universal. Catholicity (conciliarity) of

¹⁵ See: Φούγια Μ., Γ., 'Ορθοδοξία, Ρωμαιοκαθολικισμός 'Αγκλικανισμός, 'Αθήνα 1966, pg. 81

¹⁶ Augustin, Ep. 92, 93; De unit., 6, 16. Nevertheless, the first one to relate the concept of unity of the Church in the universe with the concept of Catholicity (Conciliarity) is Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (See: Καθηχ 18, 23 – PG. 33, 1044.) Still, he did not identify the universal (ecumenical) character of the Church with the catholicity of the Church. According to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, the universal (ecumenical) character of the Church is only a fragment of its catholicity. Still, one should take in serious consideration and view from multiple aspects the attempt of Saint Augustine to put the Donatists on the margins so that these would not infect the greater part of the body. Although he probably had only the best intentions to make the schism destroy itself, he produced a great ecclesiological oversight, which unfortunately drags itself through to today.

¹⁷ Precisely this is the reason why Saint Augustine said: “the schismatics have the same external manifestation like the real Church, they read the same Holy Scripture, but they have no salvation”.

the Church is shattered if there is no harmony between the two aforesaid criteria. In other words, if there is disharmony between the two criteria of catholicity (the universal and local character of the same), then, a schism occurs, which, being directly opposed to the teaching of the Church, may be called heresy.

In continuation we shall dwell on the ecclesiological heresy in the schism of the so-called Macedonian Orthodox Church, which arose precisely because of the aforesaid disruption of the harmony of the two criteria of catholicity. The ecclesiological heresy of the so-called MOC began immediately after World War II, when the communist authorities did not allow the expelled, canonical Metropolitan of Skopje Joseph to return to Skopje. The same communist authorities organized a rebellion of the then people's Republic of Macedonia to summon a Church-Laity's Council (March 1945) and express disobedience to Metropolitan Joseph. Here, we are not going to linger over the infamous historical facts which were a subject in another of our studies¹⁸, we are just going to pinpoint that precisely this is the beginning of the schism of the Church in Republic of Macedonia, but it is also the beginning of the ecclesiological heresy.

We shall focus on three points of view which produced three types of ecclesiological heresy in the so-called MOC. First, the absence of a bishop at the eucharist communion, which was achieved through prohibiting Metropolitan Joseph to return to the local Church where he was bishop, thus disrupting the catholicity of the local Church, for it is well known that there is no Church without a bishop. Second are the requests by the aforesaid Church-Laity's Council, confirmed at all other Church-Laity's Councils of the MOC, to form a national (Macedonian) Church, where it is quite easy to recognise the heresy of ethnophyletism. The third somehow imposes itself from the mere synthesis of stated facts and is the existence of the institution of church-laity's Council, which we also deem an ecclesiological heresy, an opposing study about the catho-

¹⁸ See: John, Metropolitan of Veles: *The Theological and Historical Aspect of the Schism of the Church in the Republic of Macedonia and the Overcoming Thereof*, in the book: *For the Kingdom to Come*, Ohrid 2005, vol. I, pg. 56–102.

licity of the local Church, therefore opposing to the teaching about the catholicity of the universal Church.

Beginning from 1945, when the newly-formed territory of the People's Republic of Macedonia within Federative Yugoslavia is abandoned by the administrating bishops positioned there by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (then still in schism with Constantinople), until 1958, until the arrival of Dositeos of Toplitza – the vicar bishop of the Serbian Patriarch, and his appointment to the position Archbishop of Ohrid by the communist authorities in the People's Republic of Macedonia, the Church on this territory had no Bishop. It is not the subject of this study to consider the issue of Dositeos not being a canonically elected Archbishop, but only positioned by the communist authorities. Yet, he was a canonically ordained Bishop and his apostolic succession is certain.

So, for full thirteen years, the catholicity of the Church on the territory of today's Republic of Macedonia was completely broken. The local church organisation was beheaded. The liturgical communion was not presided over by a Bishop; nor was the name of a Bishop mentioned by the priests, and they were supposed to complete the Eucharist in the parishes in the name of a Bishop. This is a reason enough to disrupt the catholicity of the local Church. The Bishop is not an addition to the catholic Church. He is a structural element and without a canonically elected, ordained and confirmed Bishop, no community may be called a Church. Certainly, only he (the Bishop) is not a sufficient element, for besides him, the Church has to have: a priest, a deacon and a congregation; but if it had all other elements, and no Bishop, it cannot be a Church.

The church organisation in the then People's Republic of Macedonia, was in such a state after 1945. A more detailed analysis is unnecessary for one to realise that the structure of the local Church was broken, but that so was the catholicity of the local Church. This is the first type of ecclesiological heresy in which the quasi-church organisation on the territory of today's Republic of Macedonia then befell.

The second type of ecclesiological heresy, which is a prod-

uct of the created schism, caused and instigated by the fundamental motive for creating a schism, is ethnophyletism. Ethnophyletism was condemned as a heresy in 1872, at the Council of Constantinople. It was summoned because of the schism created for ethnophyletistic reasons by the Bulgarian Exarchate. However, ethnophyletism, which is the most senseless heresy in the history of the Church, has not yet been cured. It potentially brews in many local Churches, but in the so-called MOC, ethnophyletism is the essence upon which the so-called “autocephaly” of this religious organisation is based. In fact, the autocephaly of the Church in the Republic of Macedonia was vital to the communist authorities so that the pseudo history of the Macedonian nation may be built – a history which has yet to be revised – and the same was not an internal need arising from the maturity of the Church.

The third type of ecclesiological heresy, practiced by the so-called MOC, is the assigning of the Church–Laity’s Council to be the “Highest ecclesiastical, administrative and legislative body” of the so-called MOC (see Article 38 of their Constitution). This authority given to the church-laity’s Council with the Constitution of the so-called MOC is completely contradictory to the ecclesiastical teaching about the catholicity of the Church. Even in the pre-Nicene period, the Assembly of the Church is essentially a gathering of Bishops. No one denies that priests, deacons, and even laymen participated at their councils, but theirs was but a counsellor’s role. The Nicene Council in 325, in its V canon, only confirmed the already accepted practice – the Councils of the Church are to be Councils (assemblies) of Bishops. This spirit was never abandoned by the Church, except in the more recent history, when only a several councils were summoned in the local Churches, and all had rather political than ecclesiastical purpose. Certainly, the motivation for this kind of councils carries a political burden which may be translated onto the decisions reached at these councils. In order to avoid the reprimand that these are only decisions of the Bishops of a given Local Church (who are a minority in comparison to the entire people), completely unecclesiastically, in the XX century a new institution was introduced: a Church–Laity’s Council — where the majority are laymen.

In such a case there is an impression that “despotism” in the Church is surpassed and the decisions of the council are an expression of democracy in the Church. There is another question as to whether actually the participants at such councils (the clergy, monks and laymen) were not under the influence of Bishops. But I’d rather not ask this question in this given research, at least at present, because our purpose is to show that the mere existence of the Church–Laity’s Council is a deeper failure than its abuse and misinterpretation of its practice.

The theology related to this type of catholicity of the Church is under a great influence of the western theology, both of the Roman-Catholic and of the Protestant. The influence of the Roman-Catholic Church is consisted in the perception that the universal (ecumenical) Church, contained within all the individual Churches, is entrusted to all the bishops together.¹⁹ Elsewhere we have written about the influence of western theology on the Orthodox Christians during Turkocracy, yet, the aforesaid makes it obvious that accepting the criterion of supremacy of the universal Church over the local one(s) bears a misconception about the supremacy of the Council of Bishops over the Bishop of a local Church. Although, in this case, no one accepted the teaching of the Roman-Catholics that the Pope is a Bishop superior to the other Bishops, it was accepted, antipodally and yet essentially the

¹⁹ See: Макарий, Митрополит, Православное догматическое богословие, т. 2, Сканирование и создание электронного варианта: издательство Аксион эстин (<http://www.axion.org.ru>), Saint Petersburg, 2006, pg. 230. The fact that the Orthodox Church has no legal mechanism to impose the decisions of the Council is a most natural attestation that the Church did not have a special institution to guarantee the infallibility of a given church dogma. Much later, even in the XIX century, the Orthodox Christian theologians came to the opinion that the Council of Bishops is the one to not only reach decisions, but also to guarantee the infallibility of these decisions. Nevertheless, all of this is a reaction under the influence of the Roman-Catholic theology about the infallibility of the Pope. Yet, these theological stances are a failure of the theology, not of the Church. Despite given problems in the Orthodox Church, among which befalls the great temptation of self-sufficiency and self-isolation within the Council of a local “autocephalous” Church, still, the Church never introduced another authority of authenticity of the Council beyond the act of receipt, that is acceptance of the concilliary decisions.

same, that the Council (regardless whether Ecumenical or of a local “autocephalous” Church) is superior to the local Bishop.

The influence of the Protestants is in the domain of political democracy of the Council in which there should be representatives of all structural elements of the Church, and not only Bishops. They deem that the Church should be represented by all members, and not only the Bishop, and that the Bishop, although a crucial element, still does not fully represent the Church. How wrong this conception is may be seen in the section where we wrote about the Catholicity (conciliarity) of the Local Church. The Council has no need for representatives of one or another structure in order to make it more democratic. The actual Council of the Church is the participation of the entire local Church, and not only of some representatives. The Church never saw the Bishop as a representative of the local Church in the Council with the other local Churches, but he is the person through whom the entire Church partakes in the Council. He is “the one” in whom “the many” unite and this is the only reason why he is “Christ’s icon” and “is the stead of God”.²⁰ The shattering of this iconic ontology of the Church for introducing more democracy is essentially shattering the ecclesiology of catholicity of the local eucharist communion.

Besides the two aforesaid fundamental ecclesiological misconceptions, which stem out from the overemphasis of the universal character of the Church criterion, we would move further by considering the consequences of these misconceptions, which is a new type of ecclesiological heresy in the so-called MOC. This is the imposing of the Church–Laity’s Council of the so-called MOC as a type of authority. As we have already witnessed in the previous chapter, not even the Ecumenical Council has superior power over the Bishops or the local Churches. This is why the institutional position of the Church–Laity’s Council of the so-called MOC as a supreme ecclesiastical, administrative and legislative body is a completely disrupted ecclesiological criterion. Only the Bishop has authority in the Church, and even this authority is accurately determined by the IX canon of the Council of

²⁰ Saint Ignatius the Godbearer (Magnez. 6, 1).

Antioch. The authority of the Bishop in the scope of his bishopric is spiritual, and not juridical. This “authority” is more of an authority of the Bishop’s service as “Christ’s icon” than some sort of a demonstration of superiority. However, the constitutional position of the Church–Laity’s Council of the so-called MOC as a “supreme authority” is a complete ecclesiological disruption. The awareness which is notably present among the Orthodox Christians, that the Ecumenical Council has authority (power), is derived from the authority of the truth which has been expressed by that Council. Thus, if one may say so, the truth imposes itself as authority, and yet, it is not introduced, nor is it implemented through legal mechanisms.²¹

On the other hand, the constitutional position of the Church–Laity’s Council of the so-called MOC as “authority” uses a legal mechanism to practice the same. In such a case one immediately wonders: what is the Council (assembly) or the Synod of Bishops for in the so-called MOC? If it cannot even choose the first among the Bishops²², what is its role then?

In the Church–Laity’s Council of the so-called MOC, the Bishops are an insignificant minority in the electoral apparatus. It is hard to believe that in a totalitarian ambiance of the state political structure, such was the one of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, the Bishops would be allowed greater influence in the Church–Laity’s Council than – let us say – the political authority. Nevertheless, all this was presented and proven in the history of the so-called MOC itself. The imposing of the Church–Laity’s Council as a supreme authority of the Church began even with the First, uncanonical, Church–Laity’s Council held in 1945, organised by the communist authorities in the newly-formed People’s Republic Macedonia. As a matter of fact, the Church–Laity’s Council, ever since the beginning of the schismatic

²¹ “Putting aside the contradiction — says Afanasyev — we may say that the Ecumenical Council is supreme authority of the ecclesiastical issues.” See: Афанасјев, Н.: Сабор у руском Православном богословљу, published in Истина, 12–15/2005, Bishopric of Dalmatia, pg. 281

²² Compare Article 50 and 51 of the Constitution of the so-called MOC. The election of an Archbishop of the so-called MOC is done by the Church–Laity’s Council.

path of the so-called MOC replaced the Synod of Bishops. Starting from 1945 until 1958, the Church on the territory of today's R Macedonia had no Bishops whatsoever; consequently a Synod of Bishops was nonexistent as well. So, the existence of the Church–Laity's Council structure confirmed itself the most suitable to accomplish the goals of the communist authorities for the so-called “autocephaly” of the Church. Even after the formation of the Synod of Bishops in 1958, the Church–Laity's Council remained a supreme authority of the so-called MOC. The same remains nowadays. The mere concept of the Church–Laity's Council being in a way superior to the Synod of Bishops makes the Bishops of the MOC feel inferior and in a constant pressure of fear from the authorities. This is most expressly demonstrated in the withdrawal of the signatures by the three Bishops of the MOC from the “Nish Agreement”²³ - which resolves the schism in the Church. Fearing the authorities, which essentially created the schism in the Church in 1967, the three Bishops renounced what they signed.

5. SUMMARY

If the schism is not healed in time, it regularly ends up as heresy. Even the schisms, recognised by some as disciplined, with the due course of time acquire some sort of “ideology” which is produced as a response to the condition in which it has befallen.

Thus, the schism of the religious organisation in the Republic of Macedonia, recognised by some as “disciplined”, proves itself to be an ecclesiological heresy. Three types of such heresies are recognised in the so-called Macedonian Orthodox Church. The first one is disruption of the local catholicity of the Church by not having a Bishop on the entire territory now usurped by the so-called MOC beginning from 1945 until 1959. The Bishop is not an addition but a structural element of the Church and there is no Church without him. This is why the

²³The original Nish Agreement with the faxed signatures may be found in the book: For the Kingdom to Come, Ohrid 2005, vol. I, pg. 106–113.

aforsaid condition cannot be called anything else but a wrong teaching about the Church, that is, a heresy.

The second type of wrong teaching still existent in the so-called MOC is ethnophyletism. It has been long condemned by the Church, at the Council of Constantinople in 1872, but it essentially still brews in many Orthodox Churches. Still, the putschist act of proclaiming “autocephaly” of the so-called MOC was motivated entirely by ethnophyletistic reasons. The communists, who created a forged history, needed “an autocephalous” Church out of political reasons as a safety net for the national identity of the Macedonians. This completely uneclesiastical reason was accepted as well by some of the Church members and without the consent of the mother-Church proclaimed “autocephaly”. This autocephaly had no serious grounds in the ecclesiology and the canonical law of the Church. It was based solely in the ecclesiological heresy of ethnophyletism. This is why that “autocephaly” has not been recognised yet by any other Orthodox Church in the world.

The third type of ecclesiological heresy, which occurred in the so-called MOC, is allowing political interference in ecclesiastical issues, not as an incident but through an institutional tool. Instead of a Synod of Bishops, the so-called MOC had the Church–Laity’s Council as its supreme ecclesiastical, administrative and legislative body. As we depicted before, the authority in the Church is not conducted by legal mechanisms. Not even the Ecumenical Council enforces with infallible authority, but with authenticity emanating truth and the true faith. The placement of some sort of a Church–Laity’s Council on a position of authority in the Church, just as the so-called MOC did/does, is without ecclesiastical foundation. How damaging this position of the Church is has been shown in the history of the schismatic MOC itself. Having no Bishops starting from 1945 until 1958, therefore having no Assembly of Bishops, the so-called MOC placed the Church–Laity’s Council to be the highest body of its schismatic organization. Even nowadays, when they have a Synod of Bishops, the Church–Laity’s Council is the highest ecclesiastical, administrative and legislative body. This constitutional position of the schismatic organisation

MOC allows, or in other words, is conceived so that it would allow uninterrupted influence of the political authorities in the Church, in fact, just as it was done ever since the formation of the MOC in 1945 until nowadays.

On account of all of the aforesaid, we deem that there are grounds to call the so-called MOC not only schismatic, but also a political organisation. This is why, for the time being the same cannot be recognised as a Church. The most recent events, not only related to the election of their current archbishop (who is known to have been politically elected, and not by the Church), but also the persecution of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric by the authorities, in which the so-called MOC took active participation, prove how political this schismatic organisation actually is. Lord forgive them for the persecutions, but in order to be Church they have to repent and forget the ecclesiological heresies they practice.

On the day of commemoration of the holy tzar Justinian
27/14 November 2006
prison “Idrizovo” – Skopje

