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## THE AUTOCEPHALOUS STRUCTURE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN A HISTORICAL – CANONICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Abstract.** It is well known that the foundations of Church organization were established by the Holy Apostles themselves, who were the first to spread the teachings of Christ. They fulfilled this mission in accordance with the command of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18–19), as they traveled to various regions to establish Christian communities. Initially, each Christian community, led by its bishop, constituted a distinct ecclesiastical unit, which may be regarded as the prototype of the modern local autocephalous Churches. The existence of multiple, distinct, and independent local Churches does not hinder conciliarity within the Church. On the contrary, the major issues concerning the life of the entire Church were historically resolved through conciliar processes. With the recognition of Christianity as a legally equal religion under Emperor Constantine the Great, the organization of Church dioceses began to mirror the administrative divisions of the Roman Empire. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, this alignment was fully realized. In the centuries that followed, the structuring of local Churches developed gradually, shaped by historical circumstances.

**Keywords:** Orthodox Church, church law, local Orthodox churches, canons, church diocese

The systematic structuring of the Church began to take form in the early centuries following the emergence of Christianity, particularly after the first three centuries, a period traditionally characterized by the persecution of Christians. This era of persecution came to an end under Emperor Constantine the Great, who established religious tolerance and restored interreligious peace throughout the Roman Empire<sup>1</sup>. The organization of church dioceses closely followed the administrative divisions of the Roman Empire and, by the fourth century, had become fully aligned with the imperial structure. Under Constantine's rule, the Empire was

<sup>1</sup> S. BRALEWSKI, *Was Constantine the Great Aware of the Constantinian Shift?*, SCer 9, 2019, p. 157–158.



divided into four prefectures: Gaul, Italy, Illyricum, and the East – the latter being the largest. The Prefecture of Gaul encompassed Gaul, Britain, Spain, and Mauretania. The Prefecture of Italy included Italy, Germany, Noricum, Pannonia, Dalmatia, Epirus, and Africa, with Carthage as its capital. The Prefecture of Illyricum, centered in Thessaloniki, comprised Macedonia and Dacia. The Prefecture of the East included the dioceses of Asia, with Ephesus as its center (also encompassing the southwestern provinces of Asia Minor), Pontus (with its capital in Caesarea Cappadocia), Thrace (centered in Heraclea), Syria (capital Antioch), and Egypt, along with Libya and Pentapolis (centered in Alexandria), as well as the island of Cyprus.

The imperial capitals – Rome and Constantinople – held special status and, owing to their primacy, were not included within any of the aforementioned prefectures. Each diocese consisted of multiple provinces<sup>2</sup>.

The structure of local churches is referenced in several canonical regulations. For instance, the 6<sup>th</sup><sup>3</sup> of the First Ecumenical Council and the 36<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>4</sup> of the Sixth Ecumenical Council place the Church of Rome on equal footing with other

<sup>2</sup> Д. АНГЕЛОВ, *Политическа история на Византия*, София 2013, р. 27–29.

<sup>3</sup> СТ. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на Св. Православна църква с тълкуванията им*, vol. I, София 1912, р. 282: Τὰ ἀρχαῖα ἔθη κρατεῖτω, τὰ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ, καὶ Λιβύῃ καὶ Πενταπόλει, ὥστε τὸν ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ ἐπίσκοπον πάντων τούτων ἔχειν τὴν ἐξουσίαν· ἐπειδὴ καὶ τῷ ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἐπισκόπῳ τοῦτο σύνθηές ἐστίν. Ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν, καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις ἐπαρχίαις, τὰ πρεσβεία σώζεσθαι ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Καθόλου δὲ πρόδηλον ἐκεῖνο· ὅτι, εἴ τις χωρὶς γνώμης τοῦ μητροπολίτου γένοιτο ἐπίσκοπος, τὸν τοιοῦτον ἢ μεγάλη σύνοδος ὥρισε μὴ δεῖν εἶναι ἐπίσκοπον. Ἐὰν μέντοι τῇ κοινῇ πάντων ψήφῳ, εὐλόγῳ οὔσῃ, καὶ κατὰ κανόνα ἐκκλησιαστικόν, δύο, ἢ τρεῖς δι-οικεῖαν φιλονεικίαν ἀντιλέγῳσι, κρατεῖτω ἢ τῶν πλειόνων ψήφος / *Let the ancient customs in Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis prevail, that the Bishop of Alexandria have jurisdiction in all these, since the like is customary for the Bishop of Rome also. Likewise in Antioch and the other provinces, let the Churches retain their privileges. And this is to be universally understood, that if anyone be made bishop without the consent of the Metropolitan, the great Synod has declared that such a man ought not to be a bishop. If, however, two or three bishops shall from natural love of contradiction, oppose the common suffrage of the rest, it being reasonable and in accordance with the ecclesiastical law, then let the choice of the majority prevail.*

<sup>4</sup> СТ. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на Св. Православна църква с тълкуванията им*, vol. II, София 1913, р. 188: Ἀνανεούμενοι τὰ παρὰ τῶν ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα ἁγίων Πατέρων, τῶν ἐν τῇ θεοφυλάκτῳ ταύτῃ καὶ βασιλίδι πόλει συνελθόντων, καὶ τῶν ἑξακοσίων τριάκοντα, τῶν ἐν Χαλκηδόνι συναθροισθέντων νομοθετηθέντα, ὀρίζομεν, ὥστε τὸν Κωνσταντινουπόλεως θρόνον τῶν ἴσων ἀπολαύειν πρεσβειῶν τοῦ τῆς πρεσβυτέρας Ῥώμης θρόνου, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐκκλησιαστικοῖς, ὡς ἐκεῖνον, μεγαλύνεσθαι πράγμασι, δεύτερον μετ' ἐκεῖνον ὑπάρχοντα, μεθ' ὃν τῆς Ἀλεξανδρέων μεγαλοπόλεως ἀριθμείσθω θρόνος, εἴτα ὁ Ἀντιοχείας, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτον, ὁ τῆς Ἱεροσολυμιτῶν πόλεως / *Renewing the laws made by the one hundred and fifty Holy Fathers who assembled in this God-guarded imperial capital city, and by the six hundred and thirty of those who assembled in Chalcedon, we decree that the throne of Constantinople shall enjoy equal seniorities (or priorities) with the throne of older Rome, and in ecclesiastical matters shall be magnified like the latter, coming second after the latter; after which the throne of the great city of the Alexandrians shall come next, then that of Antioch, and after this the throne of the city of the Jerusalemites.*

local churches. Particularly noteworthy is the 2<sup>nd</sup> canon<sup>5</sup> of the Second Ecumenical Council – which articulated the doctrine of the Church's unity. This canon explicitly prohibited any local church from extending its jurisdiction beyond its assigned boundaries, in recognition of the Creed's affirmation of the Church's unity. Importantly, the Council did not interpret this unity as submission to a single earthly authority, such as the Church of Rome. From a historical perspective, at the time of the Second Ecumenical Council, multiple autocephalous churches existed across the 14 dioceses of the Roman Empire. Furthermore, the same council's 3<sup>rd</sup> canon<sup>6</sup>, acknowledged the position of the Church of Constantinople, granting it equal honor to the Church of Rome. Later, during the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the 28<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ст. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правила на...*, vol. I, p. 377: Τοὺς ὑπὲρ διοικήσιν ἐπισκόπους ταῖς ὑπερορίοις ἐκκλησίαις μὴ ἐπιέναι, μηδὲ συγγέειν τὰς ἐκκλησίας· ἀλλὰ κατὰ τοὺς κανόνας, τὸν μὲν Ἀλεξανδρείας ἐπίσκοπον, τὰ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ μόνον οἰκονομεῖν· τοὺς δὲ τῆς Ἀνατολῆς ἐπισκόπους, τὴν Ἀνατολὴν μόνην διοικεῖν· φυλαττομένων τῶν ἐν τοῖς κανόσι τοῖς κατὰ Νίκαιαν πρεσβείων τῇ Ἀντιοχείῳ ἐκκλησίᾳ· καὶ τοὺς τῆς Ἀσιανῆς διοικήσεως ἐπισκόπους, τὰ κατὰ τὴν Ἀσιανὴν μόνον διοικεῖν· καὶ τοὺς τῆς Ποντικῆς, τὰ τῆς Ποντικῆς μόνον· καὶ τοὺς τῆς Θράκης τὰ τῆς Θρακικῆς μόνον οἰκονομεῖν. Ἀκλήτους δὲ ἐπισκόπους ὑπὲρ διοικήσιν μὴ ἐπιβαίνειν ἐπὶ χειροτονία, ἢ τισὶν ἄλλαις οἰκονομίαις ἐκκλησιαστικαῖς. Φυλαττομένου δὲ τοῦ προγεγραμμένου περὶ τῶν διοικήσεων κανόνας, εὐδὴλον ὡς τὰ καθ' ἑκάστην ἐπαρχίαν ἢ τῆς ἐπαρχίας σύνοδος διοικήσει, κατὰ τὰ ἐν Νικαίᾳ ὄρισμένα. Τὰς δὲ ἐν τοῖς βαρβαρικοῖς ἔθνεσι τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκκλησίας, οἰκονομῆσθαι χρὴ κατὰ τὴν κρατήσασαν συνήθειαν τῶν Πατέρων / *Bishops must not leave their own diocese and go over to churches beyond its boundaries; but, on the contrary, in accordance with the Canons, let the Bishop of Alexandria administer the affairs of Egypt only, let the Bishops of the East govern the Eastern Church only, the priorities granted to the church of the Antiochians in the Nicene Canons being kept inviolate, and let the Bishops of the Asian diocese (or administrative domain) administer only the affairs of the Asian church, and let those of the Pontic diocese look after the affairs of the diocese of Pontus only, and let those of the Thracian diocese manage the affairs of the Thracian diocese only. Let Bishops not go beyond their own province to carry out an ordination or any other ecclesiastical services unless (officially) summoned thither. When the Canon prescribed in regard to dioceses (or administrative provinces) is duly kept, it is evident that the synod of each province will confine itself to the affairs of that particular province, in accordance with the regulations decreed in Nicaea. But the churches of God that are situated in territories belonging to barbarian nations must be administered in accordance with the customary practice of the Fathers.*

<sup>6</sup> Ст. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правила на...*, vol. I, p. 386: Τὸν μὲν τοῖ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐπίσκοπον ἔχειν τὰ πρεσβεῖα τῆς τιμῆς μετὰ τὸν τῆς Ῥώμης ἐπίσκοπον, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὴν νέαν Ῥώμην / *Let the Bishop of Constantinople, however, have the priorities of honor after the Bishop of Rome, because of its being New Rome.*

<sup>7</sup> Ст. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правила на...*, vol. I, p. 633–644: Πανταχοῦ τοῖς τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων ὄροις ἐπόμενοι, καὶ τὸν ἀρτίως ἀναγνωσθέντα κανόνα τῶν ἑκατὸν πεντήκοντα θεοφιλέστατων ἐπισκόπων, τῶν συναχθέντων ἐπὶ τοῦ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς μνήμης Μεγάλου Θεοδοσίου, τοῦ γενομένου βασιλέως ἐν τῇ βασιλίδι Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Νέᾳ Ῥώμῃ, γνωρίζοντες, τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀρίζομεν τε καὶ ψηφίζομεθα περὶ τῶν πρεσβείων τῆς ἀγιωτάτης ἐκκλησίας τῆς αὐτῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Νέας Ῥώμης· καὶ γὰρ τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς πρεσβυτέρας Ῥώμης, διὰ τὸ βασιλεῦεν τὴν πόλιν ἐκείνην, οἱ Πατέρες εἰκότως ἀποδεδώκασιν τὰ πρεσβεῖα. Καὶ τῷ αὐτῷ σκοπῷ κινούμενοι οἱ ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα θεοφιλέστατοι ἐπίσκοποι, τὰ ἴσα πρεσβεῖα ἀπένευμαν τῷ τῆς Νέας Ῥώμης ἀγιωτάτῳ θρόνῳ, εὐλόγως κρίναντες, τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ συγκλήτῳ τιμηθεῖσαν πόλιν, καὶ τῶν ἴσων ἀπολαύουσαν

extended this recognition to include authority<sup>8</sup>, emphasizing that the Church of Rome's preeminence was rooted not in doctrinal superiority, but in the political significance of the city of Rome as the imperial capital.

When larger Churches have attempted to subjugate smaller local Churches, the Ecumenical Episcopate – guided by the faithful transmission of Apostolic teaching and the Spirit-enlightened ecclesial consciousness – has consistently resisted such efforts by upholding the teaching of the unity of the Church.

A notable example of this in historical context is the dispute between the Church of Antioch and the Church of Cyprus in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the fact that the Church of Cyprus was founded by the Apostle Paul during his first missionary journey, the Church of Antioch sought to bring it under its jurisdiction, in contradiction to ecclesiastical decrees and the canons of the holy Apostles – specifically, the 35<sup>th</sup> Apostolic Canon<sup>9</sup>. This uncanonical attempt at subordination

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πρεσβείων τῇ πρεσβυτέρᾳ βασιλίδι Ῥώμῃ, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐκκλησιαστικοῖς ὡς ἐκείνην μεγαλύνεσθαι πράγμασι, δευτέραν μετ' ἐκείνην ὑπάρχουσαν. Καὶ ὥστε τοὺς τῆς Ποντικῆς, καὶ τῆς Ἀσιανῆς, καὶ τῆς Θρακικῆς διοικήσεως μητροπόλιτας μόνους, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἐν τοῖς βαρβαρικοῖς ἐπισκόπους τῶν προειρημένων διοικήσεων χειροτονεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ προειρημένου ἀγιωτάτου θρόνου τῆς κατὰ Κωνσταντινουπόλιν ἀγιωτάτης ἐκκλησίας· δηλαδή ἐκάστου μητροπολίτου τῶν προειρημένων διοικήσεων μετὰ τῶν τῆς ἐπαρχίας ἐπισκόπων χειροτονούντος τοὺς τῆς ἐπαρχίας ἐπισκόπους, καθὼς τοῖς θείοις κανόσι διηγόρευται· χειροτονεῖσθαι δέ, καθὼς εἴρηται, τοὺς μητροπόλιτας τῶν προειρημένων διοικήσεων παρὰ τοῦ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἀρχιεπισκόπου, ψηφισμάτων συμφώνων κατὰ τὸ ἔθος γινομένων, καὶ ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀναφερομένων / *Everywhere following the decrees of the Holy Fathers, and aware of the recently recognized Canon of the one hundred and fifty most God-beloved Bishops who convened during the reign of Theodosius the Great of pious memory, who became emperor in the imperial city of Constantinople otherwise known as New Rome; we too decree and vote the same things in regard to the privileges and priorities of the most holy Church of that same Constantinople and New Rome. And this is in keeping with the fact that the Fathers naturally enough granted the priorities to the throne of Old Rome on account of her being the imperial capital. And motivated by the same object and aim the one hundred and fifty most God-beloved Bishops have accorded the like priorities to the most holy throne of New Rome, with good reason deeming that the city which is the seat of an empire, and of a senate, and is equal to old imperial Rome in respect of other privileges and priorities, should be magnified also as she is in respect of ecclesiastical affairs, as coming next after her, or as being second to her. And it is arranged so that only the Metropolitans of the Pontic, Asian, and Thracian dioceses shall be ordained by the most holy throne of the most holy Church of Constantinople aforesaid, and likewise the Bishops of the aforesaid dioceses which are situated in barbarian lands; that is to say, that each Metropolitan of the aforesaid dioceses, together with the Bishops of the province, shall ordain the Bishops of the province, just as is prescribed by the divine Canons. But the Metropolitans of the aforesaid dioceses, as has been said, are to be ordained by the Archbishop of Constantinople, after the elections have first been conducted in accordance with custom and have been reported to him (Ap c. XXXIV; c. III of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and c. XXXVI of the 6<sup>th</sup>).*

<sup>8</sup> Γ. ΠΑΠΑΤΟΜΑΣ, *Съвременни и бѹдеици предизвикателства пред првославната цѣрква (Исторически, еклисиологичен и каноничен подход)*, Паралингва 2019, p. 170.

<sup>9</sup> Στ. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕΦΑΝОВ, Π. ЦΑΝΕΒ, *Правилата на...*, vol. I, p. 104: Ἐπίσκοπον μὴ τολμᾶν ἔξω τῶν ἑαυτοῦ ὄρων χειροτονίας ποιεῖσθαι, εἰς τὰς μὴ ὑποκειμένας αὐτῷ πόλεις, καὶ χώρας· εἰ δὲ ἐλεγχθεῖ τούτο πεποικῶς, παρὰ τὴν τῶν κατεχόντων τὰς πόλεις ἐκείνας, ἢ τὰς χώρας, γνώμην, καθαρεῖσθω καὶ αὐτός, καὶ οὐδ' ἐχειροτόνησεν / *Let not a bishop dare to ordain beyond his own*

was promptly addressed by the Third Ecumenical Council, which, through its 8<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>10</sup>, condemned the act as an unwarranted innovation that infringed upon

*limits, in cities and places not subject to him. But if he be convicted of doing so, without the consent of those persons who have authority over such cities and places, let him be deposed, and those also whom he has ordained.*

<sup>10</sup> Ст. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на...*, vol. I, p. 468–470: Πράγμα παρὰ τοὺς ἐκκλησιαστικούς θεσμούς καὶ τοὺς κανόνας τῶν ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων καινοτομούμενον, καὶ τῆς πάντων ἐλευθερίας ἀπτόμενον, προσήγγειλεν ὁ θεοφιλέστατος συνεπίσκοπος Ῥηγίνιος, καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ θεοφιλέστατοι ἐπίσκοποι τῆς Κυπρίων ἐπαρχίας, Ζήνων καὶ Εὐάγριος. Ὅθεν, ἐπειδὴ τὰ κοινὰ πάθη μείζονος δεῖται τῆς θεραπείας, ὡς καὶ μείζονα τὴν βλάβην φέροντα, καὶ μάλιστα εἰ μὴδὲ ἔθος ἀρχαῖον παρηκολούθησεν, ὥστε τὸν ἐπίσκοπον τῆς Ἀντιοχείων πόλεως τὰς ἐν Κύπρῳ ποιεῖσθαι χειροτονίας, καθὰ διὰ τῶν λιβέλλων καὶ τῶν οἰκείων φωνῶν ἐδίδαξαν οἱ εὐλαβέστατοι ἄνδρες, οἱ τὴν πρόσοδον τῇ ἁγίᾳ συνόδῳ ποιησάμενοι, ἔξουσι τὸ ἀνεπρέαστον καὶ ἀβίαστον οἱ τῶν ἁγίων ἐκκλησιῶν, τῶν κατὰ τὴν Κύπρον, προεστῶτες, κατὰ τοὺς κανόνας τῶν ὁσίων Πατέρων, καὶ τὴν ἀρχαίαν συνήθειαν, δι' ἑαυτῶν τὰς χειροτονίας τῶν εὐλαβεστάτων ἐπισκόπων ποιούμενοι· τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων διοικήσεων, καὶ τῶν ἀπανταχοῦ ἐπαρχιῶν παραφυλαχθήσεται· ὥστε μὴδὲνα τῶν θεοφιλεστάτων ἐπισκόπων ἐπαρχίαν ἑτέραν, οὐκ οὔσαν ἄνωθεν καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὑπὸ τὴν αὐτοῦ, ἢ γοῦν τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ χεῖρα καταλαμβάνειν ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ τις κατέλαβε, καὶ ὑφ' ἑαυτὸν πεποιηται, βιασάμενος, ταύτην ἀποδιδόνα· ἵνα μὴ τῶν Πατέρων οἱ κανόνες παραβαίνωνται, μὴδὲ ἐν ἱερουργίας προσχήματι, ἐξουσίας τύφος κοσμικῆς περιεσῶνται, μὴδὲ λάθωμεν τὴν ἐλευθερίαν κατὰ μικρὸν ἀπολέσαντες, ἣν ἡμῖν ἔδωρησατο τῷ ἰδίῳ αἵματι ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ὁ πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἐλευθερωτής. Ἐδοξε τοίνυν τῇ ἁγίᾳ καὶ οἰκουμενικῇ συνόδῳ, σφῆζεσθαι ἐκάστη ἐπαρχία καθαρᾷ καὶ ἀβίαστα τὰ αὐτῇ προσόντα δίκαια ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ ἄνωθεν, κατὰ τὸ πάλαι κρατήσαν ἔθος, ἅδειαν ἔχοντος ἐκάστου μητροπολίτου τὰ ἴσα τῶν πεπραγμένων πρὸς τὸ οἰκεῖον ἀσφαλῆς ἐκλαβεῖν. Εἰ δὲ τις μαχόμενον τύπον τοῖς νῦν ὠρισμένοις προσκομίσει, ἄκρυν τοῦτον εἶναι ἔδοξε τῇ ἁγίᾳ πάσῃ καὶ οἰκουμενικῇ συνόδῳ / *Our fellow Bishop Reginus, most beloved by God, and with him the most God-beloved Bishops of the province of the Cypriotes Zeno and Evagrius, has announced an innovation, a thing which is contrary to the ecclesiastical laws and the Canons of the Holy Apostles, and one which touches the freedom of all. Hence, since common ailments require more drastic treatment, on the ground that they do greater damage, and especially in view of the fact that the Bishop of Antioch, far from following the ancient custom, has been performing the ordinations in Cyprus, according to information given in libelli and by oral statements made by most pious gentlemen who have approached the Holy Council; therefore those who preside over the churches in Cyprus shall retain their privilege unaffected and inviolate, according to the Canons of the Holy Fathers and ancient custom, whereby they shall themselves perform the ordinations of the most reverent Bishops. The same rule shall hold good also with regard to the other diocese and churches everywhere, so that none of the Bishops most beloved by God shall take hold of any other province that was not formerly and from the beginning in his jurisdiction, or was not, that is to say, held by his predecessors. But if anyone has taken possession of any and has forcibly subjected it to his authority, he shall regive it back to its rightful possessor, in order that the Canons of the Fathers be not transgressed, nor the secular fastus be introduced, under the pretext of divine services; lest imperceptibly and little by little we lose the freedom which our Lord Jesus Christ, the Liberator of all men, has given us as a free gift by His own blood. It has therefore seemed best to the holy and Ecumenical Council that the rights of every province, formerly and from the beginning belonging to it, be preserved clear and inviolable, in accordance with the custom which prevailed of yore; each Metropolitan having permission to take copies of the proceedings for his own security. If, on the other hand, anyone introduce any form conflicting with the decrees which have now been sanctioned, it has seemed best to the entire holy and Ecumenical Council that it be invalid and of no effect (Ap. c. XXXIV; cc. VI, VII of the 1<sup>st</sup>; c. XX of the 2<sup>nd</sup>; cc. XXXVI, XXXIX of the 6<sup>th</sup>; c. IX of Antioch).*

the independence of another Church. The Council described such interference as a social malady requiring immediate correction, due to the significant harm it inflicts upon both the instigator and the broader ecclesial body. The provisions of this canon are not limited solely to the specific case of Cyprus but apply universally to all Churches with canonically recognized autocephalous status<sup>11</sup>.

Another significant canonical moment in the history of the Church of Cyprus occurred when its head, Archbishop John, was compelled – for political reasons – to seek refuge in Constantinople along with his clergy and faithful. In defense of the Church of Cyprus's full independence, the Sixth Ecumenical Council issued the 39<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>12</sup>, reaffirming its autocephalous status.

From the examples presented thus far, it becomes evident that, like any other public institution, the Church of Christ – following its establishment on earth – is subject to specific organizational requirements and must possess a defined external structure. This point is crucial to emphasize, as the canonical framework outlined

<sup>11</sup> Адолф Д'АВРИЛ, *Источните иерархии*, ЦВ 2, 1911, р. 4. Adolphe d'Avril was a prominent French diplomat and writer. The monograph was originally published in the French diplomatic journal "Revue d'histoire diplomatique" (2, 1901, р. 293–314).

<sup>12</sup> Ст. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на...*, vol. II, р. 197–199: Τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ καὶ συλλειτουργοῦ ἡμῶν Ἰωάννου, τοῦ τῆς Κυπρίων νήσου προέδρου, ἅμα τῷ οικείῳ λαῷ, ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλησπόντιον ἐπαρχίαν, διὰ τε τὰς βαρβαρικὰς ἐφόδους, διὰ τε τὸ τῆς ἐθνικῆς ἐλευθερωθῆναι δουλείας, καὶ καθαρῶς τοῖς σκῆπτροις τοῦ χριστιανικωτάτου κράτους ὑποταγῆναι, τῆς εἰρημένης μεταναστά- ντος νήσου, προνοίᾳ τοῦ φιλανθρώπου Θεοῦ, καὶ μόχθῳ τοῦ φιλοχρίστου καὶ εὐσεβοῦς ἡμῶν βασι- λέως, συνωρῶμεν, ὥστε ἀκαινοτόμητα διαφυλαχθῆναι τὰ παρὰ τῶν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ τὸ πρότερον συνελ- θόντων θεοφόρων Πατέρων τῷ θρόνῳ τοῦ προγεγραμμένου ἀνδρὸς παρασχεθέντα προνόμια, ὥστε τὴν νέαν Ἰουστινιανούπολιν τὸ δίκαιον ἔχειν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, καὶ τὸν ἐπ' αὐτῇ καθιστάμε- νον θεοφιλέστατον ἐπίσκοπον, πάντων προεδρεύειν τῶν τῆς Ἑλλησποντίας ἐπαρχίας, καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκείων ἐπισκόπων χειροτονεῖσθαι, κατὰ τὴν ἀρχαίαν συνήθειαν. Τὰ γὰρ ἐν ἐκάστῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἔθῃ, καὶ οἱ θεοφόροι ἡμῶν Πατέρες παραφυλάττεσθαι διεγνώκασιν, τοῦ τῆς Κυζικηνῶν πόλεως ἐπισκόπου ὑποκειμένου τῷ προέδρῳ τῆς εἰρημένης Ἰουστινιανουπόλεως, μιμήσει τῶν λοιπῶν ἀπάντων ἐπισκό- πων, τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν λεχθέντα θεοφιλέστατον πρόεδρον Ἰωάννην, ὅφ' οὐ χρείας καλούσης, καὶ ὁ τῆς αὐτῆς Κυζικηνῶν πόλεως ἐπίσκοπος χειροτονηθήσεται / *Seeing that our brother and fellow minister John the president of the island of the Cyprians has departed thence with his laity and has come to the eparchy of the Hellespont, both because of barbarian assaults and because they have been freed from heathen slavery and have become subject to the ruling powers of the most Christian empire, by the providence of the philanthropic (or man-loving) God, and by the hard work of our Christ-loving and pious emperor, we see fit to concur in decreeing that the privileges conferred upon and granted to the throne of the man aforesaid by the God-bearing Fathers who convened in Ephesus long ago shall be preserved without any innovations, so that the new Justinianopolis shall have the right of Constantinople, and the most God-beloved Bishop appointed over it shall preside over all those in the eparchy of the Hellespon- tians and be ordained by his own bishops, in accordance with the ancient custom. For our God-bearing Fathers have already decided that the customs obtaining in each Church are to be continued, the Bishop of the city of the Cyziceniens being subject to the president of the said Justinianopolis, in imitation of the rest of all the Bishops who are under the said most God-beloved president John, by whom, if the need arises, the Bishop of the same city of the Cyziceniens shall be ordained* (Ap. c. XXXIV; cc. VI, XII of the 1<sup>st</sup>; cc. II, III, VIII of the 2<sup>nd</sup>; c. XXVIII of the 4<sup>th</sup>; c. XXXVI of the 6<sup>th</sup>; c. IX of Antioch).

here will continue to underpin the analysis throughout this study. Before addressing the specific conditions under which ecclesiastical independence is granted, it is necessary to clarify the etymology of the term *autocephaly*. The designation “autocephalous Church” began to appear in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century. The term is of Greek origin and is composed of two elements: αὐτός (*itself*) and κεφαλή (*head*), denoting an entity – whether secular or ecclesiastical – that is led by its own authority and is independent of any higher or sovereign authority<sup>13</sup>.

In the writings of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (†959) and the chronicler Theophanes, *autocephaly* is associated with the notion of political sovereignty. In the sense of possessing “full rights”, the term also appears in the works of Theodore the Reader (†525)<sup>14</sup>, Epiphanius of Constantinople (†535), Theophylact of Ohrid (†1107), and Theodore Balsamon<sup>15</sup>. The Latin equivalent of *autocephaly* is rendered as *libera ac sui juris*, meaning “free and of one’s own right”, or simply *independens* – “independent”<sup>16</sup>.

Theodore Balsamon identified all provincial metropolitans as *autocephalous* during the time of the Second Ecumenical Council. Epiphanius of Constantinople distinguishes *autocephalous* archbishops – those who are independent – from τῶν ἐπισκόπων ἐπιλομένων, that is, bishops subordinate to other bishops. He further identifies six autocephalous Churches within the Byzantine Empire. The term αὐτοκέφαλος came to denote the title of archbishops presiding over independent Churches, such as the primate of the Church of Cyprus. Over time, this title was extended to other bishops once their Churches achieved jurisdictional independence<sup>17</sup>. An official catalog of autocephalous Churches was published in April 1855 in the *Athens Syntagma*. This list enumerated ten Orthodox autocephalous Churches, beginning with the Church of Constantinople and concluding with the Church of Greece (*Hellas*)<sup>18</sup>.

Prior to the adoption of the term *autocephalous Church*, which emerged at a later stage, local churches were identified by their geographical location. The apostolic epistles refer to churches in Asia (1 Cor. 16:16), Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1), Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1), Ephesus (Rev. 2:1), and other regions<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Т. СЪБЕВ, *Самостояйна народностна църква в средновековна България*. Синодално издателство, София 1987, p. 222.

<sup>14</sup> J. ERICKSON, *The Autocephalous Church*, [in:] *The Challenge of Our Past*, New York 1991, p. 96.

<sup>15</sup> Г. РАΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων και ιερών κανόνων των τε αγίων και πανευφήμων Αποστόλων, και των ιερών και οικουμενικών και τοπικών Συνόδων, και των κατά μέρος αγίων Πατέρων*, vol. II, Αθήναι 1852, p. 171–172.

<sup>16</sup> Т. СЪБЕВ, *Автокефалия и патриаршески институт в църковното устройство на Православния изток*, [in:] *Духовна култура*, vol. XI–XII, София 1963, p. 59.

<sup>17</sup> Ст. ЦАНКОВ, *Негово Блаженство екзархът глава ли е на Българската църква*, ЦВ 3, 1911, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Г. РАΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. V, 1855, p. 513–530.

<sup>19</sup> Р. ПОПТОДОРОВ, *Автокефалия и автономия на Църквата*, [in:] *Богословска мисъл*, vol. II, София 1997, p. 26.

However, it must be acknowledged that not all churches that identified themselves as autocephalous were, in fact, *de jure* autocephalous. The autocephalous status of several churches has been contested since antiquity – sometimes without sufficient justification. For instance, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, St. Basil the Great questioned the autocephaly of the Armenian Church, and in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Pope of Rome (Pope Vigilius) similarly challenged the status of the Church of Justiniana Prima<sup>20</sup>. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Archbishop Demetrius Homatian of Ohrid disputed the autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church<sup>21</sup>. Between 1185 and 1234, the Patriarchs of Constantinople did not recognize the independence of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and from 1346 to 1375, they likewise contested the autonomy of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In 1355, Patriarch Kallistos even attempted to demonstrate that the Bulgarian Church's claim to autocephaly was uncanonical<sup>22</sup>. A particularly turbulent period concerning the canonical legitimacy of autocephaly for numerous churches – including the Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Albanian, Georgian, Czechoslovakian, Polish and Macedonian Churches – was the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>23</sup>. These disputes often disrupted harmonious relations among the Orthodox Churches, leading to confusion and disillusionment among the faithful, while providing cause for satisfaction among non-Orthodox observers. Given the historical and ecclesiological complexity of these disputes, it is essential to clarify the canonical prerequisites for the granting of autocephaly – both in terms of its historical emergence and the structural organization of autocephalous churches.

The earliest founders of autocephalous churches were the holy apostles, as evidenced by numerous authoritative sources, including the *Apostolic Decrees*, the *Epistles of the Eastern Patriarchs* (Article 10), and the decrees of the Council of Jerusalem in 1672 (10<sup>th</sup> canon)<sup>24</sup>. Historical records indicate the existence of a view according to which only those churches established directly by the apostles possessed the right to autocephaly. This notion gave rise to disputes regarding the legitimacy of autocephaly in churches that emerged after the apostolic era. For example, Popes Leo the Great and Nicholas I did not recognize the independence of the Church of Constantinople, as it was not believed to have received direct apostolic foundation or blessing<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> И. СНЕГАРОВ, *История на славянските Православни църкви*, София 1960, р. 135–136.

<sup>21</sup> I. KAMINIS, *Academic Research on Saint Sava of Serbia in Greece*, OPREE 44, iss. 9, article 2, p. 6. Cf. Ил. Илиев, *Охридската архиепископия и първите владетели на възобновеното българско царство*, ДЦ 2006, р. 95.

<sup>22</sup> С. ТРОИЦКИЙ, *О церковной автокефалии*, ЖМП 7, 1948, р. 37.

<sup>23</sup> Д. КАЛКАНДЖИЕВА, *Преосмисляне на автокефалията: светските власти като автокефалотворен фактор*, ХК 2 (199), 2025, р. 40–43.

<sup>24</sup> *Никодим (Милаш)*, еп., *Православно църковно право*, София 1904, р. 359.

<sup>25</sup> В. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на Българската държава през средните векове*, vol. I, *Първото българско царство*, pars 2, *От славянизацията на държавата до падането на Първото царство (852–1018)*, София 1927, р. 105. See more on this issue: *Responsa Nicolai I papae*, cap. XCII, [in:] *FLHB*, vol. II, София 1960, р. 118: *nam Constatinopolitanam ecclesiam nec apostolorum quibusquam instituit nec Nicena sinodus*.

Similarly, the Church of Antioch refused to acknowledge the autocephaly of the Georgian Church, arguing that no apostle had preached in those regions. Pope Gregory the Great went even further, asserting that ecclesiastical authority should be divided among the Roman, Alexandrian, and Antiochian Churches – those believed to be founded by the Apostle Peter – while criticizing other churches for claiming apostolic origin without historical evidence<sup>26</sup>. For example, both the Churches of Constantinople and Georgia traced their apostolic lineage to Saint Andrew. However, this theory does not align with either Holy Scripture or the canonical tradition of the Church. The apostles did not divide the world into a fixed number of churches, nor did they limit the establishment of future churches. Moreover, many autocephalous churches arose after the apostolic period. Even some of the churches founded directly by the apostles eventually lost their autocephalous status, either temporarily – as in the cases of Jerusalem and Athens – or permanently. Of the eighteen churches identified as autocephalous in the *Apostolic Decrees*, only five have retained their independence<sup>27</sup>.

While it is undisputed that many churches were indeed founded by the apostles, those established later remain integral components of the same apostolic tradition. They are branches of the one great tree – the Church of Christ – participating fully in its life through apostolic succession. For this reason, all churches are equal in dignity and status.

A key canonical principle concerning the independence of local churches is that the holy apostles entrusted their full ecclesiastical authority to the episcopate of the Universal Church. Consequently, the authority to establish new autocephalous churches belongs collectively to the episcopate, which expresses its will through the Ecumenical Councils – the highest governing bodies of the Church. Indeed, the Ecumenical Councils have repeatedly addressed matters of autocephaly. The First Ecumenical Council, through its 6<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>28</sup>, recognized the autocephalous rights of the Churches of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch, and addressed the status of the Church of Jerusalem in its 7<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>29</sup>. The Second Ecumenical Council, through its 2<sup>nd</sup> canon<sup>30</sup>, affirmed the jurisdictional boundaries of the autocephalous Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Asia, Pontus, and Thrace. The Third Ecumenical Council defended the autocephaly of the Church

<sup>26</sup> *Responsa Nicolai I papae...*, p. 118: *Constantinopolitanus autem et Hierosolymitanus antistites, licet dicantur patriarchae, non tantae tamen auctoritatis quantae superiores existunt.*

<sup>27</sup> С. ТРОИЦКИЙ, *О церковной...*, p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 128. See more Ст. ЦАНКОВ, Ив. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на...*, vol. I, p. 283.

<sup>29</sup> Ст. ЦАНКОВ, Ив. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на...*, vol. I, p. 296: Ἐπειδὴ συνήθεια κεκράτηκε, καὶ παράδοσις ἀρχαία, ὥστε τὸν ἐν Αἰλίᾳ ἐπίσκοπον τιμᾶσθαι, ἐχέτω τὴν ἀκολουθίαν τῆς τιμῆς τῇ μητροπόλει σφῆζομένου τοῦ οἰκείου ἀξιώματος / *Since custom and ancient tradition have prevailed that the Bishop of Ælia [i.e., Jerusalem] should be honoured, let him, saving its due dignity to the Metropolis, have the next place of honour.*

<sup>30</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 169–170.

of Cyprus in its 8<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>31</sup>, while the Fourth Ecumenical Council, through its 28<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>32</sup>, confirmed the autocephaly of the Church of Constantinople and placed the churches of Asia, Pontus, and Thrace under its jurisdiction. The Sixth Ecumenical Council further established the hierarchical order of the five major patriarchates in its 36<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>33</sup> and reaffirmed the autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus in its 39<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>34</sup>.

It must also be acknowledged that neither the Holy Apostles nor the Ecumenical Councils can be regarded as regular or standard authorities for resolving questions related to the autocephaly of a particular Church. The Apostles lived during the formative period of the earliest Christian communities, while the Ecumenical Councils represent exceptional events, convened in response to doctrinal or ecclesial crises affecting the entire Church – not for the resolution of localized or administrative matters such as the status of a particular Church.

The stance of the episcopal institution regarding the granting of autocephaly is another important consideration that should not be overlooked. The episcopate of the already existing autocephalous Churches plays a central role in addressing this canonical issue, acting collectively on behalf of the episcopate of the Universal Church. This is carried out through the Church's primary decision-making mechanism: the synod or council. The authority of Ecumenical Councils extends over the entire Church, whereas the jurisdiction of a synod within an autocephalous Church is confined to its own ecclesiastical territory. Such a council may grant autocephaly only to a part of its own Church or relinquish its jurisdiction to facilitate the incorporation of that part into another autocephalous Church. Ecclesiastical history provides numerous examples of such processes.

It is evident that the institution of autocephaly has developed gradually over time. By decree of the Synod of the Church of Constantinople, several Churches were proclaimed autocephalous: the Bulgarian Church in 1946, the Serbian Church in 1218 and again in 1879, the Russian Church in 1589, the Greek Church in 1850, the Romanian Church in 1885, and the Albanian Church in 1938<sup>35</sup>. The Georgian Church was granted independence in antiquity by the Church of Antioch, and later received recognition from the Russian Church, which also granted in recent times autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America<sup>36</sup>. Of course, some Churches obtained their autocephalous status during the era of the Ecumenical Councils, such as the Armenian Church in 354 and the Church of Justiniana Prima in 537.

<sup>31</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 203–204.

<sup>32</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 280–281.

<sup>33</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 387.

<sup>34</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 395–396.

<sup>35</sup> Ρ. ΠΟΠΤΟΔΟΡΟΒ, *Автокефалия и автономия...*, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> Formerly an autonomous church under the Russian Orthodox Church, it was granted the status of an autocephalous church in 1970. This status has not been recognized by some of the canonical churches, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate (author's note).

There are also numerous historical instances of the merging of several autocephalous Churches into a single ecclesiastical body. For example, in the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, according to the testimony of Theodore Balsamon, the Churches of each Roman province were functionally autocephalous<sup>37</sup>. However, by the time of the Second Ecumenical Council, these metropolitan sees were grouped into larger ecclesiastical units – Exarchates – parallel to the 14 civil dioceses of the Roman Empire, as confirmed by the Council's 2<sup>nd</sup> canon<sup>38</sup>. Because the imperial capitals (initially Rome, and later Constantinople) held privileged status, they came to exercise authority over multiple dioceses. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century, only six autocephalous Churches remained within the boundaries of the Greco-Roman world. A similar process of ecclesiastical unification can be observed in modern times. In 1920, several autocephalous Churches – the Serbian, the Church of Sremski Karlovci, and the Montenegrin Church – along with portions of the Churches of Constantinople and Bukovina-Dalmatia, as well as the autonomous Church of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were united into a single Serbian Orthodox Church. Simultaneously, three separate autocephalous Churches were integrated into a unified Romanian Orthodox Church<sup>39</sup>.

There are three primary factors that contribute to the canonical establishment of an autocephalous Church: the will of the Apostles, the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, and the authority of the episcopate of an already established autocephalous Church. In canon law, these are recognized as the direct factors in the creation of ecclesiastical autocephaly<sup>40</sup>. No other mechanisms are deemed sufficient to enact such a canonical act. Nevertheless, throughout history, various attempts have been made to obtain autocephaly through means closely related to, but ultimately distinct from, these direct sources. These are referred to as secondary or indirect factors. They include the involvement of state authorities, the episcopate of a group separated from an existing autocephalous Church, and the Church of Constantinople acting outside the boundaries of its canonical jurisdiction.

Canonically, an autocephalous Church is one that has received its independence either from the Apostles themselves, from an Ecumenical Council, or from the autocephalous Church within whose jurisdiction it previously existed. Of these three sources, only the third – the will of the mother autocephalous Church – remains applicable in the contemporary context. This raises an important question: What criteria should guide an autocephalous Church in granting independence to a particular portion of its jurisdiction? As with all matters of ecclesiastical

<sup>37</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 171: Εἰ δέ καὶ ἐτέρας ἐκκλησίας αυτοκεφάλους εὐρίσκεις.

<sup>38</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 169–170.

<sup>39</sup> И. СНЕГАРОВ, *История на...*, p. 134.

<sup>40</sup> Р. ПОПГОДОРОВ, *Автокефалия и автономия...*, p. 29.

administration, including the granting of autocephaly, Church authority must be governed by a single overriding principle – the spiritual and pastoral benefit of the Church itself. The ecclesiastical authority has the obligation to discern whether the prevailing conditions serve the fulfillment of the Church's salvific mission. In considering the question of autocephaly, the mother Church must take into account, first and foremost, the expressed will of the episcopate and faithful of the region seeking independence. Secondly, it should consider the stance of the civil authorities, and thirdly, the geographical, cultural, and historical context that may affect ecclesial governance and pastoral care<sup>41</sup>.

In addition to the three previously mentioned conditions, one must also consider whether a given ecclesiastical community possesses the structural and institutional capacity to function independently in a manner consistent with the true nature of autocephaly. It is important to note that the essence of autocephaly is not always fully understood, even among canonists and church historians, who at times conflate autocephaly with autonomy. Since apostolic succession is the sole source of sanctification, unity, and authority within the Church, only that ecclesial body can be considered truly autocephalous which possesses its own independent source of authority – namely, its own line of apostolic succession. In concrete terms, this means that only a Church whose bishops, including its primate, are elected and consecrated by its own episcopate – without external involvement from bishops of another Church – can rightfully be considered autocephalous. Canonical sources consistently regard this capacity for independent episcopal governance as the core characteristic of autocephaly.

This understanding is clearly reflected in the 8<sup>th</sup> canon of the Third Ecumenical Council, which defended the autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus. The canon does not refer to any other ecclesiastical rights or privileges beyond the right of the Cypriot bishops to receive ordination from within their own hierarchy. This principle was subsequently accepted as normative across all other local Churches. The canon states: *Let the leaders of the holy Church of Cyprus have the full and undisputed right, according to the rules of the holy fathers and according to ancient custom, to appoint reverend bishops for themselves. Let the same be observed in other regions and in all dioceses*<sup>42</sup>. A contrasting example is found in the 28<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>43</sup> of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, which revoked the autocephalous status of the Churches of Pontus, Asia, and Thrace, while granting them full autonomy. The canon does not enumerate any additional restrictions on their ecclesial rights except the loss of the authority to ordain their own metropolitans – this prerogative being transferred to the Church of Constantinople.

<sup>41</sup> С. Троицкий, *О церковной...*, p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 203–204.

<sup>43</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 280–281.

All authoritative interpreters of ecclesiastical canons identify the essence of autocephaly with the right of a Church to ordain its own bishops. As Theodore Balsamon emphasizes in his commentary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> canon of the Second Ecumenical Council: *Pay attention, he advises, that according to this rule, all metropolitans of provinces were autocephalous and ordained by their own councils*<sup>44</sup>. This is the true essence of autocephaly, and it constitutes the foundational structure of all fully independent Churches.

Following the example set by Christ's teaching, authority in the Church was not conferred upon individual apostles in isolation, but collectively upon all the apostles. The Founder of the Church promised to be present among them so long as they remained united (cf. Matt. 18:20; Mark 9:34–35; 1 Pet. 5:2–4). Therefore, supreme ecclesiastical authority in the Church is not vested in a single bishop but emerges from the collegial unity of several bishops. The New Testament provides clear testimony to this conciliar model of apostolic succession. Episcopal ordinations were performed collectively, as evidenced in Acts 13:1–3 and 1 Timothy 4:14. The canons of the Church likewise affirm the conciliar principle in the election and ordination of bishops. The 4<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>45</sup> of the First Ecumenical Council stipulates the participation of all bishops in the election of a new bishop, while the 13<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>46</sup> of the Council of Carthage allows for the participation of many

<sup>44</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. VI, 1852, p. 258: γάρ οι αρχιερείς υπό τῶν ἰδίων ἐπισκόπων χειροτονείσθαι εἰώθασιν.

<sup>45</sup> СТ. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на...*, vol. I, p. 262–263: Ἐπίσκοπον προσήκει μάλιστα μὲν ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐν τῇ ἐπαρχίᾳ καθίστασθαι· εἰ δὲ δυσχερὲς εἴη τὸ τοιοῦτο, ἢ διὰ κατεπείγουσαν ἀνάγκην, ἢ διὰ μῆκος ὁδοῦ, ἔξ ἅπαντος τρεῖς ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συναγομένους, συμψήφων γινομένων καὶ τῶν ἀπόντων, καὶ συντιθεμένων διὰ γραμμάτων, τότε τὴν χειροτονίαν ποιεῖσθαι· τὸ δὲ κύρος τῶν γενομένων δίδοσθαι καθ' ἐκάστην ἐπαρχίαν τῷ μητροπολίτῃ / *It is by all means proper that a bishop should be appointed by all the bishops in the province; but should this be difficult, either on account of urgent necessity or because of distance, three at least should meet together, and the suffrages of the absent [bishops] also being given and communicated in writing, then the ordination should take place. But in every province the ratification of what is done should be left to the Metropolitan.*

<sup>46</sup> И. СТЕФАНОВ, *Правила на Светата Православна Църква. Света гора*, АТОН 2004, p. 277: Αὐρήλιος ἐπίσκοπος εἶπε· Τὶ πρὸς ταῦτα λέγει ἡ ὑμετέρα ἀγιωσύνη; Ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐπισκόπων ἐλέχθη· Ὅφειλει παρ' ἡμῶν τὰ ὀρισθέντα ἐκ τῶν πρὸ ἡμῶν φυλαχθῆναι, ὧν τινων ὡς ἔτυχεν ἀβούλως οἱ πρωτεύοντες τῆς οἰασθήποτε ἐπαρχίας ἀμελεῖν κατατολμῶσι. Πολλοὶ οὖν ἐπίσκοποι συναχθέντες, ἐπίσκοπον χειροτονήσουσιν. Εἰ δὲ ἀνάγκη γένηται, τρεῖς ἐπίσκοποι, ἐν οἰωδήποτε ἂν τόπῳ ᾧσι, τῷ τοῦ πρωτεύοντος παραγγέλματι χειροτονήσουσι τὸν ἐπίσκοπον. Καὶ ἐάν τις ἐν τινι ἐναντιωθῇ τῇ ἰδίᾳ ὁμολογίᾳ ἢ τῇ ὑπογραφῇ, αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν ἀποστερήσει τῆς τιμῆς. That a bishop should not be ordained except by many bishops, but if there should be necessity he may be ordained by three. / *Bishop Aurelius said: What says your holiness on this matter? By all the bishops it was answered: The decrees of the ancients must be observed by us, to wit, that without the consent of the Primate of any province even many bishops assembled together should not lightly presume to ordain a bishop. But should there be a necessity, at his bidding, three bishops should ordain him in any place they happen to be, and if anyone contrary to his profession and subscription shall come into any place he shall thereby deprive himself of his honour.*

bishops. Similarly, the 23<sup>rd</sup> canon<sup>47</sup> of the Council of Antioch and the 6<sup>th</sup> canon<sup>48</sup> of the Council of Sardica require the involvement of a council of bishops. According to the canonical tradition, the minimum number of bishops required to elect a new bishop is three (First Ecumenical Council, 4<sup>th</sup> canon)<sup>49</sup>, while at least two bishops are necessary for the act of ordination itself (1<sup>st</sup> Apostolic Canon)<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> Ст. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на...*, vol. II, p. 768–769: 'Επίσκοπον μὴ ἐξεῖναι ἀντ' αὐτοῦ καθιστᾶν ἕτερον ἑαυτοῦ διάδοχον, κὰν πρὸς τῇ τελευτῇ τοῦ βίου τυγχάνῃ· εἰ δέ τι, τοιοῦτον γίγνοιτο, ἄκυρον εἶναι τὴν κατάστασιν. Φυλάττεσθαι δὲ τὸν θεσμόν τὸν ἐκκλησιαστικὸν περιέχοντα, μὴ δεῖν ἄλλως γίνεσθαι ἐπίσκοπον, ἢ μετὰ συνόδου καὶ ἐπικρίσεως ἐπισκόπων, τῶν μετὰ τὴν κοίμησιν τοῦ ἀναπαυσάμενου τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἔχόντων τοῦ προάγεσθαι τὸν ἄξιον / *It is unlawful for a bishop, even as his life draws to a close, to appoint his own successor. If he does this, his appointment is void. Church law must be obeyed. Only a council held under the jurisdiction of the bishops may appoint a bishop. Only they have the authority to appoint a man who is worthy to succeed a bishop who has fallen asleep and rests from his labors.*

<sup>48</sup> Ст. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на...*, vol. II, p. 895–896: 'Ὁσιος ἐπίσκοπος εἶπεν· Ἐὰν συμβῆ ἓν μὲν ἐπαρχία, ἐν ἣ πλεῖστοι ἐπίσκοποι τυγχάνουσιν, ἓνα ἐπίσκοπον ἀπομεῖναι, κάκεινος κατὰ τινα ἀμέλειαν μὴ βουληθῆ συνελθεῖν καὶ συναινεῖσαι τῇ καταστάσει τῶν ἐπισκόπων, τὰ δὲ πλήθη συναθροισθέντα παρακαλοῖεν γίνεσθαι τὴν κατάστασιν τοῦ παρ' αὐτῶν ἐπιζητούμενου ἐπισκόπου, χρὴ πρότερον ἐκείνον τὸν ἐναπομείναντα ἐπίσκοπον ὑπομνήσκεσθαι διὰ γραμμάτων τοῦ ἐξάρχου τῆς ἐπαρχίας, (λέγω δὴ τοῦ ἐπισκόπου τῆς μητροπόλεως), ὅτι ἀξιοὶ τὰ πλήθη ποιμένα αὐτοῖς δοθῆναι· ἡγοῦμαι καλῶς ἔχειν καὶ τοῦτον ἐκδέχεσθαι, ἵνα παραγένηται. Εἰ δὲ μὴ διὰ γραμμάτων ἀξιωθεὶς παραγένηται, μήτε μὴν ἀντιγράφοι, τὸ ἱκανὸν τῇ βουλήσει τοῦ πλήθους χρὴ γενέσθαι. Χρὴ δὲ μετακαλεῖσθαι καὶ τοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς πλησιοχώρου ἐπαρχίας ἐπισκόπους, πρὸς τὴν κατάστασιν τοῦ τῆς μητροπόλεως ἐπισκόπου. Μὴ ἐξεῖναι δὲ ἀπλῶς καθιστᾶν ἐπίσκοπον ἐν κώμῃ τινὶ ἢ βραχείᾳ πόλει, ἢ τινὶ καὶ εἰς μόνος πρεσβύτερος ἐπαρκεῖ· οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον γὰρ ἐπισκόπους ἐκεῖσε καθιστάσθαι, ἵνα μὴ κατευτελίξηται τὸ τοῦ ἐπισκόπου ὄνομα καὶ ἡ αὐθεντία. Ἄλλ' οἱ τῆς ἐπαρχίας, ὡς προεῖπον, ἐπίσκοποι ἐν ταύταις ταῖς πόλεσι καθιστᾶν ἐπισκόπους ὀφείλουσιν, ἔνθα καὶ πρότερον ἐτύγγανον γεγονότες ἐπίσκοποι. Εἰ δὲ εὐρίσκοιτο οὕτω πληθύνουσα τις ἐν πολλῷ ἀριθμῷ λαοῦ πόλις, ὡς ἀξίαν αὐτὴν καὶ ἐπισκοπῆς νομίζεσθαι, λαμβανέτω. Εἰ πᾶσιν ἀρέσκει τοῦτο; Ἀπεκρίναντο πάντες· Ἀρέσκει / *Bishop Hosius said: If it happen that in a province in which there are very many bishops one bishop should stay away and by some negligence should not come to the council and assent to the appointment made by the bishops, but the people assemble and pray that the ordination of the bishop desired by them take place – it is necessary that the bishop who stayed away should first be reminded by letters from the exarch of the province (I mean, of course, the bishop of the metropolis), that the people demand a pastor to be given them. I think that it is well to await his [the absent bishop's] arrival also. But if after summons by letter he does not come, nor even write in reply, the wish of the people ought to be complied with. The bishops from the neighbouring provinces also should be invited to the ordination of the bishop of the metropolis. It is positively not permitted to ordain a bishop in a village or petty town, for which even one single presbyter is sufficient (for there is no necessity to ordain a bishop there) lest the name and authority of bishop should be made of small account, but the bishops of the province ought, as before said, to ordain bishops in those cities in which there were bishops previously; and if a city should be found with a population so large as to be thought worthy of an episcopal see, let it receive one. Is this the pleasure of all? All answered: It is our pleasure.*

<sup>49</sup> See footnote 41.

<sup>50</sup> Ст. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на...*, vol. I, p. 3: 'Επίσκοπος χειροτονεῖσθω ὑπὸ ἐπισκόπων δύο ἢ τριῶν / *Let a bishop be ordained by two or three bishops.* See more on this issue: *Никодим (Милаш), еп., Православно...*, p. 356.

Furthermore, for the consecration of a bishop in a widowed diocese, at least four bishops must be present. This number is also the minimum required for conducting an ecclesiastical trial against a bishop. The requirement for each autocephalous Church to have at least four bishops arises from the fundamental ecclesiological principle that the highest authority within the Church must be exercised collegially. The primate of an autocephalous Church is not an absolute ruler but functions as *primus inter pares* – first among equals – within the synod. However, while four bishops represent the canonical minimum, this number is often insufficient for the effective and stable governance of Church affairs. To ensure proper ecclesiastical administration and to avoid structural deficiencies, it is advisable that each autocephalous Church maintain a larger number of bishops.

When discussing the independence of autocephalous Churches, it is important to recognize that such independence is not absolute. This is due to the unique and sacred character of the Church itself. The autonomy of a particular autocephalous Church should not be equated with the political sovereignty of a nation-state. Despite ecclesiastical divisions into distinct administrative jurisdictions, the Universal Church remains one, united in faith, sacraments, and apostolic tradition. The division of the Universal Church into separate autocephalous Churches arises from the distinctive nature of ecclesial unity and the practical limitations inherent in the governance of the global episcopate. Given the logistical and pastoral challenges, it is not feasible for the entire episcopate of the Universal Church to jointly and continually address all ecclesiastical matters. Therefore, the existence of autocephalous Churches reflects an administrative necessity rather than a breach in the unity of the Church<sup>51</sup>.

It follows that each autocephalous Church is obliged to act not as a completely separate entity, but as a part of the one Universal Church, with which it remains in permanent union. On the other hand, since the necessity of separating a particular local Church is dictated by practical requirements that often change, the corresponding autocephalous Church, in the process of separation and identification, is not considered an invariable part of the Universal Church. Thus, some autocephalous Churches have lost their independence, such as the Churches of Jerusalem, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece. Other local Churches have fallen out of unity with the Early Church due to doctrinal differences, as is the case with the Roman, Armenian, and Persian Churches.

The limits of the independence of autocephalous Churches in various areas of ecclesial activity – such as doctrine, legislation, worship, administrative regulation, and judicial proceedings – depend on the nature of each specific sphere<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> В. ТАЛАЗИН, *Соборность и автокефалия*, ЖМП 7, 1959, p. 54.

<sup>52</sup> Today, according to Orthodox tradition, a Church is considered autocephalous if it possesses: 1) the right to resolve all internal matters independently, through its own authority, without dependence on other Churches; 2) the right to appoint its own bishops and to elect its primate from

It is well established that, in the realm of dogmatic teaching, there is no scope for independent action on the part of autocephalous Churches, because the deposit of faith was entrusted to the Universal Church by the holy apostles, who, in turn, received it from the founder of the Church – the Lord Jesus Christ – and it remains unchanged in the Church's consciousness. This affirms that the Orthodox Church rejects the Roman Catholic concept of doctrinal development within church teaching<sup>53</sup>.

The Universal Church has formulated the teaching of Christ, and its assimilation is obligatory for all autocephalous Churches, which are required to preserve and transmit it perpetually. Likewise, for autocephalous Churches, the canonical tradition of the Church is unchangeable and binding, insofar as it is grounded in the dogmatic teaching on the structure of the Church. With regard to the freedom of the Churches in the sphere of worship, limitations are observed only in its relation to dogmatic teaching, which reflects the intention to preserve the integrity of that teaching. The commemoration during the Divine Liturgy (as prescribed in the 15<sup>th</sup> canon of the Council in Trullo)<sup>54</sup> of the name of the primate by the other bishops of the same Church serves as a liturgical expression of both the independence and unity of the autocephalous Churches. Absolute independence of the autocephalous Churches can be spoken of only in their administrative sphere. The Church canons require full unity in matters of dogma, regarding individuals who do not accept conciliar dogmatic definitions as being outside the Church – that is, as heretics and schismatics.

Bishops are granted the freedom to make decisions on ecclesiastical matters of an administrative nature, with the requirement that such decisions be made by majority vote, following the precedent set by the 5<sup>th</sup> canon of the First Ecumenical Council<sup>55</sup>. At the same time, the canons safeguard the administrative independence

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among them, without any obligatory expression of subordination to another Church; 3) a more or less homogeneous ethnic community within a defined national or ecclesiastical territory; 4) the right to maintain local customs and liturgical rites; 5) the right to consecrate holy chrism; 6) the right to canonize local saints.

<sup>53</sup> В. ТАЛАЗИН, *Соборность...*, p. 54.

<sup>54</sup> И. СТЕФАНОВ, *Правила на Светата...*, p. 353–354.

<sup>55</sup> СТ. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕФАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на...*, vol. I, p. 274–275: Περὶ τῶν ἀκοινωνήτων γενομένων, εἴτε τῶν ἐν κλήρῳ, εἴτε τῶν ἐν λαϊκῷ τάγματι, ὑπὸ τῶν καθ' ἐκάστην ἐπαρχίαν ἐπισκόπων, κρατεῖτω ἢ γνώμη, κατὰ τὸν κανόνα τὸν διαγορεύοντα, τοὺς ὑφ' ἐτέρων ἀποβληθέντας ὑφ' ἐτέρων μὴ προσέεισθαι. Ἐξεταζέσθω δέ, μὴ μικροψυχία, ἢ φιλονεικία, ἢ τινα τοιαύτη ἀηδία τοῦ ἐπισκόπου, ἀποσυνάγωγοι γεγένηνται. Ἴνα οὖν τοῦτο τὴν πρέπουσαν ἐξετασιν λαμβάνοι, καλῶς ἔχειν ἔδοξεν, ἐκάστου ἐνιαυτοῦ, καθ' ἐκάστην ἐπαρχίαν δις τοῦ ἔτους συνόδους γίνεσθαι. Ἴνα κοινῇ πάντων τῶν ἐπισκόπων τῆς ἐπαρχίας ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συναγομένων, τὰ τοιαῦτα ζητήματα ἐξετάζηται, καὶ οὕτως οἱ ὁμολογουμένως προσκεκροκότες τῶ ἐπισκόπῳ, κατὰ λόγον ἀκοινωνήτοι παρὰ πᾶσιν εἶναι δόξωσι, μέχρις ἂν τῶ κοινῶ τῶν ἐπισκόπων δόξη τὴν φιλανθρωποτέραν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἐκθέσαι ψῆφον. Αἱ δὲ σύνοδοι γίνεσθωσαν, μία μὲν πρὸ τῆς Τεσσαρακοστῆς, ἵνα πάσης μικροψυχίας ἀναιρουμένης, τὸ δῶρον καθαρὸν προσφέρηται τῷ Θεῷ· δευτέρα δέ, περὶ τὸν τοῦ μετοπώρου καιρὸν / *Such as have*

of each autocephalous Church by prohibiting a bishop of one Church from ordaining or exercising jurisdiction within the boundaries of another Church (Second Ecumenical Council, 2<sup>nd</sup> canon<sup>56</sup>; Council of Antioch, 13<sup>th</sup> canon)<sup>57</sup>.

Autocephalous Churches also possess full independence in the field of judicial proceedings, wherein even the head of a Church may be judged by the other bishops. A Church with the minimum number of bishops may be compelled to seek assistance from other Churches if a bishop, condemned by a local council, wishes to appeal to a higher council, a right granted to him by canon (Second Ecumenical Council, 6<sup>th</sup> canon)<sup>58</sup>.

It should be noted here that the issue of autocephaly and the procedure for its proclamation within the Orthodox Church has remained on the agenda of inter-Orthodox dialogue for many years. This topic is discussed alongside a number of other unresolved questions – such as those concerning autonomy, the status of the Orthodox diaspora, the ecclesiastical calendar, and others. An illustrative example can be found in one of the most recent forums of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, held in Chambésy from 21 to 27 February 2011. During four consecutive sessions (two on 22 February and two on 23 February 2011), an attempt was made to reach agreement regarding the manner in which the Tomos of autocephaly should be signed. At the outset, the representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate stated their consent that the Tomos be signed by all Primate of the Local Orthodox Churches, thereby expressing pan-Orthodox consensus. The Chair proposed that the signing be accompanied by the expressions ἀποφάινεται (“proclaims”) in reference to the Ecumenical Patriarch, and συναποφάινεται (“co-proclaims”) in reference to the other Primate.

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*been excommunicated by certain bishops shall not be restored by others, unless the excommunication was the result of pusillanimity, or strife, or some other similar cause. And that this may be duly attended to, there shall be in each year two synods in every province—one before Lent, the other toward autumn.*

<sup>56</sup> See I. ΚΑΜΙΝΙΣ, *Academic Research...*, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> СТ. ЦАНКОВ, ИВ. СТЕΦАНОВ, П. ЦАНЕВ, *Правилата на...*, vol. II, p. 748–749: Μηδένα ἐπίσκοπον τολμᾶν ἀφ’ ἑτέρας ἐπαρχίας εἰς ἑτέραν μεταβαίνειν, καὶ χειροτονεῖν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ τινὰς εἰς προαγωγὴν λειτουργίας, μηδὲ εἰ συνεπάγοιτο ἑαυτῷ ἑτέρους, εἰ παρακληθεὶς ἀφίκοιτο διὰ γραμμάτων τοῦ τε μητροπολίτου καὶ τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ ἐπισκόπων, ὧν εἰς τὴν χώραν παρέρχοιτο. Εἰ δὲ μηδενὸς καλοῦντος ἀπέλθοι ἀτάκτως ἐπὶ χειροθεσίᾳ τινῶν, καὶ καταστάσει τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν πραγμάτων, μὴ προσηκόντων αὐτῷ, ἄκυρα μὲν τὰ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ πραττόμενα τυγχάνειν, καὶ αὐτὸν δὲ ὑπέχειν τῆς ἀταξίας αὐτοῦ, καὶ τῆς παραλόγου ἐπιχειρήσεως τὴν προσήκουσαν δίκην, καθηρημένον ἐντεῦθεν ἤδη ὑπὸ τῆς ἁγίας συνόδου / *No bishop shall presume to pass from one province to another, and ordain persons to the dignity of the ministry in the Church, not even should he have others with him, unless he should go at the written invitation of the metropolitan and bishops into whose country he goes. But if he should, without invitation, proceed irregularly to the ordination of any, or to the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs which do not concern him, the things done by him are null, and he himself shall suffer the due punishment of his irregularity and his unreasonable undertaking, by being immediately deposed by the holy Synod.*

<sup>58</sup> Γ. ΡΑΛΛΗ, Μ. ΠΟΤΛΗ, *Σύνταγμα των θείων...*, vol. II, 1852, p. 180–182.

The Russian Orthodox Church, however, objected to the first point and offered an alternative proposal: *The Tomos of autocephaly should be signed by all Primates in the order of the Diptychs, without any additions to their signatures.* Consequently, the discussion focused on whether the role of the First Hierarch (the Ecumenical Patriarch) should be emphasized by distinguishing him in some way from the other Primates, or whether full equality among all should be maintained.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate upheld its proposal that the Tomos be signed by the Ecumenical Patriarch with the addition of the words: *I proclaim together with all the Primates of the holy Orthodox Churches* (ἀποφαιίνεται μετὰ πάντων τῶν Προκαθημένων τῶν ἀγιωτάτων Ὁρθοδόξων Ἐκκλησιῶν)<sup>59</sup>. However, this proposal did not achieve unanimous approval. Thus, the question concerning the methodology for the proclamation and implementation of autocephaly within the Orthodox Church remains unresolved to this day.

According to Archimandrite Cyril (Hovorun), due to the absence of a clearly defined statutory methodology for granting autocephaly, Orthodox practice often exhibits ambiguity both regarding the procedures by which it is achieved and concerning its canonical status – whether it constitutes autonomy, autonomy with extended rights, or full autocephaly<sup>60</sup>.

This prevailing uncertainty presents a considerable challenge to the autocephalous institution, particularly when considered in the context of ecclesiastical developments in Ukraine and North Macedonia over the past several decades<sup>61</sup>. But a comprehensive analysis of this issue lies beyond the scope of the present study.

In conclusion, from the aforementioned historical facts and events, it appears that the initial bold and arbitrary assertions of independence in the ecclesial life of nearly all Orthodox Churches that emerged after the era of the Ecumenical Councils – particularly following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – are especially striking. Although these actions were not coordinated with other local autocephalous Churches, they may be regarded as natural steps toward the ultimate goal: independence in the structure and governance of these Churches. However, this historical pattern reveals a troubling trend – namely, that initial non-canonical actions have, not infrequently, led to the attainment of canonical recognition regarding the independence of Local Orthodox Churches. This raises a fundamental question: Is this not the result of the absence of uniform criteria concerning autocephaly and the method of its implementation within the Orthodox Church? The history of the Church answers this question in the affirmative.

<sup>59</sup> И. Йовчев, *Автономия–автокефалия и начин на провъзгласяването им (с оглед на Македонската схизма)*, София 2021, p. 230–233.

<sup>60</sup> CYRIL (HOVORUN), archim, *The Status of the UOC Today: What are Hovorun-like Talkers Talking About?*, <https://shorturl.at/0wPyI> [7 XI 2025].

<sup>61</sup> Д. КАЛКАНДЖИЕВА, *Преосмисляне на автокефалията...*, p. 44–45.

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