

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith and the Preaching of the Byzantine Mission

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I. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith (Creed)

1. The Christology of the Symbol of Faith (Creed)

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed constitutes the comprehensive codification of the entire apostolic and post-apostolic ecclesiastical tradition regarding the mystery of the divine economy (dispensation) in Christ as well as the salvation of humankind. Thus, both the “Incarnation of the Son and Word of God” («Ἐνανθρώπησις τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ Λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ»), through the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary, and the whole “Life of Christ on earth”, are, with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, the “creaturely” offering of the consecrated holy blood of the virgin Mary, so that the *one, holy, catholic and apostolic* earthly Church in Christ might be revealed on the Pentecost. The Church, therefore, undertook her soteriological mission “to all nations” and “to the ends of the earth”, always with the synergy of the Holy Spirit¹.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the incorporation of believers into the “body of Christ” of the earthly Church necessarily presupposed the “in Christ” triune “Confession of Faith” of all the baptized during the celebration of the introductory sacrament of Baptism, since Christ Himself had received the Baptism by John the Baptist, just as His apostles had also received it under this spirit, however, all the apostles

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1. *Matth.* 28, 18-20; *John* 15, 26-27; 16, 7-14; 20, 21-23; *Acts* 1, 7-8; 2, 1-4; *1 Cor.* 11, 23-29; *Eph.* 2, 13-22; *Col.* 1, 15-24.

received from Christ Himself and by His authority, that is, by the “*blowing up*” («ἐμφύσημα») of Christ as an ordination, immediately after His resurrection, to fulfill, with the cooperation always of the Holy Spirit, their assumed soteriological mission in His earthly Church².

Besides, Christ Himself exhorted them: «Πορευθέντες μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν, καὶ ἰδοὺ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος», that is, by the uninterrupted celebration of the divinely instituted sacrament of the Eucharist³. Indeed, Christ celebrated the “Last Supper” with His apostles, before His crucifixion and the divine Passion, to declare to them the common *word, time, and manner* of His uninterrupted presence “*to the end of the age*” («πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος»)⁴.

Therefore, in the Last Supper, Christ Himself expressly instructed them: «τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν», so that the celebration of their own Eucharistic Last Supper would continue in all the local churches «πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν» and «ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς», always with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, so that the uninterrupted presence of Christ in the life of his Church, i.e. Christ «ἄχρις οὗ ἂν ἔλθῃ» in His glorious second presence, may always be assured in liturgically and visibly in this mystery of the Eucharist, which is administered by the Church on earth⁵.

Both the evangelical and the apostolic traditions connected the mystery of the Eucharist with the earthly Church’s “*Christocentric ontology*” which performs this mystery, i.e. as Christ’s only eternal historical body, «ὅ ἐστιν ἡ Ἐκκλησία» (“*which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all*”)⁶. From this perspective, therefore, the earthly Church’s main soteriological mission is always and inextricably linked to its missionary

2. John 16, 7-14; 20, 21-23; Acts 1, 7-8; 2, 1-4.

3. Matth. 28, 18-20; John 20, 21-23; Acts 1, 7-8; 1 Cor. 11, 23-29.

4. Matth. 26, 26-29; Mark 14, 22-25; Luk. 22, 19-21; John 6, 51-58.

5. 1 Cor. 11, 23-26.

6. 1 Cor. 12, 24-27; Eph. 1, 22-23; 2, 19-22; 3, 20-21; 4, 15-16; 5, 24-27. Col. 1, 17-18 and 24.

activity for the promotion and dissemination of the Apostolic Preaching not only to those near but also to those far away, i.e., «εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη», «ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς»⁷.

Of course, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of the ecumenical Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith necessarily presupposes the ever-living and ever-active missionary consciousness of the entire ecclesiastical body, not only regarding the Apostolic Preaching but also its integral relationship with the Church's entire sacramental life. After all, according to St. Chrysostom, Christ, being incarnated by the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, «Ἐκκλησίας σάρκα ἀνέλαβεν»⁸, so that all believers, i.e. «πάντες οἱ ὄντες, οἱ γενομένοι καὶ οἱ ἐσόμενοι, ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι» are continually incorporated into His eternal and historical body⁹.

However, a wonderful example of the missionary activity of all the apostles in the Greco-Roman world was the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, who miraculously converted to Christianity. It was in this spirit, therefore, that he made clear to the Corinthians his apostolic conscience: «Οὕτως ἡμᾶς λογιζέσθω ἄνθρωπος, ὡς ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ καὶ οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων Θεοῦ. Ὁ δὲ λοιπὸν ζητεῖται ἐν τοῖς οἰκονόμοις, ἵνα πιστός τις εὐρεθῇ»¹⁰. This missionary model was thus generally established not only because of the impressive completeness and quality of his Apostolic Sermon but also for the appropriate methodology of his zealous missionary action, particularly within the Greco-Roman world's hostile environment.

Indeed, this impressive apostolic example of the apostle to the Gentiles Paul was applied by all the successors of the apostles in the local Churches of the Greco-Roman world and formed the common and reliable tradition of missionary activity of the first three centuries AD. However, this tradition was impressively expanded, not only by the bishops of all the local Churches around the ecumene (Hermas, Justin, Clement, Pantaenus, Tertullian, Origen, Lucian, etc.) but also by the

7. *Matth.* 28, 18-20; *Acts* 1, 7-8.

8. PG 52, 427.

9. PG 61, 264.

10. *1 Cor.* 4, 1-2.

renowned theologians of the Church (Timothy, Titus, Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Ireneus, etc.). In this spirit, therefore, this missionary tradition of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, hastened the immediate prevalence of Christianity in the fourth century, not only in the known Greco-Roman world but also in its unknown wider milieu of pagan barbarian tribes.

The decisions of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great were consequently decisive: a) to officially recognize the Christian religion, with the famous *Edict of Milan* (313 AD); b) to transfer the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to the town of Byzantium, the future Constantinople (324); c) to convene the *First Ecumenical Council* in Nicea of Bithynia (325), and (d) to call all the bishops of all the local Churches, both in the East and the West, to unanimously embrace the *common Confession of the Christian faith*, as it is expressed in the already established, from the apostolic times, *Baptismal Symbols* of almost all the local Christian Churches.

These *Symbols*, despite their minor differences, had as their common reference the *trinitarianism*, *Christology*, *pneumatology*, and *ecclesiology* of the apostle to the Gentiles Paul, as they have been exposed in his famous Epistles (to *Romans*, *Corinthians*, *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, etc.). Indeed, these apostolic proposals had already been established in the *Baptist Symbols of Creed* – a sort of concise ecclesiastical declaration of both the acceptance of the confessed faith of the apostolic tradition (*Regula fidei*) and the rejection of the heretical deviations of Christians (*Regula veritatis*).

Of course, the common ecclesiastical criterion for accepting or rejecting the “Rule of Truth” (*Regula fidei* – *Regula veritatis*) was only the “Eucharist” celebrated by the bishop in the local Church. Nevertheless, according to St. Irenaeus of Lyons [Lugdunum], under this spirit, the Eucharist of the Church is celebrated by all the bishops: «ἡμῶν γάρ [the Orthodox] σύμφωνος ἡ γνώμη [doctrine] τῇ Εὐχαριστίᾳ, ἡ δὲ Εὐχαριστία βεβαιοῖ τὴν γνώμην», while those who do not recognize or feed on the body and blood of Christ of the Eucharist are heretics; therefore, they ought to: «ἢ τὴν γνώμην ἀλλαξάτωσαν ἢ τὸ προσφέρειν τὰ εἰρημένα παραιτείσθωσαν»¹¹.

11. Κατὰ αἱρέσεων, [Against Heresies], IX, 18, 5.

Consequently, this indissoluble and interdependent distinct *ontological relationship* between the earthly Church and the Eucharist celebrated by her has by necessity its common and distinct reference to Christ's only eternal historical body – assumed at the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God, by the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, and ascended into heaven on the Pentecost day. Indeed, Christ assumed this body “creatively”, with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, from the Virgin Mary's consecrated holy blood, brought it into His entire earthly life, raised it to the Cross as a ransom for many, and made it both His earthly and heavenly Church.

In this spirit, therefore, St. Chrysostom proclaimed, in agreement with the teaching of the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, on the indissoluble *ontological identification* of the earthly Church with Christ's only eternal historical body, that: «τῷ δὲ τῆς σαρκὸς ὀνόματι [=body of Christ] καὶ τὰ Μυστήρια [=Eucharist] καλεῖν εἴωθεν ἡ Γραφή καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν ἄπασαν...». Besides, from the spearing of His body on the Cross αἷμα and ὕδωρ flowed out, and he explicitly stated that: «τοῦ Βαπτίσματος σύμβολον καὶ τῶν Μυστηρίων [=Eucharist] ἐστὶ τὸ αἷμα ἐκεῖνο καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ. Ἐξ ἑκατέρων τούτων ἡ Ἐκκλησία γεγέννηται... Ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων τούτων ἡ Ἐκκλησία συνέστηκεν...»¹².

Indeed, St Chrysostom willingly accepted and faithfully supported the Pauline Christology, i.e., the indissoluble relationship between Christ and the Church, which is why he also proclaimed that «ὁ Χριστὸς σαρκωθείς Ἐκκλησίας σάρκα ἀνέλαβεν»¹³. In this sense, therefore, as exegete of the relevant chapters of the great Epistles of the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, to the *Romans*, *Corinthians*, *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, etc, emphasizes that: «οὕτω καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὸ σῶμα, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Καθάπερ γὰρ καὶ Σῶμα καὶ Κεφαλὴ εἷς ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, οὕτω τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν καὶ τὸν Χριστὸν ἐν ἑφῆσεν εἶναι [=Paul], διὸ καὶ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀντὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τέθεικεν, τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ οὕτως ὀνομάζων...»¹⁴.

12. PG 59, 463.

13. PG 52, 427.

14. PG 61, 249-250.

It is clear, however, that, as in the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God, by the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, the cooperation of the Holy Spirit was necessary not only for the “creative” reception of the human body from Mary the Virgin’s pure blood, sanctified by the Holy Spirit but also for its union with Christ’s divine nature, i.e. in the hypostasis of God’s Son and Word. Therefore, St. Chrysostom developed the indispensable necessity of the cooperation of the Holy Spirit for the indissoluble and interdependent unity not only of the relationship between Christ and the Church but also for its apostolic extension in the life of the ecclesiastical body in its totality.

Consequently, St. Chrysostom, who deeply admired the apostle to the Gentiles, again refers to the apostle Paul, to correctly emphasize that «ἐν ἐνὶ Πνεύματι φησιν [=Paul], πάντες γὰρ ἡμεῖς εἰς ἐν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν [=Christ’s body], ... τὸ κατασκευάσαν ἡμᾶς ἐν σῶμα γενέσθαι καὶ τὸ γεννηῆσαν ἡμᾶς ἐν ἐστὶ Πνεῦμα, ... Οὐ μόνον τὸ βαπτίσαν ἡμᾶς ἐν (=Spirit), ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς ὃ ἐβάπτισε, τουτέστιν ἐφ’ ᾧ ἐβάπτισεν, ἐν [=Christ’s body], ἵνα πάντες ἐν σῶμα ὦμεν, εἰς τοῦτο ἐβαπτίσθημεν... καὶ πάντες εἰς ἐν Πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν, ... πρὸς τὴν αὐτὴν ἡλθομεν μυσταγωγίαν, τῆς αὐτῆς ἀπολαύωμεν Τραπέζης [=Eucharist]. Καὶ διατί μὴ εἶπε ἐρωτῶν [=Paul] τὸ αὐτὸ σῶμα τρεφόμεθα καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ αἶμα πίνομεν; Ὅτι Πνεῦμα εἰπὼν [=Paul], ἀμφοτέρω ἐδήλωσε, ... δι’ ἀμφοτέρων γὰρ ἐν Πνεῦμα ποτιζόμεθα...»¹⁵.

Indeed, St. Chrysostom put forth the words of the apostle Paul: «εἰς ἄρτος, ἐν σῶμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἐσμεν, οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν [=Christ]»¹⁶, to clearly emphasize: «τί γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἄρτος; Σῶμα Χριστοῦ. Τὶ δὲ γίνονται οἱ μεταλαμβάνοντες; Σῶμα Χριστοῦ»¹⁷. St. Chrysostom, therefore, put forth the self-evident soteriological significance of the “Christ’s body” not only to emphasize the divine condescension, through the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God, i.e. for the salvation of the human race but also to remind the believers of their responsibility for their salvation. This responsibility, however, necessarily implies both their incorporation into the “Christ’s body”, «ὅ

15. PG 61, 250-251.

16. *John* 6, 35-40 and *1 Cor.* 10, 17.

17. PG 61, 200.

ἐστιν ἡ Ἐκκλησία»¹⁸, and their authentic experience of the new life in Christ in the body of the Church on earth, with reference also to the *Heavenly Liturgy*, in which Christ himself is the *victim, sacrifice, and altar*.

Consequently, St Chrysostom introduced, like the apostolic and patristic tradition unanimously, an impressive dialogue between Christ and each particular believer to more fully realize Christ's sacramental as well as the reductive spiritual scale, namely, the *locus communis* of his participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist, so that the devout believer may share the divine grace that was "sent back" by the heavenly altar, so that he may also become «θείας φύσεως κοινωνός»¹⁹, so that he may be united with Christ's one and only eternal historical body, ascended into heaven, «ὁ ἐστιν ἡ Ἐκκλησία»²⁰. In this spirit, therefore, St. Chrysostom explicitly stated that:

Τὸ σῶμα ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν ὁ Θεὸς ἀπὸ γῆς, ἵνα καὶ αὐτὸ εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀναγάγωμεν, οὐχ ἵνα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν εἰς τὴν γῆν κατασπῶμεν... Ἐγὼ [ὁ Χριστός] τὴν οὐσίαν ἡργάσαμην, σύ [ὁ ἄνθρωπος] καλλώπισον τὴν προαίρεσιν... Ἄρχω, φησὶν, ἀγγέλων ἐγώ, καὶ σὺ διὰ τῆς ἀπαρχῆς [τοῦ σώματος]... Ἐπὶ θρόνου κάθηναι βασιλικῶς, καὶ σὺ συγκάθηναι διὰ τῆς ἀπαρχῆς... Προσκυνεῖ σε τὰ χερουβεὶμ καὶ τὰ σεραφεῖμ, πᾶσα ἡ ἀγγελικὴ δύναμις, ... διὰ τῆς ἀπαρχῆς... Ἦνωσά σε καὶ συνῆψα ἐμαυτῷ... Καὶ ἄνω σε ἔχω καὶ κάτω συμπλέκομαί σοι. Οὐκ ἄρκει σοι, ὅτι σοῦ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν ἔχω ἄνω [ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα], ... Καὶ κάτω πάλιν κατέβην, οὐχ ἀπλῶς μίγνυμαί σοι, ἀλλὰ συμπλέκομαι, τρώγομαι, λεπτύνομαι κατὰ μικρόν, ἵνα πολλὴ ἡ ἀνάκρασις γένηται καὶ ἡ μίξις καὶ ἡ ἔνωσις (=θεία Εὐχαριστία). Τὰ γὰρ ἐνούμενα ἐν οἰκείοις ἔστηκεν ὅροις, ἐγὼ δὲ συνυφαίνομαί σοι... Ἐν εἶναι βούλομαι τὰ ἀμφοτέρω...»²¹.

Hence, it is understandable that the *Trinitarian interpretation of the Christocentric ontology* of the mystery of the Divine Economy in Christ by Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was necessary for the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God the Father, by the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, as well as for the entire earthly life of Christ, i.e. the indissoluble ontological relationship between Christ and the earthly Church in

18. Eph. 1, 22-23; Col. 1, 17-18 and 24.

19. 2 Pet. 1, 4.

20. Eph. 1, 22-23; Col. 1, 17-18 and 24.

21. PG 62, 583-586.

local, regional and ecumenical perspectives. These relations, however, have decisively determined not only the apostolic tradition's authentic continuity in the life of the Church but also her soteriological mission – the immediate refutation of the great heretical systems or trends (Gnosticism, Montanism, Monarchianism, Sabbellianism, etc.).

However, these heretical systems have always acted, with antagonistic discourses and even in a provocative manner, against the prevailing Christian Church; they have therefore caused dangerous confusion not only within the Christian communities of the Greco-Roman world but also within the pagan barbarian tribes beyond the latter's boundaries, with the tolerance or even encouragement of the Roman authorities hostile to the Church, especially in times of local or general persecution.

Indeed, the Trinitarian, Christological, pneumatological, and ecclesiological teaching of the Sermon of the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, as well as the impressive way he handled his missionary activity in the Greco-Roman world, determined definitively the synoptic content of the "Symbols of Baptism", not only in almost all the local Churches of the Greco-Roman world, as indispensable *Regula fidei* and *Regula veritatis*, but also in the entire apostolic, theological and liturgical ecclesiastical tradition of the first three centuries AD.

This tradition was therefore developed and remained intact by the chosen disciples and approved successors of the apostles and approved theologians of the post-apostolic era (Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Lucian, etc.), who influenced both the Patristic tradition and the Missionary activity of the Orthodox Church during the period of the seven Ecumenical Councils of the first millennium of the Church's historical life.

Consequently, it is necessary and essential to selectively quote three very important passages from the famous theological Epistles of the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, which express not only the whole mystery of the divine economy in Christ for the salvation of the human race, but at the same time the whole content of his impressive missionary preaching «εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη» and «ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς», per

Christ's commandment to His apostles²². Moreover, this *Preaching* is also clearly expressed in all the Paul's Epistles²³.

2. The Paulinian Christian Mission

The following three important passages from the theological Epistles of the Apostle Paul –*Ephesians*²⁴ and *Colossians*²⁵– were chosen because, on the one hand, they express almost in their entirety the content of the Confession of Faith of the post-apostolic era's "Symbols of Baptism", as well as the "Teachings of the Apostles", and on the other one, because they affirm the unbroken and interdependent relationship between the "Christian Mission" and the ways that the missionary action is organized, not only to those near but also to those that are far away, i.e. «ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς» and «εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη», «ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος»²⁶:

α. ἵνα ὁ θεὸς τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ πατὴρ τῆς δόξης, δῶῃ ὑμῖν πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως ἐν ἐπιγνώσει αὐτοῦ, πεφωτισμένους τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι ὑμᾶς τίς ἐστὶν ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς κλήσεως αὐτοῦ, τίς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις, καὶ τί τὸ ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας, κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ. Ἦν ἐνήργησεν ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐγείρας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου, οὐ μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι καὶ πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ, καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκε κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, ἣτις ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου.

[Eph. 1, 17-23]

β. Διὸ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ποτὲ ὑμεῖς τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί, οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀκροβυστία ὑπὸ τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς ἐν σαρκὶ χειροποιήτου, ὅτι ἦτε ἐν τῷ καιρῷ

22. *Matth.* 28, 18-20; *John* 16, 7-14 and 20, 21-23; *Acts* 1, 7-8 et pass.

23. See *Rom.* 8, 1-11; 13, 1-9; *1 Cor.* 10, 15-17; 11, 23-29; 12, 12-14 and 24-27; *Eph.* 1, 17-23; 2, 11-22; *Col.* 1, 12-23 et pass.

24. 1, 17-23 and 2, 11-22.

25. 1, 12-23.

26. *Matth.* 28, 18-20; *Acts* 1, 7-8.

ἐκείνῳ χωρὶς Χριστοῦ, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες καὶ ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἳ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγγὺς ἐγενήθητε ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἐν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ, τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασι καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν ἑαυτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην καὶ ἀποκαταλλάξῃ τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἀποκτείνας τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν αὐτῷ. καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσαστο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ τοῖς ἐγγύς· ὅτι δι' αὐτοῦ ἔχομεν τὴν προσαγωγὴν οἱ ἀμφότεροι ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. Ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι ἀλλὰ συμπολιταὶ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα ἡ οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὕξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ· ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι.

[Eph. 2, 11-22]

γ. εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ τῷ ἱκανώσαντι ἡμᾶς εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί· ὃς ἐρόύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ, ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα, τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι· τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν, καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος, τῆς ἐκκλησίας· ὃς ἐστὶν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν, εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, δι' αὐτοῦ εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. Καὶ ὑμᾶς ποτε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς, νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ, εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει τεθεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἐδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὐ ἠκούσατε, τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν, οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος.

[Col. 1, 12-23]

The Paulinian Christian mission is, therefore, the ultimate and immutable hard core of the whole timeless mission of the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church*, namely, the Confession of Faith of the common

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325-381), which was established by the Byzantine Mission for all Christian Churches or Confessions, despite existing confessional differences or occasional divergences. After all, the very founder of the Church, Jesus Christ, was the apostle par excellence of the gospel of faith by revealing the Divine Economy's whole mystery for mankind's salvation, that is, not only by His Incarnation, but by the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin but also by His entire earthly life – his teaching of the faith, his miracles, his divine Passion, his Crucifixion, and Resurrection.

This excellent paradigm of Evangelical Preaching was also followed by the twelve disciples or apostles chosen by Christ Himself; therefore, He had private conversations with them, on the one hand, to explain to them His reasons or His miraculous acts as they are preserved in the evangelical tradition, and on the other one, to entrust to them the proclamation or testimony of the work accomplished during His earthly life, always with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit «εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη» and «ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς», since the apostles were always His companions as well, which is why they were also described as eyewitnesses or earwitnesses of His work, as they were always following Him²⁷.

In this spirit, therefore, Christ invited His apostles to the *Last Supper* to reveal to them His path towards the divine Passion, and also the manner of His constant presence with them both after His Resurrection and after His Ascension into heaven²⁸. Indeed, in the course of the *Last Supper*, He also revealed that the consecrated bread is Christ's very body, and the consecrated wine is Christ's very blood; thus, he urged them to eat the consecrated bread and to drink the consecrated wine to be always united with Christ, but he also recommended that they should also celebrate the Holy Eucharist; for this reason, he also expressly pointed out to them to celebrate the Mass: «τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν»²⁹.

27. *Matth.* 28, 18-20; 20, 21-23; *John* 15, 26-27; 16, 7-14; *Acts* 1, 7-8 et pass.

28. *Matth.* 26, 26-29; *Mark* 14, 22-25; *Luk.* 22, 14-20; *John* 6, 35-59; *1 Cor.* 11, 23-29 et pass.

29. *Luk.* 22, 19 and *1 Cor.* 11, 24-25.

Nevertheless, according to this perspective, the risen Christ, immediately after His resurrection, revealed Himself to his apostles to impart his authority to his apostles by his “blowing”, to proclaim his gospel message of redemption «εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη» and «ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς», as well as to promise them the immediate sending of the Holy Spirit and to guide them «εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν» of the Divine Economy «εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν» of the Divine Economy³⁰.

Indeed, Jesus the Baptist said to his apostles: «εἰρήνη ὑμῖν καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέ με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ πέμπω ὑμᾶς. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐνεφύσησεν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον· ἃν τινων ἀφῆτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἀφίενται αὐτοῖς, ἃν τινων κρατῆτε, κεκράτηνται»³¹. Moreover, Christ Himself urged His apostles to undertake their mission and gave them direction: «πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος»³².

Thus, Christ, at His ascension, before the assembled apostles and the devout believers, «εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστὶ γινῶναι χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς οὓς ὁ πατήρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ, ἀλλὰ λήμψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ ἐν πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς»³³. Indeed, on the Pentecost day, the Holy Spirit came down to the apostles and the devout believers «ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν» κατήλθε τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα καὶ «ὥφθησαν αὐτοῖς διαμεριζόμεναι γλῶσσαι ὥσπερ πυρός, ἐκάθισέ τε ἐφ’ ἓνα ἕκαστον αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν ἅπαντες πνεύματος ἁγίου»³⁴.

It is therefore obvious and understandable that the mystery of the Divine Economy in Christ for the salvation of the human race is indissolubly connected with the Incarnation of the Word of God, by the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, and with Christ’s whole earthly

30. *Matth.* 28, 18-20; *John* 15, 26-27; 16, 7-14; 20, 21-23; *Acts* 1, 7-8; 2, 1-4.

31. *John* 20, 21-23.

32. *Matth.* 28, 19-20.

33. *Acts* 1, 7-8.

34. *Acts* 2, 3-4.

life, as well as it was expressed by his earthly Church, which is Christ's one and only eternal historical body. Indeed, Paul correctly identified the earthly Church with Christ's body³⁵. Following this reasoning, St. Chrysostom, as well as unanimously the patristic tradition, correctly proclaimed that Christ «σαρκωθείς Ἐκκλησίας σάρκα ἀνέλαβεν»³⁶, so that all «οἱ πανταχοῦ τῆς Οἰκουμένης πιστοί, καὶ ὄντες καὶ γενόμενοι καὶ ἐσόμενοι ἐν σῶμα εἰσιν», i.e. Christ's one and only eternal body, are united in it³⁷.

Saul, the opponent of Christians and defender of the Mosaic Law of Judaism having a vision was miraculously converted to Christianity, on his march to Damascus with the cause of violently persecuting all Christians; he was therefore indoctrinated and baptized as a Christian by the apostolic disciple Ananias and became a leading figure in the spread of the apostolic preaching throughout the Greco-Roman world. Indeed, the wealthy and powerful Cyprian Barnabas, who was the leader of the Hellenizing and Judaizing Christians in the great city of Antioch, recognized the missionary zeal of the converted Paul and undertook to protect him from both the Antioch's Judaizing community, and from the apostle's suspiciousness about the merciless persecutor of Christians before his conversion.

Nevertheless, the apostle Paul was included in the circle of the chosen members of Antioch's Hellenizing Christians, even though he was deeply acquainted with Jewish tradition as well as an ardent admirer of Greek Stoic philosophy. In this spirit, therefore, he persuaded Barnabas to undertake together a missionary tour of the great cities of Cyprus and southeastern Asia Minor to promote the Christian faith not only to the Gentile Greeks but also to the thriving communities of the Greco-Roman world's Jewish Diaspora. Of course, Paul immediately organized impressively the Christian missionary action, having the Jewish synagogue as his main starting point, in every flourishing city or community, to proclaim the Christian message of redemption from the Mosaic Law.

35. 1 Cor. 10, 14-17 and 31-33; 12, 24-27; Eph. 1, 22-23; 2, 15-22; 3, 19-21; 4, 15-16; 5, 23-27; Col. 1, 17-18 and 24-25.

36. PG 52, 427-429.

37. PG 61, 24-26.

Besides, Paul was well aware of the Jews' understandable reactions, but he was also well aware that he would at least persuade all the Hellenist converts to Judaism gathered in the synagogue, i.e. the «σεβομένους» (“reverent”) or «φοβουμένους» (“fearful”) of the God of Judaism, who constituted the core of the local churches founded in every important city³⁸. Indeed, this particular method of waging missionary work had not only significant but also impressive results, which were received with great enthusiasm by the Hellenist Christians in both Antioch and Jerusalem. Consequently, the apostles and elders convened in a synodal assembly (49 AD), and also endorsed, with great enthusiasm, the great missionary work carried out among Gentiles³⁹.

The recognition on behalf of the apostles in the synod of the important missionary work that has been carried out was therefore continued by the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, for the spreading of the Christian Gospel in almost all the nations of the main axis, from Jerusalem to Rome, with the same method of action and the same missionary zeal. Of course, he also reinforced his apostolic preaching with the theocentric Greek philosophy of the Stoic “Κοσμοπόλεως” (“Cosmopolis”), an ideology which, through Cicero's and Seneca's efforts, had already formed an integral part of the Roman Empire's political theory (51 AD).

Besides, the Stoic “Cosmopolis” had as its basic and immutable poles both the world's and human race's natural unity; therefore, it was compatible with the Judeo-Christian tradition for the creation of man and the world. Those two poles were consequently presented, with particular emphasis by the apostle to the Gentiles, both in his famous Speech to the Athenian Areopagus⁴⁰, and in his *Epistle to the Romans*, where he had focused on the authentic theocentric interpretation of all the powers exercised in the world⁴¹.

Paul's extraordinary model of missionary activity in the Greco-Roman world perfectly combined the established Judeo-Christian tradition with the ecumenical perspective of the theocentric Stoic Greek

38. Acts 13, 1-52 and 14, 1-28.

39. Acts 15, 6-29.

40. Acts 17, 22-29.

41. Rom. 13, 1-9.

philosophy and Hellenism's philosophical heritage in toto, as it was clearly expressed in his famous theological Epistles to the local Churches of Greater Hellenism that have been founded by himself and his chosen collaborators.

Thus, his wonderful missionary model was continued by all his chosen associates and disciples and was followed by almost all the apostles and all the bishops that succeeded them during the first three centuries AD. Besides, this model was necessary both for the Christian faith's reliable promotion, given the Local and Ecumenical councils, and for the refutation of dangerous heretical or schismatic challenges –Gnosticism, Monarchianism, Montanism, etc.–, especially during the period of Roman persecutions against Christians.

Nevertheless, Constantine, the Great's decision was not only to move the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople, i.e. to New Rome (324) but also to convene in the city of Nicea, Bithynia, the First Ecumenical Council of the *one, holy, catholic and apostolic* Christian Church (325). Besides, these decisions definitively sealed once and for all the unbroken and interdependent relationship between Hellenism and Orthodoxy.

In this perspective, however, as the Stoic Zeno of Citium, introducer of the term *Cosmopolis*, would have claimed, this indissoluble and interdependent relationship was expressed, with impressive consistency and continuity, in almost all spheres of the Byzantine Empire's public, ecclesiastical and private life. Moreover, this relationship was particularly expressed in the development of the preaching of the Byzantine Mission to the non-Christian peoples of the wider Regions, i.e. those outside the boundaries of the Roman and Byzantine Empires' Greco-Roman world during the first millennium of the earthly Church's historical life.

Indeed, the Ecumenical Patriarchate became the pre-eminent and irreplaceable center of the Church's entire missionary struggle, not only in the Greco-Roman world but also in the pagan barbarian tribes that lay outside the latter's boundaries. In this spirit, it impressively developed the missionary activity of the Christian Church, and from an ecumenical perspective. It was from this perspective that the Byzantine mission was systematically developed, as early as the beginning of the

fourth century AD, and it acted mainly among the barbarian tribes, such as the Ostrogoths, the Visigoths, the Croats, the Georgians, the Arabs, the Ethiopians, the Britons, etc. with understandable –directly or indirectly– positive results for the Byzantine Empir and its Church.

However, the Byzantine Mission's supreme expression of its great missionary activity was the one organized by the ambitious Ecumenical Patriarch Photius (858-867, 877-886) among Eastern and Central Europe's Slavs during the ninth and tenth centuries AD, which was willingly and in various ways supported by the Byzantine emperors. Indeed, the Byzantine mission spread the Christian faith to the newly established dominion of the Scandinavian Varangians-Rus people kingdom of Kyiv (860) and through it to almost all the Slavic tribes in the regions between the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea, as well as between the rivers Dnieper and Volga.

Besides, the Ecumenical Patriarchate continuously and variously supported the Byzantine Mission's great work in all the principalities of the region, which it even organized in two large Metropolises, namely the Metropolis of Kyiv (Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania) and the Metropolis of Moscow (the Principality of Great Russia). Of course, the organized missionary activity for the spread of Christianity among the Eastern Slavs influenced all other neighboring peoples in converting them to Christianity (Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians), concerning the Mother Church, i.e. the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

At the same time, the great Ecumenical Patriarch Photios organized another important missionary activity of the Byzantine Mission to the Balkan peninsula's neighboring southern Slavic peoples (Croats, Bulgarians, Serbs, Moravians, Bohemians, etc.), which he systematically prepared, and entrusted it to the two Thessalonian brothers, namely Constantine-Cyril and Methodius. Indeed, the two Hieromissionaries, Enlighteners of the Slavs, invented the Old Slavonic alphabet and translated into the Old Slavonic language both the Divine Liturgy and the passages of the Apostolic and Evangelical *Readings* of the divine worship's annual cycle, as well as, among other texts, the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Ecumenical Creed*, which were even transferred to the Byzantine mission of the Eastern Slavs.

3. Byzantine Mission's contemporary role

Thus, it is obvious that both the development and the support of the multidimensional Byzantine mission in the Slavic world and among other neighboring peoples of the wider region have always been beneficial not only for the Ecumenical Patriarchate's outstanding and valuable mission in the Christian world, both in the East and the West, but also for the Byzantine Empire's unique appeal. Therefore, the impressive and multi-dimensional activity of the Byzantine mission reshaped the political, ecclesiastical, spiritual, and social identity not only of the Eastern Orthodox Church but also of Europe in general, especially in modern times, i.e., as we shall see, with the continuous and almost inevitably growing Orthodox Diaspora in most of the Western Christian countries.

So under this new, multifaceted, and diverse perspective, the Christian Mission, especially on the African continent, had in the past and still has the institutionalized, generous, and willing support of the Church of Greece's Apostolic Diaconate. Besides, the Apostolic Diaconate was and remains guaranteed, according to the Executive Law of the current Constitution (1975), i.e. the Charter of the Church of Greece, Ν.Π.Δ.Δ. (Articles 40 and 41 of the Law 590/1977). Indeed, it has the very important privilege of possessing full internal autonomy for the exercise of its many, varied, and indispensable responsibilities, for the immediate, willing, and proper support of the Foreign Mission in the African continent, but always under the supervision and approval of the Permanent Synod of the Church of Greece (Article 9 §3).

Thus, its basic and important responsibilities are defined both in the Provisional Law 976/1936 "On the Apostolic Diaconate of the Church of Greece" (Articles 1-5), and in the Report of G. Rallis, Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs, regarding the *Statutory Charter of the Church of Greece* (Chapter 12, Articles 40-41). According to this important chapter of the Report, the Charter "provides for the Apostolic Diaconate, which is the missionary and educational agent of the Church of Greece, and also provides for the establishment of an Inter-Orthodox Centre of the Church of Greece, as an Institution that promotes Orthodox and inter-Christian relations in the external missionary work".

Indeed, the Apostolic Diaconate of the Church of Greece has developed, within this constitutionally enshrined institutional framework, a wide range of important missionary activities – ecclesiastical, theological, pastoral, publishing, and social ones. Besides, the Apostolic Diaconate, as a missionary and educational body of the Church of Greece, has acquired almost all the necessary building facilities and all the necessary institutionalized basic financial and other resources for the appropriate and effective support of the statutory activities of the Foreign Mission and its urgent needs.

This support, however, covers the needs not only of the Church of Greece's complex internal ecclesiastical ministry but also of almost all the basic needs of the established ancient Orthodox Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, as well as of almost all the other Autocephalous and Autonomous Orthodox Churches. Of course, it is now more urgent for the tried and tested great Greek Orthodox Foreign Mission in the countries of the African continent to receive immediate, willing, and obligatory support, as it is under pressure not only by the irregular claims of the Church of Russia but also by the increasingly violent, provocative and threatening missionary activity of Islam. Besides, this support is necessary for the weakening of this important Orthodox Greek Foreign Mission to be prevented or avoided; for this cause, the appropriate utilization of the Greek Diaspora's thriving communities willing to assist is also necessary.

The Apostolic Deaconate is well aware of the reason, the time, and the way of the necessary support of this important missionary struggle of the Church of Greece on the African continent, namely, the immediate formation of a select, willing, and suitable group of *Itinerant Preachers* for both material and moral support, as well as for the stimulation of the important mission of the native clergymen, still unprepared and awed by the formidable task they are facing, in the constantly developing Orthodox African Greek Metropolises and Communities that lie within the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa's exclusive canonical jurisdiction.

However, the urgent and varied needs of the ever-expanding, multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora in the mainly hospitable Christian countries

of Western Europe, North and South America, Australia, and Oceania are also similar. These needs are urgent both for the appropriate staffing of the Greek communities of the Orthodox Diaspora – the selection of the necessary clergy and teachers, and the supply of the necessary theological and liturgical vessels, ornaments, and books, as well as the traditional sacred objects of the Divine Liturgy.

Of course, the Apostolic Diaconate of the Church of Greece has all the necessary ecclesiastical, theological, liturgical, and institutional missionary prerequisites to appropriately support the Greek Orthodox Diaspora's various demands, since it has always responded willingly to all these demands during the last three decades (1993-2023). Besides, the constantly expanding and already flourishing Orthodox Greek Diaspora of the countries mentioned above wishes to have –and indeed it has– direct communication and cooperation with the Apostolic Diaconate both for the luxurious publication of the *Ecclesiastical Diptychs* and the annual *Calendars*, as well as for the purchase of the necessary sacred vessels and liturgical books or useful theological and pastoral works, which are printed by its state-of-the-art printing house and are available from the Apostolic Diaconate's bookshops in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras, etc.

Following the constitutionally enshrined institutional framework, the General Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of National Education and Religions can cooperate with the Apostolic Diaconate, in a quite reciprocal and mutually constructive manner, as has already been established with many other joint and very important initiatives for *υποβοηθώντας* national, ecclesiastical, and social issues, self-evidently treated in the Charter of the Church of Greece, both in the relevant legislative provisions and in the Presidential Decrees, namely Articles 60 and 61 of the Charter of the Church of Greece (N. 590/1977).

Besides, the issues regarding the proper support of the many and urgent needs of the organized Greek Foreign Mission in Africa are now more pressing, since this important mission of the Church of Greece is threatened by the illegal actions of the Church of Russia, as well as by the increasing Islamic missionary pressure that has as its target the mainly Christian communities, «*ἵνα μὴ τὸ κακὸν χεῖρον γένηται*», i.e. both for Hellenism and the Orthodox Church – yet, not just for the sake

of a plate of lentil stew, «ἵνα μὴ δι' ἐλάσσονα ζητήματα ζημιωθῶμεν εἰς μείζονα».

The constantly growing and thriving Orthodox Greek Diaspora constitutes now the Great Ecumenical Hellenism and must also be supported, immediately and even willingly, both to organize itself with the necessary means in heterodox and inhospitable environments, and to defend more vigorously the sacred and sacred things of the Nation, not only for Hellenism, but also for Orthodoxy. It is therefore understandable that the special, clear, and solidary relationship of the great Greek Orthodox Diaspora throughout the world with the Apostolic Diaconate of the Church of Greece returns to it as «ἀντιπελάργησιν» a major part of what it offers both to Greek Hellenism in particular and to Orthodoxy in general.

Indeed, the «ἀντιπελάργησις» is self-evident: the Greek archpriests of the Greek Orthodox Diaspora, without exception, have a two-way and necessary canonical relationship with the Mother Church, from which they are chosen and ordained, and they always participate in rotation in the relevant Holy Synod, and at the same time, they always keep a prominent place in all the Episcopal Assemblies of all the multi-national Orthodox Diaspora, namely in the thirteen (13) established Regions of the multi-national Orthodox Diaspora of the Christian States in Western Europe, North and South America, Australia and Oceania – Orthodox Greeks, Arabs, Russians, Ukrainians, Serbs, Romanians, Bulgarians, Albanians, etc.

In light of these events, therefore, the representatives of all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches at the First Pre-Synodical Pan-Orthodox Conference (Pregny-Chambésy, Geneva, 1976) unanimously decided that the “Orthodox Diaspora” issue would be the first and most urgent item on the agenda of the planned Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. This choice was necessary, both for the inter-Orthodox relations of solidarity between the members of the Pre-Synodical Pan-Orthodox Conferences multiethnic Orthodox Diaspora and for their appropriate common support, i.e. in the context of the Pre-Synodical

Pan-Orthodox Conferences' relevant decisions, as well as the planned final decision of the "Meeting of the Primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches" gathered under the Presidency of the Ecumenical Patriarch to convene the Holy and Great Synod/Council of the Orthodox Church.

Indeed, this important issue of the "multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora" was discussed at length at three assemblies of the "Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee" (Pregny-Chambésy, Geneva, 1990, 1993, 2009), was discussed at length at the last "Pre-Synodical Pan-Orthodox Conference" (Pregny-Chambésy, Geneva, 2009) and was unanimously approved at the "Gathering of the Primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches" convened by the Ecumenical Patriarch (Pregny-Chambésy, Geneva, 21-27.1.2016). Furthermore, at the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Crete, 16-27.6.2016) it was decided that the unanimous synodal ratification as well as the immediate organization of the ever-expanding "Greek Orthodox Diaspora" should be carried out in the thirteen (13) multi-ethnic regions of the countries of the heterodox Christian World, i.e. with the development of the Orthodox canonical institution of the "Bishopric Assembly" in each specific Region, until a common canonical regulation of the "Orthodox Diaspora's" status would be unanimously accepted.

Thus, at the "Gathering of the Primates" the relevant "*Regulation*" was unanimously approved by the Nomocanonical Counsel of both the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Secretariat responsible for the preparation of the "Holy and Great Synod/Council" (Crete, 16-27.6.2016), which also unanimously ratified the necessary relevant "Regulations for the functioning of the Episcopal/Bishopric Assemblies" for the establishment, organization, administration, and functioning of the multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora's thirteen Regions, but always by reference to both the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the relevant autocephalous Orthodox Churches, for all serious or critical ecclesiastical or canonical matters.

II. Orthodox Church's Ecumenic Mission and the multiethnic Orthodox Diaspora

1. Organization and function of the Orthodox Diaspora

It is therefore understandable that it is necessary to make proper use of the rapidly expanding multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora in the hospitable heterodox Christian countries of "Western Europe", "North and South America", "Australia" and "Oceania", i.e., immediately after the Soviet Union's official dissolution (25 Dec. 1991), as well as after the collapse of all the communist regimes in the countries of Eastern Europe with large Orthodox population. Indeed, the "multiethnic Orthodox Diaspora" constitutes perhaps the most important prospect for a more direct and clearer projection of the timeless and reliable Orthodox theological witness both to the near and far, i.e. in the context of the inter-Orthodox and inter-ecclesiastical relations of the Orthodox Church's contemporary Ecumenical mission, under the high-spirited, coordinating and canonical, supervision of the respective Ecumenical Patriarch.

Besides, the respective Ecumenical Patriarch is, according to the unanimous canonical tradition and the long-standing ecclesiastical practice, the authentic guardian and the timeless guarantor of the Orthodox Church's unity, both according to the faith's traditional authentic orthodoxy, as well as in the faithful observance of the established canonical order – the orderly and canonical functioning not only of the Orthodox but also of its inter-church relations. Therefore, this important mission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate becomes more intense, broader, clearer, and urgent within the multinational Orthodox Diaspora of all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches throughout the world.

The ambitious coordinating mission and canonical supervision of the Ecumenical Patriarch related to the rapidly expanding multinational Orthodox Diaspora of almost all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches is expressed in the institutional canonical "Bishopric / Episcopal Assemblies" that have been established for each specific Region – the established thirteen autonomous ecclesiastical territorial Areas, which

are distinguished by clearly described territorial and canonical criteria, and have also been ratified by the *Holy and Great Synod* (Crete, 16-27 / 6 / 2016): 1) Canada, 2) United States of America, 3) Latin America, 4) Australia, 5) Great Britain and Ireland, 6) France, 7) Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, 8) Austria, 9) Italy and Malta, 10) Switzerland and Liechtenstein, 11) Germany, 12) Scandinavian countries (except Finland), and 13) Spain and Portugal.

However, under this new inter-church canonical perspective of the “multiethnic Orthodox Diaspora”, it was no longer immediately possible or feasible –because of obvious historical or for various formal, pastoral, or other serious reasons– for them to organize and function canonically. Indeed, the immediate canonical ecclesiastical organization of the multiethnic Orthodox Diaspora in each specific Region is expressed, in the traditional Orthodox Christocentric ecclesiology, i.e. the established, timeless common, and canonical *apostolic*, *liturgical*, *patristic* and *synodal* tradition of the first millennium of the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic* Church’s historical life.

Accordingly, it was decided by the Council of Crete that the necessary ecclesiastical institution of the Bishop’s Assemblies introduced in all the thirteen Regions mentioned above of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches’ multiethnic Orthodox Diaspora be maintained «κατ’ οἰκονομίαν» i.e. “until the time is ripe for the implementation of canonical precision”. Indeed, the “*Regulations for the functioning of the Episcopal Assemblies in the Orthodox Diaspora*” were drawn up immediately (1995) by the Legal and Canonical Adviser of the *Secretariat in preparation for the Holy and Great Synod*. Besides, the establishment of the new canonical synodal institution of the “*Bishopric Assemblies*” as well as the introduction of the supervisory ecclesiastical institution of the “*Assembly of the Primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches*” were necessary for the canonical foundation, the necessary administrative organization, the appropriate ecclesiastical constitution, and the harmonious functioning of the Synod.

Of course, this important *Regulation on the functioning of the Bishopric Assemblies* clearly states that its members are “all the Orthodox bishops of each Region [...] who are in canonical communion with all the

local autocephalous Orthodox Churches, therefore they form their own Bishopric Assembly” (article 1). Again, the Regulation expressly provides that “The President is *ex officio* the First among the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s bishops and, in his absence, according to the order of the Diptychs”. Thus, “the President of each Episcopal Assembly shall convene its sessions, direct its work, and preside over all its concelebrations. On the questions discussed in the relevant Episcopal Assembly [...] the President shall present before the State, the society, and the other religious bodies the common position of the relevant region’s Orthodox Churches” (Article 4, Paragraph 2).

Within this new institutional framework, however, the *Regulation on the functioning of the Bishopric Assemblies* clearly states that: “the work of the Episcopal Assembly shall be conducted following the principles of the Orthodox Conciliar tradition and shall be directed by its President, who shall also have the responsibility of supervising the execution of its decisions” (Article 8). At the same time, it explicitly and unequivocally emphasizes that: “the decisions of the Bishopric Assembly shall be taken by unanimity. Nevertheless, in matters of general interest which, according to the Bishopric Assembly’s judgment, require a pan-Orthodox approach, the President of the Assembly shall refer them to the Ecumenical Patriarch for further action by the pan-Orthodox provisions in force” (Article 10).

The Regulation also expressly and unequivocally states that: “the establishment of a new Bishopric Assembly, the division or abolition of an existing one, or the merger of two or more of them, shall be made by decision of the Gathering of the Primates of all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches, upon the request of a Church or the President of its Bishopric Assembly to the Ecumenical Patriarch” (Article 13). Moreover, the Special Inter-Orthodox Commission which drafted the extensive *Encyclical of the Holy and Great Synod*, with the voluntary contribution of the already established Secretariat of the *Holy and Great Synod*, was unanimously approved by all the present Primates of the Orthodox Churches. The *Holy and Great Synod* rightly included the *Bishopric Assemblies* in the established Synodic system of the Orthodox Church, under the condition, however, that “the consistent functioning

of these will guarantee the respect for the ecclesiological principle of synodality” (para. 2, sub-para. 5).

As a consequence, the *Episcopal / Bishopric Assemblies* of the institutionalized thirteen Regions of the rapidly expanding multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora, after the official dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of all communist regimes among Eastern Europe’s Orthodox population, constitute a permanent, two-way, important, and valuable open Orthodox ecclesiastical channel for supporting not only an appropriate and reliable promotion of the Orthodox Church’s internal unity but also its systematic utilization or integration within the context of the Orthodox Church’s contemporary ecumenical mission.

But this mission has been and remains necessary not only for the strengthening of intra-Orthodox relations but also for the development of intra-church ones, both within the divided Christian world of the Western Churches and the wider context of the ecumenical movement for Christian unity. The utilization of this ever-expanding multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora in Western Christianity is therefore now possible, but always only under the established and generally recognized, prominent coordinating and timeless canonical authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate – the Orthodox Church’s *Prima sedes*.

However, the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s prominent and well-established authority is canonically self-evident and ecclesiastically *sine qua non*. But this authority is necessary, not only for the intra-orthodox relations of the local autocephalous Orthodox Churches, i.e. between themselves and the Ecumenical Patriarchate but also for their inter-church relations, i.e. with all other Christian Churches or Confessions. Besides, these inter-church relations are particularly linked to the hospitable Christian countries of the multiethnic Orthodox Diaspora, namely Western Europe, North and South America, Australia and Oceania, etc.

The ecumenical mission of this now large and constantly expanding multinational Orthodox Diaspora is greatly important from ecclesiastical and ecclesiological points of view, not only for the Orthodox Church but also for the other Christian Churches and denominations of the Western Christian world. Besides, the Orthodox Church’s ecumenical perspective

is a necessary or even indispensable ecclesiastical mission, both to those near and far away. Nevertheless, the multinational Orthodox Diaspora's mission is also valuable in many ways because it would ultimately prove to be particularly beneficial not only for all the participating autocephalous Orthodox Churches but also for almost all other Western Churches or Confessions.

All the great theologians of the West's divided Christian world during modern times, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, have always rightly characterized the Orthodox Church "as the Church of both the great Greek Orthodox Fathers, as well as of the seven Ecumenical Councils" – the first millennium of the historical life of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of the ecumenical *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith (Creed)*. As a consequence, all the great theologians of the Western Churches and Confessions are constantly seeking and understandably longing, in every appropriate canonical and ecclesiastical way, for the common path that can lead to the restoration of both the ecclesiastical communion of faith and the bond of love in the Church's sacramental life.

Indeed, this perspective was put forward by, on the one hand, the eminent Dominican pro-Orthodox theologian Yves Congar in his famous article entitled: «J'aime l'Orthodoxie», and on the other hand, the equally eminent Jesuit pro-Orthodox theologian H. de Lubac, in his equally famous study entitled: *Corpus mysticum. L'Eucharistie et l'Eglise du Moyenâge* (Paris 1944). In the same spirit, the leading modern Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, in his great theological treatise entitled: *Esquisse d'une Dogmatique* (1968), argues with particular emphasis, on the apostolic tradition's uninterrupted authentic continuity in the life of the Orthodox Church, both via the Greek Fathers' theology during the period of the seven Ecumenical Councils and the Nicaea-Constantinople Ecumenical Creed (325-381).

These theological works, therefore, urged all the faithful, Roman Catholics and Protestants alike, to experience through both the Orthodox Divine Liturgy and the ascetic spirituality the indissoluble and interdependent *mystagogical* and *reductive* conjugation of the evangelical and apostolic Preaching. In this conjugation, however, the faithful

experience the theological and ecclesiological fullness of the Orthodox Church's soteriological salvific mission in Christ and the unique spiritual experience of the whole sacramental life within the Church. Thus, in this new ecclesiological perspective of the Christian world, the *Dialogue of Love* between the Presbyterian Church and New Rome was developed, with a nostalgic initiative taken by the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras (1948-72).

This Dialogue has been and always remains important both for the relief of the historical past's burdensome traumatic experiences and for the common search, by ecclesiastical dispensation, for a common and mutually supportive path towards the restoration of the necessary ecclesiastical communication or mutual inter-critical solidarity in their bilateral relations. In this spirit, however, the restoration of relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church is necessary, to heal the past traumatic experiences as well as to enable the two pulmonary lobes of the ecclesiastical body to function in a relationship of solidarity, particularly in our multicultural, tard times.

It was in this perspective, therefore, that Pope Paul VI (1963-78) declared in Paris (1968) the necessity for the solidary and harmonious functioning of the whole ecclesiastical body's two lobes – the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic. Nevertheless, the harmonious functioning of the whole ecclesial body necessarily presupposes the divided Christian world's encounter in the common apostolic, liturgical, patristic, and synodal tradition of the first millennium of the Church's historical life. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962-65) proposed this both in the dogmatic "Constitution of the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*) and the synodal decree "*On Ecumenism*" *Unitatis Redintegratio*.

Therefore, the Orthodox Church's contemporary ecumenical mission is no longer only a responsible and necessary extroverted, discreet, and mutually supportive constructive expression of its diachronic ecclesiological conscience, but also a discrete response to the common ecclesiastical demand of almost all Christian Churches and confessions that it constantly promotes. However, this demand has been and remains necessary not only to remove the Orthodox Church's long-standing

ecclesiological or confessional introversion but also to make possible a common response to social problems in a secularized multicultural society, as the *Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church* also pointed out in its relevant decisions, speaking about the ecclesiological convergence's necessity⁴².

2. Orthodox Diaspora and Mission Abroad

It is therefore understandable that the unpredictable, rapid, and uncontrollable expansion of the multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora within almost all the independent Orthodox Churches, both immediately after the official dissolution of the Soviet Union (25 December 1991), and after the inevitable collapse of almost all the communist regimes in the Eastern Europe countries with large Orthodox population. The great influx of Orthodox refugees or economic migrants to the hospitable countries of the Western Christian peoples – Western Europe, North and South America, Australia, Oceania, etc., resulted in a tripling of the members of almost all the old Communion in these countries.

Of course, these national *Orthodox communities* in the thirteen institutionalized Regions of the multiethnic Orthodox Diaspora have had and continue to have a great spiritual influence on other Christians of each specific Region. Indeed, the prelates of the Orthodox Diaspora have already developed close solidary relations and a spirit of sincere cooperation, always under the supervision of each particular Region's ecclesiastical leadership, as defined and implemented in the "Regulations for the functioning of the Episcopal Assemblies in the Orthodox Diaspora". Besides, the Bishops of each national Orthodox Diaspora in each Region have always had and continue to necessarily refer to the Holy Synod of their relevant autocephalous Orthodox Church, to the Holy Synod of which they have been and are invited, periodically and rotationally, as members.

Consequently, these two-way ecclesiastical, theological, spiritual, and social inter-Christian relations have been and remain essential or inevitable,

42. VI. Io. Pheidas *Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία*, vol. III. *Ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀλωσιν μέχρι σήμερα*, Athens 2014, pp. 753-765; *Ἐκκλησιολογία μετὰ Χριστολογία καὶ Πνευματολογία ὑπὸ τὸ φῶς τῆς πατερικῆς παραδόσεως*, Athens 2018, pp. 232-318.

but they have always and by necessity presupposed the harmonious functioning of the intra-Orthodox relations within each particular institutionalized Region, and the sincere, mutual, and solidarity-based functioning of their relations with the heterodox Christian communities of the same Region. In this broader context, all the multinational Orthodox Diasporas around the World in the designated thirteen institutionalized Regions have always functioned as important, valuable, and reliable bridges of communication, direct or indirect, between all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches with the Roman Catholic Churches, as well as with the Western Protestant Christian communities, as they are willingly representing themselves in both bilateral and multilateral theological dialogues within the framework of the ecumenical movement aiming at Christian unity.

It is under this perspective of the Byzantine Mission, therefore, that the Greek Foreign Mission of the Orthodox Church is still developing today, not only on the African continent, through the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and the ongoing missionary struggles of the Patriarchate of Alexandria but also in the modern multicultural world by the ever-expanding multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora in heterodox Christian countries. Thus, as we have seen, the Apostoliki Diakonia/Apostolic Deaconate of the Church of Greece has always dutifully supported and continues to support, especially during the last thirty years (1993-2023), in every possible and feasible way, the Foreign Mission on the African continent, as well as the ever-expanding Greek Diaspora.

It is obvious, therefore, that the effective utilization of the now large and organized multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora, both for intra-Orthodox and inter-Orthodox relations, necessarily presupposes, on the one hand, the correct application of the “Regulations for the functioning of the Bishopric Assemblies” in the thirteen Regions of the multi-national Orthodox Diaspora, and on the other hand, the regulation concerning the harmonious functioning of the canonical relations between the national Orthodox Diasporas within each established Region. Of course, their harmonious functioning has always referred to –and continues to act likewise– both intra-Orthodox and inter-Orthodox relations and to their relations with the various national autocephalous Orthodox Churches,

always in consultation with, and under the guidance of, the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Indeed, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has always had and continues to have the exceptional privilege and the established canonical mission to dutifully guard and necessarily guarantee the faithful observance of both the faith's orthodox character and the canonical order, in a local, regional, and ecumenical perspective. Besides, it has always had and still has the exclusive canonical right to convene not only Patriarchal, Major, and Ecumenical Councils, but also the "Gathering of all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches' Primates" for major ecclesiastical issues related to faith or canonical order, especially for serious matters that may arise in any institutionalized Area of the multiethnic Orthodox Diaspora.

However, this internal harmonious functioning of a multiethnic Orthodox Diaspora necessarily presupposes a common and canonically hierarchical application in every institutionalized Region of the foundation, organization, administration, and functioning of a local Church of the post-apostolic era, as it was finally formed by the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea (325), with the introduction and establishment of the "Metropolitan system", with the provinces of the Roman Empire as their territorial framework. Indeed, this system has been maintained to this day in almost all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches, always with reference both to the "System of Exarchates", introduced by the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381) and to the "Autocephalous Church of Cyprus" created by the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431), as well as to the imposed "Patriarchal System" introduced in the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451).

The decisions of these particular Ecumenical Councils, as well as of the Greater, Patriarchal, and Local ones, determined the inviolability of the canonical criteria established by the apostolic and post-apostolic tradition regarding the canonical institutional organization and the liturgical life of each local Church, that is at the level of the Parish, Bishopric, and Metropolis⁴³. It is, however, understandable that the established common

43. See canons 4, 5, 6, and 7 of the First, 2, 3, and 6 of the Second, 8 of the Third, and 9, 17, 28, and 30 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council.

and indisputable canonical tradition also includes not only the relevant Apostolic canons but also those of all local synods, to which were added the canons of the reputable High Priests and Fathers of the Church –St. Athanasius, St. Basil, etc.–, facilitate their implementation in the thirteen institutionalized Regions of the multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora, without ignoring or violating national, canonical, and synodical criteria.

In this context, it is possible and feasible to simulate the canonical setting, in each specific Region, mainly aiming not only at the constructive approach for the strengthening of communication between the various Diasporas and their common participation in the Eucharist but also to the establishment of frequent official meetings between bilateral or multilateral Diasporas, to limit the mixed marriages of Orthodox with heterodox of other Christian Churches or confessions within a particular multi-ethnic region and to strengthen the sacred institution of the Orthodox Family in the multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora.

These important ecclesiastical proposals or perspectives could be developed on a solidary, triple reductionist scale: Parishes, Bishoprics, and Metropolises, by especially putting forth these evolving canonical criteria, to strengthen the multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora's internal unity of each specific Region, without compromising or diminishing the various ecclesiastical communities' self-evident national sensitivity. Consequently, the proposed favorable canonical arrangements refer to the indispensable criteria –national, canonical, synodical– established by the relevant Orthodox canonical and ecclesiastical traditions.

However, these criteria are necessary and of decisive importance not only for the strengthening of the solidary relations between the interethnic multinational Orthodox Diasporas but also the appropriate support of the new national Diasporas in heterodox and even hostile ecclesiastical environments:

a. The “national criteria” can and must be applied dutifully and willingly at the Parish level, because in it both the latter's liturgical life and the established connection with the Orthodox communities' national schools of a multi-ethnic region in heterodox, and indeed indifferent or hostile environments are harmoniously linked. Besides, this connection is indispensable for their relationship with the curricula of their country

of origin, so that the education of Orthodox young people and their national identity do not fade away in heterodox environments. Similarly, it is also necessary to develop their relations with the young people of other Orthodox national Diasporas in each institutionalized multi-ethnic or other neighboring region.

b. The “canonical criteria” can and should be applied reasonably and appropriately at the Bishopric level, because the liturgical and educational activities of all the Parishes belonging to its canonical territorial ecclesiastical jurisdiction –having their headquarters in the latter’s most important city–, are reported to it, and also because its Bishop also refers to the Holy Synod of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of his origin, in which he is invited to participate on a rotating basis to inform it regarding the development of his ecclesiastical jurisdiction’s national parishes.

c. The “conciliar criteria” can and should be applied at the level of each multinational Region’s Episcopal Assembly, because the Primate of the bishops of all the national Orthodox Diasporas of each particular Region participate in them. Their participation is therefore always necessary, following the “Regulations for the functioning of the Bishopric Assemblies”, because, on the one hand, they are required to discuss and deal jointly with all serious issues of Orthodox faith and canonical order, under the presidency of the respective Primate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and, on the other hand, because they must also refer, as we have already seen, to the First of the “Bishopric Assembly” (the Ecumenical Patriarch), all serious or critical ecclesiastical canonical issues, not only those concerning the intra-Orthodox relations, but also the inter-ecclesiastical ones, especially in the respective institutionalized thirteen Regions of the multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora, yet always within the established canonical boundaries of the Orthodox tradition.

Thus, these bidirectional solidary relations of all the national Orthodox Diasporas of each institutionalized multi-ethnic Region are indispensable both among themselves and with the autocephalous Orthodox Churches of their origin. Besides, they also provide the desirable, necessary, and inevitable communion with the heterodox Christian Churches and

denominations of the particular Region, regarding serious ecclesiastical and practical issues of common interest. It is common knowledge that the Orthodox Church has always participated –and continues to act likewise– in both multilateral and bilateral theological dialogues, in the context of the ecumenical movement for Christian unity.

3. The Orthodox Church's Ecumenical Mission

In this spirit, therefore, on the agenda of the work of *The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*, they also included the important issues of inter-church relations: on the one hand, the “Relations of the Orthodox Church to the rest of the Christian world”, and on the other one, the “Contemporary ecumenical mission of the Orthodox Church”, i.e. not only to those near but also to those far away. Besides, these two important synodical/conciliar texts defined respectively, with impressive completeness and clarity, not only the canonical limits of the inter-church relations of the Orthodox Church (Canons 7 of the Second and 95 of the Quinisext/Penthekte Ecumenical Council) but also the broad prospects of the diachronic “ecumenical mission of the Orthodox Church” for the application of the ecclesiastical economy's established canonical principle.

Indeed, it is necessary and indispensable to promote both the common “apostolic, patristic and synodical tradition” and the “dogmatic definitions of the seven Ecumenical Councils”, which are summarized in the “*Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*”, common for all Christian “Churches” or “Confessions” (325, 381 AD). These established canonical criteria were also necessary for the healing of both the past traumatic ecclesiastical experiences and the uncritical theological confusions of the Church's historical life.

Besides, with these canonical criteria, the common root of almost all the branches of the Church's traditions becomes clearer and more familiar to the multi-ethnic Orthodox Diaspora, with due respect for the common root of the uninterrupted continuity of the apostolic, patristic, and synodical traditions of the Orthodox Church. However, the three great and tragic ecclesiastical schisms (6th, 11th, and 16th centuries) broke the unity of the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church*, namely

the seceding Anti-Chalcedonians, Roman Catholics, and Protestants respectively, from which many new and uncontrollable internal schisms arose.

In this spirit, therefore, they have arbitrarily caused the internal division of their ecclesiastical body's unity, and they have disconnected themselves from the common patristic tradition of the period of the Ecumenical Councils, as well as from the seven Ecumenical Councils' dogmatic definitions. Of course, the inevitable consequences were also burdensome: firstly, we had the arbitrary disconnection of Thomas Aquinas's (1224-1274) dichotomous scholastic theology from the established apostolic, patristic, synodical theological and ecclesiological tradition (Thomism), and secondly, the provocative internal division of their ecclesiastical body, in rival groups and with intransigent confessional antagonism.

This denominational antagonism proved catalytic not only for the Roman Catholic Church but also for the various Protestant denominations (Lutheran-Calvinist), especially the unchecked secessions of the so-called "charismatic movements" – Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Evangelicals, etc. In the immediate aftermath of the Roman Catholic Church's split of unity, scholastic and compromise theological proposals were sought to defuse their confessional intolerance, under the pressure of both Protestant idealistic German philosophy (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher, etc.), as well as the liberal neo-Thomistic Roman Catholic theology of Tübingen (J.-A. Möhler et al.), which even influenced the doctrinal, theological, liturgical and canonical decisions of the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)⁴⁴.

The fierce denominational antagonism between the Roman Catholic Church and the main Protestant Reformation Confessions (Lutherans, Calvinists, etc.) has undoubtedly shown the serious and catalytic theological, ecclesiological, and liturgical contradictions and confusions not only of their dichotomous scholastic theology but also of their denominational antagonism. These confusions, however, were considered destructive for the Christocentric ontology of both the nature and the saving mission of *the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ*

44. VI. Io. Pheidas *Ἑκκλ. Ἱστορία*, *op.cit.*, vol. III, pp. 387-442.

of the common *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (381). Thus, the sharp theological, ecclesiological, and liturgical contrasts in the confessional struggle between the Protestant Reformation and the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation confirmed that *the common patristic tradition* of the first millennium of the Church's historical life is essential⁴⁵.

It is from this confessional perspective, therefore, that the initiative of the Lutheran theologians of Tübingen to ask the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah II the Great (1572-79, 1580-84, 1587-95) to discuss the possible points of agreement or disagreement with the Orthodox patristic tradition of the *Augustan Confession* (*Confessio Augustana*) drawn up by the quiet and prudent leader of the Protestant Reformation, Philip Melanchthon. But this Confession was sent in the form of three Letters by the renowned Lutheran theologians James Andrews and Martin Crusius (1573-74), with which they provocatively demanded its recognition, approval, or acceptance.

Indeed, in their three Epistles, they deliberately, explicitly, and pleadingly stated their necessary desire to have the *Confessio Augustana* [*Augsburg Confession*, 1530] accepted; thus, they stated it simply and unambiguously: «Βιβλιάριόν τι πέμπω τὰ τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν ὅλης Κεφάλαια περιέχον, ὅπως ἡ σοῦ ἀγιότης βλέπῃ τὴν θρησκείαν ἡμῶν, τίς ἐστὶ καὶ εἰ ἄρα τῇ παρὰ ταῖς τῆς ἀγιότητός σου Ἐκκλησίαις διδασκαλίᾳ συμφωνοῦμεν ἢ τι τάχα διαφωνοῦν ἐστίν, ὅπερ οὐκ ἂν θέλωμι. Δέομαι δὲ μεγάλως τὴν ἀγιότητά σου, αὐτό [=Confessio Augustana] μετὰ τῆς αὐτῆς, ἧς τὰ πρότερα εὐνοίας δέχεσθαι καὶ εἰ μὴ βαρὺ, τὴν σοφωτάτην ἑαυτῆς περὶ τούτων κρίσιν εὐνοϊκῶς δηλοῦν, εἰ ἄρα, τοῦ Θεοῦ διδόντος, τὰ αὐτὰ ἐν Χριστῷ φρονοῖμεν» (*Acta et Scripta*).

Of course, the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah II studied the *Confessio Augustana* with his eminent theological advisors and noted the clearly contradictory theological innovations, confusions, weaknesses, and deviations contained in it; thus, the Ecumenical Patriarch sent his «Ἀπόκρισις» rejecting their request. Besides, the Patriarch also pointed out that in case of their disagreement, i.e., that «ἂν δέ γε τυχόν ἔντισι τῶν δογμάτων τῆς ἡμετέρας εὐσεβείας κατὰ πρώτην ὄψιν οὐκ

45. Vl. Io. Pheidas *Ἐκκλ. Ἱστορία*, *op.cit.*, vol. III, pp. 327-386.

εὐφρανεῖ, ὅμως πεπείσμεθα, ... μηδὲν ἄλλο προτιμήσειν ὑμᾶς, ... ὃ οἱ τε θεῖοι μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ κανονικοὶ αὐτῶν καὶ σωτηριώδεις λόγοι, οἱ τε Οἰκουμενικαὶ καὶ μερικαὶ τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων Σύνοδοι καὶ οἱ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας θεολογικώτατοι Κήρυκες ἀριδῆλως συμφωνοῦσι καὶ τοῖς τὰ ἐκείνων ἔργῳ φυλάττουσιν ἐντάλματα σωτηρίαν πάντως καὶ Βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν προξενοῦσιν...».

Consequently, the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah II rejected their Protestant proposals in three important relevant Ἀποκρίσεις (Responses, 1573-1581) and recommended they adapt their theological innovations to the Orthodox patristic tradition's established synodical and canonical criteria – e.g., the questions of the Filioque, the dogma of free-will, the sacraments, etc. In this spirit, therefore, the Ecumenical Patriarch pointed out that: «Ἐπεὶ δὲ τῶν Μυστηρίων, τινὰ μὲν στέργετε, πλὴν ἐπισφαλῶς, διαστρέφοντες καὶ μεταβάλλοντες, ... τινὰ δὲ τούτων οὐδὲ Μυστήρια εἶναι λέγετε, ὡς παραδόσεις ὄντα, μὴ ὅτι γε τοῖς θεοῖς ῥήμασί τε θεμελιωθεῖσαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντῃ αὐτοῖς ἀντιπίπτουσαι, ... κάντεῦθεν καλοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς θεολόγους».

On the contrary, Lutheran theologians were mainly seeking the *Confessio Augustana*'s recognition as consistent with orthodox theology to use it as a credible argument against the Roman Catholic Church's formal sacramental tradition in their confessional competition. Under this spirit, however, Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah interrupted the epistolary discussions as theologically fruitless and explicitly declared to them that: «ἀξιοῦμεν ὑμᾶς τοῦ λοιποῦ μὴ κόπους παρέχειν ἡμῖν, μηδὲ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν γράφειν καὶ ἐπιστέλλειν, εἴ γε τοὺς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας φωστῆρες καὶ θεολόγους ἄλλοτε ἄλλως μεταχειρίζεσθε καὶ τοῖς λόγοις τιμῶντες αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐπαίροντες, τοῖς ἔργοις ἀθετεῖτε, καὶ τὰ ὅπλα ἡμῶν ἄχρηστα ἀποδεικνύετε, τοὺς λόγους αὐτῶν τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ θείους, δι' ὧν ἂν ἡμεῖς γράφειν καὶ ἀντιλέγειν ὑμῖν εἴχομεν...»⁴⁶.

On the contrary, the theologians of the Calvinist Academy in Geneva were influenced by the important proposals of Metropolitan Metrophanes Kritopoulos, the protosyncellus of Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria (1601-1620), regarding the Eastern Orthodox Church's synodal authority, by reference to the Papocentric Western Roman Catholic Church. In this

46. VI. Io. Pheidas *Ἐκκλ. Ἱστορία*, *op.cit.*, vol. III, pp. 669-679.

spirit, therefore, the prominent Calvinist theologians of Geneva took the initiative to draft a corresponding Letter to the *Confessio Augustana* –undisputably, a Calvinist Confession of Faith–, and succeeded, with the willing support of the pro-Orthodox and benevolent Dutch ambassador in Constantinople, Cornelius Haga, who was persuaded by the emissary of the zealous Calvinist pastor Antonius Leger to ask the Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lucaris to approve and sign a Calvinist Confession of Faith, which had nevertheless been drawn up by the eminent Calvinist theologians of the Geneva Academy.

Indeed, Cyril Lucaris, who was transferred from the Patriarchate of Alexandria to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, uncritically accepted the insistent request made by his friend Cornelius Agha and signed the Calvinist Confession of Faith, which was to be presented in the West against not only Roman Catholics but also Lutherans. Consequently, he accepted it, certainly not to challenge or falsify the established Patristic and Synodal tradition of the Orthodox Church, but mainly to discredit both the scholastic, formalistic, sacrament-centered theology of the Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent (1545-1563), as well as the Lutheran theology that uncompromisingly rejected the Sacraments of episcopal ordination and the Holy Eucharist.

Consequently, the Calvinist Confession of Faith attributed to Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lucaris was uncontestably written in Latin by prominent Calvinist theologians of the Geneva Academy and was immediately circulated in the West, for the reasons already mentioned, under the following, fictitious and vague, title: *Confessio fidei reverentissimi domini Cyrilli Patriarchae Constantinopolitani nomine et consensu Patriarcharum Alexandrini et Hierosolymitani, aliarumque Ecclesiarum Antistitum, Scripta Constantinopoli, mense Martio anni 1629*. Of course, the Calvinist Confession of Faith was translated into Greek and published three years later (1633), again under a vague, and even misleading, fictitious title: *Ἀνατολικὴ Ὁμολογία τῆς χριστιανικῆς πίστεως*⁴⁷.

However, the dichotomous and contradictory theological confessional antagonism was sharpened by the confrontation of both the unilateral formalist mystery-centered theology of the Roman Catholic Church, as

47. Vl. Io. Pheidas *Εκκλ. Ἱστορία*, *op.cit.*, vol. III, pp. 679-696.

well as the unilateral anti-mystery Evangelical Preaching, i.e. of the two rival Protestant confessions; therefore, their antagonism ultimately had common and tragic ecclesiological consequences. Indeed, the two different confessional traditions were arbitrarily and uncritically disconnected not only from the common *apostolic, patristic, synodal, and liturgical* tradition of the first millennium of the historical life of the *one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church* and the common *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* but also from the Christocentric ontology of the mystery of both the Church and its entire sacramental life.

Of course, as we have already seen, the Church's Christocentric ontology is always closely connected with the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God, by the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, as well as with Christ's earthly life, but always with Holy Spirit's indissoluble and solidary synergy. Christ's synergy with the Holy Spirit is present in the whole mystery of the divine economy in Christ, which extends to the time of the Church, so that Christ may always be present in his Church, in a visible way and in liturgical time, as Christ himself proclaimed, requested and promised to the apostles his uninterrupted presence⁴⁸, so that the Church may perform its main saving mission until the end of the time⁴⁹.

Consequently, these theological and ecclesiological confessional deviations or confusions of the scholastic dichotomous proposals of the Western Christian world's two rival ecclesiastical theological traditions –the Roman Catholic and the Protestant–, were obviously burdensome, arbitrary, and uncritical. These proposals are explicitly and objectively described, and in a comprehensive manner, by the most distinguished contemporary Protestant theologian Karl Barth, who nevertheless had always been an eloquent admirer of the great and preeminent Greek Fathers' theology, which was faithful to the apostolic and patristic tradition. Besides, Karl Barth explicitly highlights, but also with impressive emphasis, as we have seen, the destructive ecclesiastical consequences

48. *Matth.* 28, 18-20; 26, 26-29; *Mark* 14, 22-25; *Luk.* 22, 14-20; *John* 6, 50-58; 15, 26-27; 16, 7-14; 20, 21-23; *Acts* 1, 7-8; 2, 1-4. *1 Cor.* 11, 23-29; *Eph.* 8, 13-22; *Col.* 1, 13-23, et *passim*.

49. VI. Io. Pheidias, *Ἐκκλησιολογία...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 17-133, 265-318.

of the dichotomous theological and ecclesiological differences after the 16th-century Protestant Reformation:

“See how things are developing in the Evangelical Church. A clear deficit seems to appear. In the context of the Reformation, the Church of Rome, that has been focused on the mysteries, was replaced by a Word-oriented Church. Thus, preaching became the focus of attention very early on, while the celebration of the sacraments took on a limited character. So, what do we see today? On the one hand, the Roman Church of the sacraments, in which preaching is somehow missionless, and, on the other hand, the Evangelical Church, in which there is also only one sacrament, but it does not constitute an obligatory element of its worship. These two tendencies are destructive for the Church. What can be the meaning of a sermon which works against the sacrament, a sermon which does not lead to the sacrament, although it is bound to interpret it;...”⁵⁰.

50. K. Barth, *La proclamation de l’Evangile*, Neuchatel 1961, pp. 26-27.