EVOLUTION OF CHURCH GOVERNANCE: FROM THE DIASPORA-MODEL TO PENTARCHY[*]

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Summary:

§1. Diaspora-model. §2. *Polis*-model. §3. Model of neighbourhood. §4. Metropolitan model. §5. Diocesan model. §6. Patriarchal model. §7. Pentarchy.

§1. Diaspora-model

Modern scholarship has clearly demonstrated that the only definite thing that we can say about the earliest structures of the Christian communities is that there were no structures. In the words of PAULA GOODER:

«The task of tracing the history of the earliest Christian communities is a little like trying to describe, in a single narrative, the path of twenty rubber balls thrown into the air and left to bounce wherever they come down (...) The New Testament provides us, she continues, numerous snapshots of life in early Christian communities but what is unclear is what, if anything, connects these snapshots»[1].

Nevertheless, with all their unclassifiable diversities, early Christian communities arranged themselves along some existent patterns. Initially they were patterns of a synagogue[2] and a household[3]. With the growth of the

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[1] MANNION G. and LEWIS SEYMOUR M., *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*. London; New York: Routledge 2008, 16.

[2] BURTCHAELL, J. T., *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press 1992, 272-338.

number of the communities, the inter-communal relations developed according to the patterns of the Jewish Diaspora and Hellenic πόλις (*polis*).

The former paradigm placed the central Christian community in Jerusalem. Others were "diasporal" communities, which in some way relied on their "metropolis" in Jerusalem. The community in Jerusalem, in turn, felt responsibility for the Christian communities outside of the city.

§2. *Polis*-model

Not all communities accepted this paradigm. There was a resistance to this model from some Christian communities, especially from Gentiles. They adopted another type of community and inter-communal relations, which I would identify as a *polis*-type. It imitated a Greek *polis*, of course as it was understood and functioned in the 1st century. Hence is the name *ecclesia*, which the first Christians chose to call their communities. This model features a significant level of independence of the community, which in the later time would be called autocephaly.

§3. Model of neighbourhood

The *polis*-model served well the internal demands of the community, but proved to be weak in some situations. Namely, the situation when a president of the community had to be judged or a new one to be installed. In both cases internal resources of the community did not suffice. Primates from other communities, now called bishops, had to participate to handle such situations. Most convenient were those bishops who were in the neighbourhood. Participation of the neighbour bishops in solving problems of a local community shaped a model of neighbourhood in administering Church affairs.

There were other problems that the local communities had to solve together, namely deviations from what it believed to be apostolic norm in teaching and practice, like heresies, schisms and other. They affected not just one community, but clusters of them. Therefore, the communities had to face them commonly. This also urged bishops to meet together. The most common name for such meetings became council (σύνοδος). The meetings of bishops, however, were not regular. There were also no criteria who can participate in them. As VLASIOS PHEIDAS remarks, «activation of the conciliar system was occasional or emergency»[4].

In the model of neighbourhood, all local communities were equal, as at any moment any community could be called to serve as a neighbour church

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[3] MEEKS W. A., *The First Urban Christians: the Social World of the Apostle Paul.* New Haven: Yale University Press 1983, 29.

[4] Φειδᾶς Β., Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία, vol. I, Ἀθῆναι 1995², 805.

for the benefit of other community that asked for help. The principle of neighbourhood by definition implies equality of the communities, as each of them can become a neighbour or a receiver of help from others.

At the same time, there were communities, which were regarded as especially authoritative, either because they were planted by apostles, or had holy and charismatic leaders. Among them were communities of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Ephesus, Caesarea in Cappadocia, Corinth, Philippi, Carthage and so on. Those communities enjoyed what could be called "primacy of honour"[5]. This kind of primacy was not in any sense institutionalised or obligatory. It was freely recognised by those churches, which wanted to. It did not introduce any sort of hierarchy in relations between the communities.

§4. Metropolitan model

The Metropolitan model emerged as a way of putting in order the model of neighbourhood. It was legalised by the canons 4, 5 and 6 of the Council of Nicaea[6]. The features of this model were as follows.

1. It clearly defined what kind of neighbourhood was required to judge a bishop or install a new one for the community. Neighbourhood was identified with an administrative unity of the Roman empire, province (ἐπαρχία).

2. All bishops of the province, if it is possible of course, had to participate in the required procedures.

3. The actions of the bishops of neighbourhood had to be approved by the one who resided in the capital of province, called "metropolitan bishop" (μητροπολίτης ἐπίσκοπος). Without his approval, decisions of the bishops of the neighbourhood were void.

The metropolitan model implied four radical shifts in understanding of the Christian Church. First, communities were considered as belonging to an administrative territory. Thus the Roman principle of territoriality was applied to the Christian Church. This principle would become dominating in the posterior history of Christianity. The model of neighbourhood also implied some kind of territoriality, but it was different. Territoriality of neighbourhood was simply a matter of convenience and accessibility. In the metropolitan model, it became a principle of administration.

Second, for the first time a hierarchy between bishops, and their communities, became institutionalised. Before that, there were only bishops who had responsibility over their communities. Now some bishops were also

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[5] *Ibidem*.
[6] Φειδᾶς Β., Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία, vol. I, Ἀθῆναι 1995², 457.

endowed with supervision over other bishops, apart of responsibilities about their own communities. Although this supervision was limited, it affected important and sensitive issues of installation and removal of other bishops. Metropolitans thus became first among equals (*primi inter pares*). They enjoyed a sort of primacy, which was a step further from honour. The primacy became institutionalised. This inevitably led to conflicts between the bishops with old-fashioned primacy of honour, and metropolitans who received a new kind of primacy of administrative position[7]. Eventually the administrative sort of primacy won over the honorary one[8].

These two shifts introduced a new rationale to the office of bishop, which was a rationale of an official who governs a territory. The focus of the office thus shifted from community to territory, and from pastoral care of the people of God to supervision over the functionalities of his colleagues in service. As BERNARD PRUSAK puts it, «the notion of a bishop presiding at his church assembled for the Eucharist was no longer the principal focus. The bishop's primary function had become administration»[9].

The third shift in the metropolitan model was that the councils of bishops became a regular institution. According to canon 5, they had to be summoned twice a year. All bishops of province had to take part in them. Thus conciliarity or synodality became a crucial function in the Church. These venues of bishops became an ultimate authority in the matters of the ecclesial province. No other community from outside could intervene or change the decision of this council.

This, fourth, constituted a network of churches within one province a kind of "super-church". Autocephaly or self-governance thus was delegated by local communities to this super-church, metropolis. This is confirmed, for instance, by witness of THEODORE BALSAMON: «In old times, all metropolitans of the provinces were autocephalous and consecrated by their own councils»[10]. Speaking more generally, the notion of church was extended from a community to a network of communities. This notion became conceptualised and functional.

A shift to the metropolitan model was probably the most dramatic one in the development of the Church structures. This model either introduced or legalised principles, which shaped the Church, as we know now.

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[7] Such conflicts were reported in the provinces of Palestine (between Caesarea and Jerusalem), Karia (between Tralleis and Aphrodisias), Pamphilia (between Side and Perge), Paphlagonia (between Pompiioupolis and Gangra), Lykia (between Patara and Myrrha), Cyprus (between Paphos and Konstantia), Mesopotamia (between Nisibis and Edessa), Pisidia (between Sagala and Ikonion) and others. See Φειδᾶς Β, Ὁ Θεσμός τῆς Πενταρχίας τῶν Πατριαρχῶν, vol. I, Ἀθῆναι 1969, 53-54.

[8] *Ibidem*, 53.

[9] PRUSAK B. P., *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries*, Paulist Press 2004, 210.

[10] Ῥάλλης Γ. & Ποτλης Μ., Σύνταγμα τῶν θεῆων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων, vol. II, Ἀθῆναι 1854, 171.

As any model, however, the metropolitan one early showed its vulnerability. In particular, this model helped the civil authorities in Constantinople and their ecclesial counterparts to quickly introduce state-sponsored Arianism to the majority of newly-established metropolias. It would be much more difficult to disseminate this doctrine to cell-communities if they were not organised into larger structures connected with civil centres. In the struggle with Arianism, Niceans both in East and West managed to open up closed structures of metropolias and made them accountable to other Churches. This was particularly done by the councils in Antioch (341) and Sardica (343). The former approved an institution of 'major council' (μείζων σύνοδος), which apart of the bishops of metropolia would include bishops from other provinces as well[11]. The council of Sardica introduced a possibility of appealing to authoritative sees[12].

§5. Diocesan model

The council of Constantinople 381 was called to handle neo-Arian reactions to Nicaea. Apart of theological instruments developed by the Cappadocean Fathers, it secured some canonical instruments to restore the Nicean Orthodoxy. Particularly, it introduced what can be called a 'diocesan model' of Church administration.[13] This model was called to correct abuses of the metropolitan system, which were committed in the period of the anti-Nicean reaction. Constantinople I continued the councils in Antioch (341) and Sardica (343) in constructing a supra-metropolitan model. This model was supposed to establish some control over metropolias. Unlike Antioch and Sardica, which tried to settle the problem within the same metropolitan paradigm, Constantinople I upgraded the model. It applied the Nicean logics of employing civil models and projected to the Church administration the diocesan structure of the Roman state.

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[11] If a bishop shall be tried on any accusations, and it should then happen that the bishops of the province disagree concerning him, some pronouncing the accused innocent, and others guilty; for the settlement of all disputes, the holy Synod decrees that the metropolitan call on some others belonging to the neighbouring province, who shall add their judgment and resolve the dispute, and thus, with those of the province, confirm what is determined (canon 14).

[12] In my earlier publication – cf. HOVORUN C., *Apostolicity and Right to Appeal*, in HAINTHALER T., MALI F., EMMENEGGER G. (eds.), *Heiligkeit und Apostolizität der Kirche*, Innsbruck-Wien: Tyrolia-Verlag, 2010, 214-245 – I have argued that the canons of Sardica (primarily canon 3) did not constitute the basis for recognition of the Roman right to entertain appeals for the eastern Church. The eastern bishops considered them either as a canonical basis for the western Churches to appeal to Rome, on the ground that Sardica belonged to the Roman jurisdiction and bishop HOSIOS of Cordoba who initiated the canons was a western bishop himself. Or they saw them as a temporal right, which was bestowed personally upon Pope JULIUS under the harsh circumstances of suppressions from the Arians.

[13] VLASIOS PHEIDAS calls it an "exarchic system" (see: Φειδᾶς Β., Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία, vol. I, op. cit., 821; IDEM, Ὁ Θεσμός τῆς Πενταρχίας τῶν Πατριαρχῶν, vol. I, op. cit., 146-167.

Dioceses (διοίκησις) were established during the administrative reforms of Diocletian in 290s. They were organised in 4 praetorian prefectures (*præfectura prætorii*, ἐπαρχότης τῶν παριτωρίων ἐπαρχότης or ὑπαρχία τῶν πραιτωρίων) and included smaller provinces.

The four prefectures of the Roman Empire around 400 AD

At the end of the 4th century, there were 14 dioceses in the Roman empire:[14]

I. Prefecture of the Gauls (Britain, Gaul, Spain, and north-western corner of Africa): 1. Britain; 2. Gaul; 3. Viennensis (Southern Gaul); 4. Spain.

II. Prefecture of Italy (Africa, Italy, provinces between the Alps and the Danube, and the north-western portion of the Illyrian peninsula): 5. Africa; 6. The Italies; 7. Illyricum.

III. Prefecture of Illyricum (Dacia, Macedonia, Greece): 8. Dacia; 9. Macedonia.

IV. Prefecture of the East or Oriens (from Thrace in the north to Egypt in the south and the territory of Asia): 10. Thrace; 11. Asiana; 12. Pontus; 13. Oriens; 14. Egypt.

Canons 2 and 6 of the Constantinople I placed metropolias to a wider accountability to the dioceses. As PETER L'HUILLIER puts it, Constantinople I suggested to consider imperial dioceses as «coherent entities in which the bishops ought to assume common responsibilities»[15]. Independence in managing Church affairs, including the most crucial canonical procedures of consecration and judgement of bishops, was expanded from the level of civil province to a higher level of diocese.

The model of Church administration, which was attempted to be built on the level of civil dioceses, did not stand for a long time. Soon it was replaced with a new one, which proved to be much more viable. Actually, it survives, though significantly modified, to our days. This is a patriarchal model.

§6. Patriarchal model

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[14] Source: *http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/government/p/CivilGovtEmpire.htm* [accessed December, 2012]. See also BURY J. B., *History of the Later Roman Empire. From Theodosius I to the death of Justinian (A.D. 395 to A.D. 565)*, vol. I, London 1923 (especially the 2nd chapter); it is available now at the following website: *http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/BURLAT/2*.html* [accessed December, 2012]

[15] L'HUILLIER P., *The Church of the Ancient Councils: the Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1996, 117.

Patriarchal model started developing in parallel with the metropolitan and diocesan models and eventually succeeded them. This process lasted from the council of Constantinople I (381) to the council of Chalcedon (451). The model did not exactly follow the pattern, which was adopted by the council of Nicaea. This model does not reflect the civil divisions of the Roman empire. Although the number of the Patriarchates is almost equal to the number of civil prefectures (5 to 4), their territories do not coincide. Thus rationale behind dividing the Church into five Patriarchates was not entirely political. It also included ecclesial and historical reasons: apostolicity, primacy of honour, theological importance *etc*. This helped the Church to calm down tensions between newly emerged administrative and traditional centres of ecclesial governance.

The Patriarchal model continued the tendency of creating supra-metropolitan systems. Although metropolias did not cease to play key role within the Patriarchates, they lost for good their self-sufficiency (autocephaly). They became accountable to five patriarchal centres: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. The only exceptions were metropolia of Cyprus, which secured its full independence at the council of Ephesus (431), and metropolia of eastern Illyricum, which became a subject of fight between Rome and Constantinople, until it was eventually went under the Roman jurisdiction in 535.

§7. Pentarchy

The institution of Patriarchate appeared to be the most important instrument of securing communion in the Church on all its levels. First, it became extremely effective in facilitating communion between local communities within the same Patriarchate. This communion was secured through referring to the Patriarchal see. Metropolitans and sometimes bishops in the lower-level communities had to commemorate the name of their Patriarch. It was believed that this commemoration preserved communion of any community with other communities within the same Patriarchate.

Second, in the relations between themselves, the Patriarchates did not turn to self-sufficient ecclesial monads. They struggled to preserve communion among themselves, though this task appeared to be significantly harder than keeping local communities in unity. In the words of a legate of the Patriarch of Jerusalem to the council of Constantinople 869-870, ELIAS, «The Holy Spirit established patriarchal heads in the world in order to eliminate through them all emerging scandals»[16]. Through the communion

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[16] MANSI XVI, 317-320.

of the Patriarchs, any community was in communion with all the communities in other Patriarchates. A mechanism of securing unity of the Patriarchates was called Pentarchy.

The institute of Pentarchy secured that councils of the Church, including ecumenical ones, function properly. Thus, the iconoclastic council in Hiereia (754), which pretended to be ecumenical, was not received by the Church largely because it was not approved by the Pentarchy – no one Patriarch participated in it. The Patriarchs were called to correct each other, when positions of some of them deviated from the norm of the tradition. In the words of THEODORE THE STUDITE: «If someone from the Patriarchs stumbles he should receive correction (...) from the same rank»[17]. Finally, through the mechanisms of Pentarchy, Patriarchs tried to secure their relative independence from the civil authorities. This was especially important for the Patriarchs of Constantinople who were often deposed by the emperors. Thus PATRIARCH NICEPHOROS (805-815), when was forcefully removed from his office by the emperor, appealed to other Patriarchs.[18]

As any effective institution in the Church, the Pentarchy was abused from time to time. For instance, when emperor HERACLIUS (610-641) promoted Monenergism and later on Monothelitism, he secured them with consent of all five Patriarchs: HONORIUS of Rome, SERGIUS of Constantinople, CYRUS of Alexandria, MACEDONIUS of Antioch, and SERGIUS of Jerusalem. Only an ecumenical council (Constantinople III, 680-681) corrected the failure of the Pentarchy[19].

Emergence and gradual strengthening of the institute of Patriarchate led to flattening ecclesial diversities within each one of them. Not only metroplias, earlier a powerful institution chrismated with the authority of the ecumenical councils, were eventually digested by the Patriarchates. Liturgical, linguistic and other cultural diversities were eventually uniformed as well, to dissatisfaction of many within the Patriarchates.

Lack of diversities within the Patriarchates was compensated however by increasing diversities between them. Although the institute of Pentarchy was called to safeguard unity between the patriarchal sees, in every next century the unity became harder to preserve. The more the Patriarchates became consolidated structurally, liturgically and culturally within themselves, the harder it was for them to tolerate diversities with other Patriarchates. The history of schisms shows that the division lines within the Church in most cases ran along the borders of the Patriarchates. The first great schism,

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[17] *Patrologia Græca* (= *PG*), XCIX, 1420.
[18] *PG* C, 121-124.
[19] See HOVORUN C., *Will, Action and Freedom*, Brill 2008, 74.

around the issue of the Chalcedonian theology, left the Patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople and Jerusalem on the one side, and largest parts of the Patriarchates of Alexandria and Antioch on the other. The schism between East and West in the 11th century was also essentially a quarrel between two Patriarchates, Rome and Constantinople. It is only possible to guess what would happen if the Church chose another model of supra-metropolitan organisation, not so large as Patriarchates. May be divisions within it would be not so wide-scale as they are now.

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