

## PRIMACIES AND PRIMACY ACCORDING TO JOHN ZIZIOULAS

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In Metropolitan John Zizioulas's estimation, the issue of primacy is the most important ecumenical question of the day and the main cause of the past estrangement between the Orthodox and Catholic churches.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than approaching primacy through a historical prism, which has proved fruitless in past ecumenical discussions, Zizioulas initially preferred a theological method. In 1997, when he adopted this course, the international Orthodox-Catholic dialogue was designed along these lines.<sup>2</sup> Today, however, the Joint International Orthodox-Catholic Commission (co-chaired by Zizioulas) works from a historical perspective, so a partial shift has taken place. I agree that a historical approach is not the most helpful because, as the latest meetings of the Commission show, it is proving increasingly difficult to have a common view of the first millennium. Moreover, that model could not prevent the schism between East and West, so its exact imitation is neither realistically possible, nor desirable. And yet, a historical method should not be completely discarded, and

- 1 John D. Zizioulas, "Primacy in the Church: An Orthodox Approach," in *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church: "Toward a Patient and Fraternal Dialogue": A Symposium Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Society of the Atonement, Rome, December 4–6, 1997*, ed. James F. Puglisi (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 116. Reprinted as John D. Zizioulas, "Primacy in the Church: An Orthodox Approach," *Sourozh* 84.2 (2001): 3–13. Italian version: John D. Zizioulas, "Il primato nella chiesa," *Studi Ecumenici* 17. 1 (1999): 121–33.
- 2 Zizioulas, "Primacy in the Church," 116–17. Zizioulas's preference for a theological approach to a historical one mirrors his choice of eucharistic-eschatological pneumatology over a missionary-historical pneumatology. See John D. Zizioulas, "Implications ecclésiologiques de deux types de pneumatologie," in *Communio Sanctorum: Mélanges offerts à Jean-Jacques von Allmen*, ed. Boris Bobrinskoy & Yves Congar (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1982), 141–42.

Zizioulas bases many of his arguments on historical precedents. In order to understand where the Spirit leads our churches, we need to understand where we come from, retrieve the positive elements of our history, and listen to God's voice as he guides us toward union.

Theologically and historically, Zizioulas sees various levels of primacy or, in the plural, primacies: at the local, eucharistic level; regionally, in the metropolitan system; nationally, in autocephalous churches and Catholic national episcopal conferences; and universally in ecumenical councils and the papacy. These various understandings of primacy will dictate the structure of my article, although I treat the first two aspects only briefly.

### ***Local and regional levels: the eucharist and metropolitan councils***

According to Zizioulas, the roots of conciliarity lie deep in the Bible and reflect the life of the early eucharistic assemblies. From the beginning of the Church, there was a need to find a common resolution to various conflicts that divided the assembly. Conciliarity was first aimed at ensuring the unity of the eucharistic celebration, as is clear in 1 Corinthians or in the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem. Later on in history, councils developed for this same reason, although they were complicated by the fact that a person who was excommunicated by a bishop could not be communed by another bishop. This reality led to the need for regional councils, where bishops met periodically to discuss these cases of excommunication and prevent potential abuses.<sup>3</sup>

This historical context raised some important theological and practical questions regarding the fullness of the local church and its relationship with the council. Zizioulas writes that

the authority of a single bishop was no longer ultimate with respect to the ecclesiastical status of a member of his own Church. [By the fourth century t]he catholicity and fullness

3 John D. Zizioulas, "The Development of Conciliar Structures to the Time of the First Ecumenical Council," in *Councils and the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Faith and Order Secretariat (Geneva: WCC, 1968), 36–38.

of the local Church was no longer the background of the councils. The establishment of permanent provincial councils held twice a year and acting as higher courts of appeal for excommunicated Christians, did not simply mean another type of council. It represented at the same time a new ecclesiological concept, leading directly to a “universal” Church organization in which the particular Churches were understood as mutually completed parts.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere Zizioulas sees the authority of the councils in charismatic, and not juridical terms,<sup>5</sup> but the theological question to which he points here is worth exploring in the section on universal primacy and its relationship to the local church. In the meantime, suffice it to say that conciliarity further developed as a response to the rise of heresies and the need of the Church to reflect doctrinally the unity of the empire;<sup>6</sup> so, to the eucharistic focus of early conciliarity was added a doctrinal and even a political facet.

- 4 Ibid., 45–46. Similarly, Afanassieff wrote that ecumenical councils imply a primacy that does not acknowledge the fullness of the local church and is based on legal right, which, in Cyprian’s “universalist” ecclesiology becomes a part of a whole. And yet, seen as charismatic events, they point to the need for universal primacy and represent institutions (impermanent though they may be) that respect the fullness of the local church. In Nicolas Afanassieff, “The Church Which Presides in Love,” in *The Primacy of Peter: Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church*, ed. John Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1992), 98–103. I would add that it is hard objectively and empirically to make the distinction between the charismatic and legalistic approaches to the councils. Maybe it is better to approach synodality from a charismatic perspective and to agree with Dumitru Staniloae, who accepted the authority of synods and did not see in them a contradiction of the fullness of the local church: “Only the synods have jurisdiction over the bishops ... but the jurisdiction of the synods does not contradict the collegial character of the relationships between [the bishops]; it is a jurisdiction somewhat special in character, because [the synods’] authority is constituted through the free accord of its members. ... Only when some bishops are disciplined, their accord is not required, because these disciplinary actions are nothing other than the recognition that these bishops have severed themselves from the communion of love of the others.” Dumitru Staniloae, “Slujirile bisericesti si atributiile lor [Ecclesial Ministries and their Attributions],” *Ortodoxia* 22.3 (1970): 463.
- 5 John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church, Contemporary Greek Theologians*, no. 4 (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1985), 242.
- 6 Zizioulas, “The Development of Conciliar Structures to the Time of the First Ecumenical Council,” 43–44.

*National level: autocephaly and episcopal conferences*

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Orthodox theologians, especially those of the Slavophile movement, helped Catholic theologians move away from the pre-Vatican II christomonistic ecclesiology. But was a pneumatomonistic ecclesiology the answer?<sup>7</sup> Georges Florovsky warned against an ecclesiology that accentuates the presence of the Spirit so much that Church structures become irrelevant.<sup>8</sup> Under the influence of his *Doktorväter*, Zizioulas emphasized the incarnational and eschatological dimension of Church structures and offices, highlighting the need for visible organization.<sup>9</sup> In 1976, for example, Zizioulas spoke strongly against the dangers of pneumatological ecclesiology and its lack of emphasis on the visibility of the Church.<sup>10</sup> He advocated on christological grounds the need for visible unity in Orthodoxy. One has to remember, however, that over time, Zizioulas's position became more balanced between the presence of Christ and the Spirit in the Church, moving away from the christocentric influence of Florovsky. But Zizioulas's development did not imply the negation of the need for an organ of visible unity within Orthodoxy. On the contrary, to the christological-pneumatological dimensions of the Church, Zizioulas added a personalist perspective, in which the

7 Zizioulas laments in this sense: "to the Christomonistic tendencies of the West, Orthodox theologians tend to answer with a Pneumatomonistic tendency in ecclesiology; we became 'specialists in Pneumatology,' but we should actually present a synthesis between Pneumatology and Christology." John D. Zizioulas, "The Pneumatological Dimension of the Church," *Communio* 1 (1974): 143–44. See also Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 110–11, 123.

8 See for example Georges Florovsky, "The Church: Her Nature and Task," in *Bible, Church, Tradition, Collected Works 1, Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Emeritus Professor of Eastern Church History, Harvard University* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972), 67–68.

9 Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 184ff. See more on Zizioulas's position and a comparison with Afanassieff in Eamon McManus, "Aspects of Primacy according to two Orthodox theologians," *One in Christ* 36.3 (2000): 249.

10 John D. Zizioulas, "First Comment," in *Procès-verbaux du deuxième congrès de théologie orthodoxe à Athènes, 19–29 Août 1976*, ed. Savas Agourides (Athens, 1978), 142. See more in Zizioulas, "The Pneumatological Dimension of the Church," 142–58.

person exists fully only in communion. In an analysis of the system of Orthodox autocephaly, Zizioulas writes:

The “many” always need the “one” in order to express themselves. This mystery of the “one” and the “many” is deeply rooted in the theology of the Church, in its Christological (the “one” aspect) and pneumatological (the aspect of the “many”) nature. Institutionally speaking, this involves a ministry of primacy inherent in all forms of conciliarity. An ecclesiology of communion, an ecclesiology which gives to the many the right to be themselves, risks being pneumatomonistic if it is not conditioned by the ministry of the “one,” just as the ecclesiology of a pyramidal, hierarchical structure involves a Christomonistic tendency, which undermines the decisive role of the Holy Spirit in the life and structure of the Church. ... A Church which is not able to speak with one mouth is not a true image of the body of Christ. The Orthodox system of autocephaly needs and in fact has a form of primacy in order to function. ... The theology that justifies or even ... necessitates the ministry of episcopacy, on the level of the local Church, the same theology underlies also the need for a primacy on the regional or even the universal level.<sup>11</sup>

Zizioulas works here within the parameters set by Vladimir Lossky, according to which Christ unites the members of the Church, while the Spirit diversifies them.<sup>12</sup> Zizioulas later abandoned this scheme, affirming that “the Spirit not only diversifies, he also unites (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4), and Christ unites not via *nature* but ‘hypostatically,’ i.e., via personhood.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, he is influenced

11 John D. Zizioulas, “[The Nature of the Unity We Seek] The Response of the Orthodox Observer,” *One in Christ* 24.4 (1988): 344–45. For a further analysis of the relationship between “one” and “many” in Christ and the Church, see John D. Zizioulas, “The Mystery of the Church in Orthodox Tradition,” *One in Christ* 24.4 (1988): 297–99.

12 Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, tr. Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2002), 166–67.

13 John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartlan (New York: T&T Clark—Continuum, 2006). Zizioulas also refers here to his *Being as Communion*, 124–25. I would not go as far as to say that Zizioulas found the perfect balance between the christological and pneumato-

by Florovsky in his criticism of pneumatomonistic ecclesiology, but complements this position with his own warning against the other, christomonistic, extreme. Zizioulas calls for a balanced, trinitarian ecclesiology. Finally, he includes in this communal ecclesiology the need for primacy at both national and universal levels.

While universal primacy will be discussed in the following section, it is important to stress that, among the bishops of a certain region, one is the primate. In fact, Zizioulas notes elsewhere, the development of metropolitan and later national synods practically created many “primacies,” not just one “primacy,” since these regional councils all have a primate of their own.<sup>14</sup> Today, the Orthodox Church is organized as a communion of autocephalous churches, so it has a de-centralized system, where no authority stands above the autocephalous church. No measure can be imposed from top town, “leaving the final decision to a common agreement between the local Churches, and debating the issues for as long as it is necessary in order to reach unanimity or at least common consensus.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Freedom and unity*

While autocephaly guarantees the freedom of each national church, it begs the question of how to achieve unity at a global level. I consider that Orthodoxy offers a valuable contribution to the understanding of all bishops as equal and the fullness of the local church, but still needs to give more substance to the notion of universal primacy. To do so, it might be helpful to look more closely at the primates of autocephalous churches and see what level of authority they have. Zizioulas is relevant in this regard. He writes:

First, it would be a mistake to regard the authority of let us say a patriarch in relation to a synod in the Orthodox Church

logical aspects of ecclesiology, but this is not the place to analyze this issue. See for example Calinic (Kevin M.) Berger, “Does the Eucharist Make the Church? An Ecclesiological Comparison of Staniloae and Zizioulas,” *SVTQ* 51.1 (2007): 49–50.

14 John D. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 144.

15 Zizioulas, “[The Nature of the Unity We Seek] The Response of the Orthodox Observer,” 344.

as simply a primacy of honor, as it is often stated by Orthodox theologians. There is certainly more to this primacy than simple "honor." The patriarch can convoke a synod and set its agenda. His presence is a *sine qua non* condition for all canonical deliberations, such as the election of bishops, etc. This means that the synod cannot function without its head; the many without the one are inconceivable. The *primus* therefore gives its theological status to the synod, and not simply honor. Canon 34 of the so-called Apostolic Canons underlies Orthodox ecclesiology in this respect. This canon is based on the principle that the bishops cannot do anything without the *protos*, just as the *protos* cannot do anything without the rest of the bishops. ... Second, it is of crucial importance that this primacy be given to a bishop, that is, to the head of a local church. In Orthodox canon law the primates of each region are tied to certain *sees* and not to individuals.<sup>16</sup>

Two remarks are necessary here. First, the primate has a ministry of unity within the autocephalous church, and the Orthodox should be willing to ascribe at least this level of authority to the bishop of Rome at a universal level. The Pope should be willing to work in collaboration with the other primates, even though *Lumen Gentium* 22 states that

the Roman pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, namely, and as pastor of the entire church, has full, supreme and universal power over the whole church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.

Thus, Vatican II conditions the synodality of the bishops upon the Pope, but papal authority does not depend on the bishops.

Second, Zizioulas's insistence that the authority belongs to the bishop not as an individual, but as the head of a local church, is an important contribution based on his understanding that ordination should be regarded neither as an ontological, nor a functional change, but a relational one. In this new light, the bishop is tied to the community and the community to the bishop, so there should

16 John D. Zizioulas, "The Institution of Episcopal Conferences: An Orthodox Reflection," *The Jurist* 48 (1988): 380.

be no abstract ordinations.<sup>17</sup> Zizioulas's position is significant in that the authority of the primate must be freely accepted by the other bishops and their communities, otherwise it cannot be claimed objectively and independently of the relationships within a regional synod, or even at a universal level. In other words, the primate cannot impose his authority, since his ministry depends on his relationships with the other bishops and their communities. His jurisdiction includes only his diocese, but his authority extends to the jurisdictions of the bishops who freely recognize him as their primate.

When the discussion shifts away from these theoretical remarks into the realm of practicality, several problems arise. At the universal level, Orthodoxy does not have a primate. The role of the Archbishop of Constantinople will be briefly discussed later, when it will become clear that his title of "Ecumenical Patriarch" does not imply that he is the Patriarch of the entire world (*oikoumene*), or even of the East, jurisdictionally speaking. He does not have universal primacy. At a local level, Orthodoxy has to deal with ethnophyletism and autocephalism.

### *Autocephalism and the diaspora*

Zizioulas is very critical of the practical situation that resulted from the system of autocephaly based on national identity. He writes of "an infiltration of the Church by nationalism and sometimes ethnophyletism. The idea of autocephaly has become autocephalism, that is, using the Church to serve national or phyletic interests."<sup>18</sup> While Zizioulas does not explore further the ecclesiological implications of autocephalism (as opposed to the autocephaly described above), Nicolas Lossky notes that, if in the past Orthodox theologians rejected the notion of primacy because of its Roman connotations, now they have reintroduced it in the

17 John D. Zizioulas, "Ordination et Communion," *Istina* 16 (1971): 8–9. See also Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 220–23.

18 John D. Zizioulas, "The Orthodox Church and the Third Millenium," *Sourozh* 81, August (2000): 22–23.



context of “autocephalist” ecclesiology. Within the autocephalous church, the primate functions as

something of a “super-bishop” who has more power than any of his brothers in the episcopate, practically a power over the other bishops of the territory of the autocephalous church. Needless to say that such a “multiplied papism” is largely due to mere ignorance of church history and canon law.<sup>19</sup>

Using the same terminology as Zizioulas, N. Lossky is obviously very critical of the degeneration of autocephaly into autocephalism. He also contrasts the inequality among the bishops—where the primates function as multiple popes within the territories of their respective autonomous churches—with the traditional equality among Orthodox bishops. This reference, corroborated with his use of the expression “power over,” points to Afanassiëff’s eucharistic ecclesiology. The latter wrote that the organization of the Orthodox Church is under the shadow of universalist ecclesiology:

The attribute of “catholicity,” which (in eucharistic ecclesiology) belongs to the episcopal church, has now been transferred to the autocephalous church—a unit, in fact, half political and half ecclesiastical. Naturally, the episcopal church loses its catholicity and becomes a part of the autocephalous church. To this latter, alone, modern Orthodox theology ascribes the ability to be free and autonomous. Orthodox theology indeed rejects the idea of primacy on the universal scale, but it recognizes a partial primacy at the center of every autocephalous church, a primacy belonging to the head of that church. We are concerned here with primacy, not priority, for priority implies that every local church has fullness of ecclesiastical *esse*. The autocephalous churches, meanwhile, have become divided and separated, for the idea of a single directive has faded since the fall of Byzantium. Ever since the second Ecumenical Council, Constantinople has been trying

19 Nicholas Lossky, “Conciliarity-Primacy in a Russian Orthodox Perspective,” in *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church: “Toward a Patient and Fraternal Dialogue”: A Symposium Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Society of the Atonement, Rome, December 4–6, 1997*, ed. James F. Puglisi (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 129–30.

to bring off a pan-Orthodox primacy, but all her attempts have failed. ... In modern times, the unity of the Orthodox Church is becoming a sort of abstract ideal, with no means of manifesting itself in the real life of the Church.<sup>20</sup>

Afanassiëff's words need no comment. Propelled by his remarks on local primacies and the need for a universal primacy, it is time to return to Zizioulas.

### *Universal level: ecumenical councils and the papacy*

Zizioulas considers that the Orthodox and Catholic churches have different models of authority that reflect a fundamental ecclesiological difference between them. Catholicism has three levels of conciliarity and authority: local, regional (episcopal conferences), and universal (the papacy).<sup>21</sup> In present-day Orthodoxy, however, there are only two levels of conciliarity: local and regional. Given the Orthodox system of autocephaly, regional synods are headed by the primates of those respective churches. Even when the primates gather for pan-Orthodox conferences, they remain independent, so their gathering does not fall under a universal umbrella, but has a regional type of authority. This is also the case of the ecumenical councils, since they are not a permanent institution<sup>22</sup> and, I would add, some councils (e.g., the second) were convened as regional, not ecumenical. Zizioulas continues:

Does it mean that Orthodox ecclesiology does not allow for a tripartite or three-level conception of synodality at all, being tied only to the two-level concept, local and regional? Some Orthodox seem to think so. ... Personally I think that in a united Church the question of universal primacy would automatically arise, since there can be no communion of local churches without some form of universal primacy. But it is difficult to say what from an Orthodox point of view the rela-

20 Afanassiëff, "The Church Which Presides in Love," 142–43.

21 In my opinion, Catholic theology needs to explain the role of the Roman Curia in a way that does not introduce a fourth level of authority.

22 Zizioulas, "The Institution of Episcopal Conferences: An Orthodox Reflection," 381.

tions would be between the regional and the universal synod, until such a universal synod actually comes into being. For the Orthodox, therefore, the three-level conception of synodality is still too theoretical and too hypothetical to be treated in a truly constructive manner.<sup>23</sup>

If here Zizioulas only begins to explore the need for universal primacy, six years later he will explicitly accept three levels of authority:

Can there be unity of the Church without primacy on the local, the regional and the universal level in an ecclesiology of communion? We believe not. For it is through a “head,” some kind of “primus,” that the “many,” be it individual Christians or local Churches, can speak with one voice. But a “primus” must be part of a community; not a self-defined, but a truly relational ministry. Such a ministry can only act together with the heads of the rest of the local Churches whose consensus it would express. A primacy of this kind is both desirable and harmless in an ecclesiology of communion.<sup>24</sup>

Zizioulas’s remarks on the relationship between universal primacy and local churches, as well as his contention that primacy is a relational ministry, will be developed in the following section.

### ***Authority must be relational***

Zizioulas tackles the relationship between universal primacy and the conciliar nature of the Church from several angles. First, historically, he points out that there is a false opposition between these two aspects of ecclesiology. This apparent incompatibility between primacy and conciliarity is the result of the growing role of the papacy before and after the First Vatican Council, when some Catholic “conciliarist” theologians emphasized the idea that councils express the supreme authority of the Church in the hope to limit papal authority. Influenced by this *konziliarismus* movement, numerous Orthodox theologians regarded synodality as an alternative to papal primacy.<sup>25</sup> Zizioulas writes:

23 Ibid.

24 John D. Zizioulas, “The Church as Communion,” *SVTQ* 38:1 (1994): 12.

25 Zizioulas, “Primacy in the Church,” 120. See also Lossky, “Conciliarity-Primacy in a

It is a common assumption that the Orthodox have councils in the same way that Roman Catholics have the Pope, but the council does not stand above the local Churches in this way. No council is allowed to intervene in the internal issues of a local Church.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, he points out that the decisions of the ecumenical councils are not authoritative simply because of their institution. Rather, conciliar decisions “must be tested through their reception by the communities before they can claim full and true authority. Like everything else in an ecclesiology of communion, *authority must be relational*.”<sup>27</sup> Zizioulas’s claim that “authority must be relational” hearkens back to his rejection of the ontological-functional approaches to ordination, described above. He would probably say that ecumenical councils are not authoritative ontologically, as some Orthodox and conciliar Catholics seem to claim, but relationally.

Second, from an ecclesiological perspective, Zizioulas affirms the balance between the local and universal aspects of the Church, especially in the context of the eucharist presided over by the bishop.<sup>28</sup> This is not the place to analyze how successful he was in maintaining the balance between local and universal, but rather to point to the ecumenical significance of his thesis.

Given Vatican II’s ambiguous presentation of the relationship between bishops and the Pope and the unclear status of national episcopal conferences,<sup>29</sup> Zizioulas asks rhetorically if perhaps the Second Vatican Council “operated with two ecclesiologies at

Russian Orthodox Perspective,” 128–34.

26 Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 142.

27 Zizioulas, “The Church as Communion,” 12.

28 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 38. See also his reaction against Afanassiëff and Meyendorff’s views that the local church has priority over the universal church and his advocacy for their simultaneity in Zizioulas, “Primacy in the Church,” 119.

29 After a period of initial uncertainty about the authority of national episcopal conferences, it is now the practice to assign them no doctrinal authority. Their statements can become authoritative to the extent to which they are taught at a local level by the bishop who exercises his authority as the head of his diocese, or if the Pope promulgates these decisions as authoritative.

the same time, one universalist and the other local?"<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere he explicitly says it did,<sup>31</sup> while most recently he seems to imply that Catholic theology has given priority to essence over person, universal over local, and thus primacy over the council of bishops.<sup>32</sup> The tension between primacy and conciliarity described above is again at work here, but it need not be so. There is no intrinsic incompatibility between the two. Zizioulas affirms that "every bishop has the right and duty to participate *on equal terms* with all the other bishops in a council," so the Pope cannot stand above a council, but must be a part of it, as are all the other bishops. Once the council makes a decision, it cannot impose it upon the local church. Rather, conciliar decisions are implemented through the local church's acceptance of their authority.

Equally, the local church could not ignore the consequences of its decisions and actions for the other churches, as if it were a "catholic" church independently of its relations and communion with the rest of the churches. The catholicity of the local church cannot be turned into self-sufficiency.<sup>33</sup>

Zizioulas thus affirms a theology of communion between the local and universal aspects of the Church, regardless of whether the latter is expressed in ecumenical councils or the papacy. And yet, the tension that Zizioulas detected in his earlier discussion of metropolitan councils that challenge the fullness of the local church (the diocese) remains unsolved.

Third, Zizioulas has to deal with another tension. On the one hand, a bishop has authority only within his diocese.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand,

30 Zizioulas, "The Institution of Episcopal Conferences: An Orthodox Reflection," 379.

31 Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 142.

32 *Ibid.*, 141. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 38. Zizioulas mentions in a footnote the debate between Kasper and Ratzinger on this subject, but does not take into consideration Kasper's position, which is certainly in disagreement with Ratzinger's. See Walter Kasper, "On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger," *America* 184, no. 14 (2001): 8–14. And Joseph Ratzinger, "The Local Church and the Universal Church: A Response to Walter Kasper," *America* 185:16 (2001): 7–11.

33 Zizioulas, "Primacy in the Church," 120.

34 See for example John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries*, tr. Elizabeth

bishops gathered in councils and the Pope in a united Church extend their authority beyond their immediate jurisdiction. That is why, based on the bishop's ordination by several other bishops of the area and his entitlement (or even obligation) to be part of a synod, Zizioulas concludes that "the bishop is both a local and a universal ministry."<sup>35</sup>

Applying these conciliar principles and the provisions of the 34th Apostolic Canon to the vision of the papacy in a united Church, Zizioulas expects that the Pope will act communally together with the other bishops, respecting the fullness of the local Church. At the same time, the Pope would have a moral and canonical authority that would enable him to convene councils and to express the common voice of the Church, as the mouthpiece of the entire Church and of the consensus of the bishops with whom he is sacramentally equal. And yet, in all these discussions on the authority of the Pope, it is important to remember that authority does not reside in his person as an individual, but as the representative of his local Church that has primacy among other churches.<sup>36</sup> Again, Zizioulas's relational theology of ordination is significant for the intrinsic relationship between the bishop and the local church, even when that local church has universal primacy.<sup>37</sup>

Concretely, how can these principles be applied in a united Church in which the Pope exercises a permanent universal primacy?

Theokritoff (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), 263.

35 Zizioulas, "Primacy in the Church," 119–20.

36 John D. Zizioulas, "When we speak of the primacy ... (Interview with Gianni Valente)," *30 Days*, no. 6 (2003). For an analysis of the striking similarities between Zizioulas's and J. M. Tillard's proposals, see Emmanuel Clapsis, "Communion Ecclesiology and the Primacy of the Bishop of Rome," in *Legacy of Achievement: Metropolitan Metodios of Boston. Festal Volume on the 25th Anniversary of his Consecration to the Episcopate 1982–2007*, ed. George D. Dragas (Palmyra, VA: Newrome Press, 2008), 335–50.

37 It is interesting to trace Zizioulas's influences, especially when they turn out to be surprisingly Affanassieffian. The Russian theologian wrote that, "in the pattern of universal ecclesiology, the primacy belongs to one of the bishops, who is at the head of the Universal Church; but in the pattern of eucharistic ecclesiology, the priority belongs to one of the local churches, and only belongs to the bishop through his church. No priority belongs to the bishop personally; he possesses it only through the local church." Afanassieff, "The Church Which Presides in Love," 141.

Zizioulas makes some valuable inroads by offering the example of the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch in the East.

### ***Byzantine primacy***

Concerning the relationship between the primacy of the Pope and that of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Zizioulas oscillates between two positions: either the Pope cannot have a universal authority, but should have a role only in the West similar to the Ecumenical Patriarch in the East, or the Pope should have universal primacy to the same extent that the Ecumenical Patriarch is the primate in the East. (I am unable to establish a linear, chronological development from one position to the other.) First, as a solution to the present impasse, Zizioulas suggests,

the understanding of the primacy of the Roman bishop *in the traditional sense of the Byzantine pentarchy*. This would mean that the Bishop of Rome is *primus* only for the West; he is the patriarch of the West and should have no primacy whatsoever over the rest of the world. This would seem to satisfy fully the Orthodox, for it would appear to be a return to the Byzantine pentarchy from which Rome has departed by claiming universal jurisdiction. ... The primacy should not be *primacy* of jurisdiction. The reason for this is that the exercise of jurisdiction means interference with the affairs of a local church and this means the destruction or negation of its catholicity and ecclesial integrity. ... The primacy should be exercised in a *synodical* context. ... [The Bishop of Rome] would be the President of all heads of churches and spokesman of the entire Church once the decisions announced are the result of consensus.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, on the one hand, Zizioulas reflects here the two-level system of authority already existing in the Orthodox Church, a system that would facilitate the reception of this model in the East. The integrity of the local church would be fully preserved in this synodal context. Practically, however, Zizioulas's proposal would not create the level of unity that Christianity needs and

38 Zizioulas, "Primacy in the Church," 123–25.

seeks right now. Moreover, Zizioulas speaks with sadness about the difficulty created by the Pope's renunciation of the title, "Patriarch of the West,"<sup>39</sup> which makes his proposal harder to implement and points to the Pope's claim of universal jurisdiction. On the other hand, Zizioulas alludes to the need for a universal authority (thus returning to a three-level system of authority), where the bishop of Rome needs to act as a mouthpiece for the entire Church, expressing its consensus. He later expresses this idea even more clearly:

Reception cannot be limited to the local level, rather it also has to be universal. We need a ministry of universal reception that meets these requirements. This ministry should be *episcopal*, exercised by the head of a local Church, for this ensures that universal catholicity does not bypass or contradict the catholicity of the local Church. The consensus of the faithful should be obtained in every case of reception and this should go through the local bishops.<sup>40</sup>

There is a need for a mouthpiece of the entire Church, which, however, should be subject to reception and speak only after having been assured that a certain teaching has been received at a local level. The role of the faithful is very significant in this case. Zizioulas also points to the way in which consensus is achieved universally, while fully taking the local churches into account. The mystical identity among local churches becomes universal unity "not in a mutual complementarity of parts or in a democratic 'majority' but in the *coincidence* of the local Churches with each other in the same place, i.e. 'in the *gnome* [mind] of Jesus Christ."<sup>41</sup>

39 John D. Zizioulas, "An Eye for the Other (Interview with Theo Hobson)," *The Tablet* 261, no. 8705 (2007): 6.

40 Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 163. See more on reception in John D. Zizioulas, "The Theological Problem of 'Reception,'" *One in Christ* 21.3 (1985): 187–93.

41 Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 153. On page 159, Zizioulas also provides three criteria for identifying the mind of Jesus Christ: "a) as a vertical relationship of each Church with the one and whole Christ mystically present in the one Eucharist, to which the Bishop was connected as the visible head, possessing the 'charism of truth'; b) as a historical reference back to the past and the full identity of each Church with the primitive apostolic Church; and c) as a latitudinal extension of each Church to the



The second position toward which Zizioulas sometimes oscillates allows for a papal universal authority, after the model of the Ecumenical Patriarch in the East. As with the primates of autocephalous churches discussed above, his authority is real, well beyond a mere “primacy of honor;”<sup>42</sup> but it should not be confused with universal jurisdiction:

The patriarch of Constantinople could not interfere in the affairs of the other patriarchates, but would be responsible for the canonical order within them and intervene only when asked to do so in cases of emergency or disturbance and anomaly of some kind. He would also be responsible for the convocation of councils dealing with matters pertaining to the entire Orthodox Churches, always with the consent of the other patriarchs.”<sup>43</sup>

Zizioulas’s contention that, as the *primus* in the East, the Patriarch of Constantinople convenes councils pertaining to issues that affect the entire Orthodox world is rather controversial. A pan-Orthodox council has been in the works for decades, and yet the Patriarch has been unsuccessful in arranging this council, largely due to his limited authority in the context of autocephaly. The Pope should certainly have more authority in this regard, as well as the ability to intervene in cases of canonical disorder, as Zizioulas proposes. Such would be the case of overlapping jurisdictions in the diaspora. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, with the influence it presently enjoys, is unable to solve this stringent issue, so a greater level of authority is necessary for an efficient exercise of the universal ministry of

inclusion and communion of the Churches everywhere on earth, if and insofar as the first two conditions held good for them.” These remarks contrast *Lumen Gentium* 25, which, while regarding papal infallibility as stemming from the infallibility of the Church, does not condition his infallible statements upon reception: “his definitions are rightly said to be irrefragable by their very nature and not by reason of the assent of the church. ... [T]hey are in no way in need of the approval of others, and do not admit of appeal to any other tribunal. ... [The Pope is] the supreme teacher of the universal church, in whom the church’s charism of infallibility is present in a singular way.”

42 Zizioulas, “Primacy in the Church,” 123.

43 Ibid., 122. See also Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 144–45.

unity. To reverse this affirmation would sound too unnatural for an Orthodox, so I will formulate it as a series of questions: Can there be unity without a universal authority? Is Orthodoxy united without a pan-Orthodox authority? Have the Orthodox focused so much on the contrast between the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Pope that, in a disunited Church, they have not considered the possibility that the Ecumenical Patriarch might need the same kind of authority in the East that the Pope should eventually have in a united Church? I am not prepared to give an answer, but I will offer another question.

Where will the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue on primacy lead? No one knows. It is encouraging to see that we discuss this issue. The attitudes toward this discussion, however, are not as encouraging. On the Orthodox side, I perceive a strong anti-Catholic feeling and ultra-sensitivity to any papal acts (let alone teachings) that allude to any leadership role that he might have. Practically, many Orthodox are not ascribing him the honor they give to the primates of their autocephalous churches. Concerning the Catholic side, it is best to let Zizioulas speak. When asked whether the Catholic approach resembles the famous "Ratzinger formula" (in a lecture at Graz in 1976, Ratzinger affirmed that, "as to the doctrine of primacy, Rome cannot claim more from the East than was formulated and practiced in the first millennium"), he answered:

I think that at the current moment the Church of Rome is taking no account of the formula. In meetings with the Orthodox Church the Catholic representatives tend to set aside the perspective indicated by the experience of unity of the first millennium. Obviously that's a pity. But we now must look for a way to come together on other premises, and those can relate to the theology, the ecclesiology, of communion.<sup>44</sup>

It seems that Zizioulas still struggles with the choice between a historical and a theological approach, but leans more and more toward a theological methodology that rests on the conclusions of

44 Zizioulas, "When we speak of the primacy ... (Interview with Gianni Valente)."

the common Orthodox-Catholic historical analysis. The current international dialogue that concentrates on the first millennium has difficulties arriving at a common conclusion, but surely they will be able to bridge this impasse and find a viable solution for a future united Church.

### ***Concluding remarks***

As is evident from this brief study of Zizioulas's understanding of local and regional primacies and universal primacy, it is impossible at this point to draw a clear conclusion. Rather, his theology has the merit of pointing to some very important questions, even though Zizioulas ends his account of some of these issues with a period, not a question mark. His statements have evolved through time and sometime seem inconsistent. But it is unfair to criticize Zizioulas for having the courage to explore these issues when no one has a definitive answer. His inconsistency is better described as paradoxical, where both sides of the affirmation, taken separately, are true, so their difficulty points to the need for further reflection. Two issues need to be urgently addressed.

First, if the relationship between bishop, Church, and eucharist is as strong as Zizioulas (rightly) affirms, what are the ecclesiological and liturgical implications of universal primacy? How is the universal primate related eucharistically to the entire Christian world?

Second, in their criticism of Afanassieff's eucharistic ecclesiology, Orthodox theologians emphasized the need for local churches to be united with one another, and not independent.<sup>45</sup> And yet, we see Zizioulas struggling with the fullness of the local church when a regional, national, or universal structure claims any level of authority. When tensions arise between the local and universal levels of authority, which one takes precedence? If the local prevails, then the authority of the universal is left devoid. If the universal has

<sup>45</sup> Radu Bordeianu, "Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue: Retrieving Afanassieff's Eucharistic Ecclesiology after Zizioulas and Staniloae," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44.2 (2009): 247–54.

priority, then the local lacks fullness. Certainly the future will bring some nuances to these two alternatives and Zizioulas's theology of communion should be part of a common understanding of primacy and primacies.