



Intervention of His Eminence Metropolitan of Pisidia Job (Getcha)

XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishop
Vatican, 9 October 2023

Your Holiness,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Above all, I would like to express my gratitude for the honor granted to the Orthodox Church to participate in this Synod of Bishops, and to the first throne of Orthodoxy, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to be represented here, and to be able to express itself to bear witness to the practice of synodality in the Orthodox Church.

For the Orthodox, synodality corresponds to the practice established by the first ecumenical council (Nicea, 325) of gathering the bishops of a region at least twice a year under the presidency of their *protos* (cf. canon 5). This synodality is best described by Apostolic Canon 34:

“The bishops of the people of a province or region [*ethnos*] must recognize the one who is first [*protos*] amongst them, and consider him to be their head [*kephale*], and not do anything important without his consent [*gnome*]; each bishop may only do what concerns his own diocese [*paroikia*] and its dependent territories. But the first [*protos*] cannot do anything without the consent of all. For in this way concord [*homonoia*] will prevail, and God will be praised through the Lord in the Holy Spirit”.

Thus, in light of this text, it appears that:

- 1) A synod is a **deliberative** meeting of **bishops**, not a consultative clergy-laity assembly.
- 2) There cannot be a synod without a primate/*protos*, and there cannot be a primate/*protos* without a synod.
- 3) The primate/*protos* is part of the synod; he does not have superior authority to the synod, nor is he excluded from it.
- 4) The concord/*homonoia* which is expressed through the synodal consensus reflects the Trinitarian mystery of the divine life.

It is through this practice of synodality, as described by the Apostolic Canons and the canons of the First Ecumenical Council, that the Orthodox Church has been administered over the centuries until the present day, although the frequency and constitution of the synods may vary from one local autocephalous Church to another.

In light of this, we could say that the understanding of synodality in the Orthodox Church differs greatly from the definition of synodality given by your present assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

Nevertheless, it should be admitted that in certain historical circumstances the Orthodox Church has involved the clergy and laity in synodal decision-making. In the Ottoman empire, the election of Primates was carried out by clergy-laity assemblies. In the 17th century, the Ecumenical Patriarchate prescribed that the Metropolitan of Kiev be elected by a clergy-laity

assembly in Kiev. Two centuries later, in Russia, the Slavophiles, inspired by the theology of *communio* of the Tübingen school, forged the concept of *sobornost*, wanting to involve all the components of the Church in its administration. This culminated at the beginning 20th century in the local council of the Church of Russia (Moscow, 1917-1918) which proposed that ecclesial decisions be taken by a council (*sobor*) consisting of representatives of the episcopate, clergy, monks and laity. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik revolution did not allow the implementation of this new mode of administration in the Church. However, in the Church of Cyprus, until today, bishops are elected not exclusively by the episcopate, but also by the clergy and the laity: at the first stage, the entire population of the Island votes from the list of all the candidates, then, in a second step, the synod of bishops chooses one from the three candidates having obtained the majority of votes.

Nevertheless, the case of the Church of Cyprus constitutes an exceptional case in contemporary Orthodoxy, where, otherwise, the practice of synodality implies exclusively an assembly of bishops. Thus, the Holy and Great Council (Synod) of the Orthodox Church which gathered in Crete in 2016 was made up of 162 delegated bishops, while the 62 advisors (clergy, monastics and laity) that were present did not have the right neither to speak, nor to vote.

Thank you for your attention!