EPISCOPACY, PRIMACY, AND THE MOTHER CHURCHES:
A Monastic Perspective

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A prominent orthodox theologian has remarked that he thinks bishops have become useless. And he is only echoing a widespread and long-standing sentiment in our tradition. This is clear evidence of a crisis of episcopal leadership and primacy in the Church, a crisis that cuts to the heart of the apostolic and catholic identity of the Church.

While most of the problems I will address in this paper are specific to the extraordinary situation of Orthodoxy in America, they have broader application because they reveal the crisis of primacy on the ecumenical level. (And I use "ecumenical" to refer to the *oikumene* – the whole Orthodox Catholic Church). They also reveal the challenge to the Church's organization and ecclesiology posed by the new political and cultural realities of the third millennium.

I. VISION AND MISSION

The nature of Church leadership stems directly from the nature of the Church's vision. The only true vision of the Orthodox Catholic Church is the Kingdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ, in other words, the Gospel. And all levels of Church leadership have the task of constantly renewing

this vision. The Liturgy is the core of this constant renewal. It provides for us the icon of the Kingdom and of spiritual ascent into Christ, raising us up into the Body of Christ and fulfilling us as the community of the Faithful.

Leadership in the Church has a single task: constantly to call us to this repentance in order that we may be purified of all distractions which hold us back from the living vision of the Kingdom and from fulfilling the mission to make disciples who will share the same vision. It is a call to faith: to enter into the living Body of Christ which is animated by the Holy Spirit, and to receive the "mind of Christ," the shared faith of all the saints from the very beginning. This call to repentance, to membership in the Church, and hence to a share in the vision and mission of the Kingdom of God, is unequivocally addressed to all people, without any qualification by any human distinction: race, ethnicity, citizenship, or language. There is "One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism," (Ephesians 4:5) and hence, One Church. There cannot be different churches for different kinds of people.

With that shared vision and mission comes shared responsibility. Our task within the Church is also to call one another, including our leaders, to repentance. This mutual responsibility for the integrity of the Tradition and for one another is the core of conciliarity – *sobornost:* mutual accountability of the leaders to the faithful and of the faithful to the leaders. But it is the particular role of the bishops to foster this conciliarity. Conciliarity is a healthy interdependence and synergy, in which mutual responsibility and accountability function in a spirit of love and respect. This holds on all levels of ecclesial organization.

II. LEADERSHIP: RESPONSIBILITY, AUTHORITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

> *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.* — *Hebrews 13:7, 17*

At the heart of leadership within the church is the care of souls, making the leader accountable for the lives and faith of those with whom he has been entrusted. The greater the role of leadership, the greater the ac-

countability for the model one provides by one's own life, for the integrity of one's own faith and conduct, and for one's oversight of others. This responsibility is essential to authority. Authority has two meanings, both referring to the source of the vision and mission of the Church. It consists in the constant renewal of the vision itself, its "authorship;" and the "one who authorizes" or gives responsibility to others to fulfill the mission, holding them accountable for it.

How do the elements of responsibility, authority, and accountability manifest themselves in an Orthodox theology of leadership?

THE LOCAL CHURCH

Let us consider some basic ecclesiological principles of the Orthodox Catholic Church. There are two facets of leadership in Orthodox ecclesiology: mysteriological and organizational.

Mysteriological or sacramental leadership is vested in the bishop, giving him the responsibility to authorize and empower others, through his blessing or ordination, to participate in that ministry for the building up of the Church.

The bishop sacramentally recapitulates his community in himself by virtue of his ordination. He bears all the fullness of the grace of the priesthood. Thus, the bishop is the "hierarch," "source of sanctification" as well as "*archiereus*," high priest (citing the pun of St Dionysios the Pseudo-Areopagite).

The focus of the life of the Church is local: a bishop surrounded by his clergy and people, celebrating the Eucharist, is the icon of the Kingdom in all its fullness. It is the actualization of the Church as the Body of Christ. The local church headed by its bishop is itself the fullness of the Church; but the communion of these churches with each other through synods of bishops conveys the catholic identity to each level of organization. These synods, national and ecumenical, also constitute Eucharistic communities. Each is a communion of persons with a single presidency, which manifests the unity of the body of Christ.

The primates of the national churches are not "super-bishops." There is no sacramental status above the ministry of bishop, so that, according to the Church's sacramental life, all bishops are equal. Thus it is a misnomer to refer to a national church or regional synod as a "local church."

Each level of institutional organization expresses the Church and its catholicity in a particular place. The essential principle of organization, and hence jurisdiction, is that it is geographically and politically defined. This principle is expressed by one bishop in each city, and one Synod in each region, with the president of that synod as the primate. This held true for the Roman Papacy as well as all other local and regional churches.

CATHOLICITY

The catholicity of the Church has two dimensions: the integrity of its orthodoxy and the universality of its mission. The local Church is the fundamental principle of Orthodox ecclesiology because it bears the fullness of sacramental life, the fullness of Apostolic faith and practice. Though there may be multiple ministries for diverse needs within the population – language, culture, or other demographic issues – all the Christians in each diocese are the responsibility of that one bishop. Thus the local church is truly Catholic, embracing all elements of human diversity within itself. Its catholicity, however, depends also on its communion with other churches in the common faith and practice. Neither sense of catholicity is possible without the bishop.

This is so because the local bishop bears responsibility both for the internal integrity of his church as well as for its relationship with the other churches. It is through its bishop's presence on the synod that the local church relates to other local churches. The bishop is the point of accountability for that unity, both to his flock and to the synod in relation to them.

In the apostolic vision, the essence of primacy is episcopal leadership. Every bishop occupies the chair of Peter that preserves the unity and integrity of Peter's Faith. There is only one episcopate, which each bishop possesses equally and completely.

A "national church" is actually the synod of bishops, which elects a president from among its members. Their unity is a sign of the unity of the whole Body, and it is expressed in the person of the primate, who, as the agent of accountability, is responsible for fostering unity and communion. The primate, in turn, relates this synod and its local churches to the other national churches by maintaining doctrinal and sacramental communion with them.

There can be no primacy without synodality, and no synodality without primacy. The primate is one among the others, first among equals; yet is given the responsibility of holding the others to accountability. The authority of the primate arises from the mutual consent of those who elect him, and his acceptance by the greater community of primates throughout the world. Real primacy is an active role of actual leadership, of responsibility and accountability, in the context of actual jurisdiction.

III. ISSUES REGARDING PRIMACY IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

The bishops of every nation must acknowledge him who is first among them and account to him as their head, and do nothing of consequence without his consent. But each may do those things only which concern his own parish and the country places which belong to it. But neither let him, who is the first, do anything without the consent of all, for so there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit. — *Apostolic Canon 34*

AUTOCEPHALY AND PRIMACY

Is there a primacy beyond that of the national church, and, if so, what is its role? The principle of the autocephaly of national synods has become the quintessential ecclesiological stance of the Orthodox Churches. According to this principle, each national synod has complete independence in governing its own affairs, and especially in electing its bishops and primate. The double office of a primate is to foster communion between the bishops and local communities through the regional synod, as well as to maintain relationships with other national churches.

But at present, there is no effective overarching primacy in the Orthodox Church. Perhaps this is because there is no active "ecumenical synod" that embraces all Orthodox; and there has been no ecumenical council for over 1200 years. The idea of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is based on primacy over an empire-wide synod, or ecumenical council. Indeed, canonically, the primacy of both Rome and Constantinople had one foundation: they were the imperial capitals. While this was feasible in the days of the Roman Empire, and later during the Ottoman Millet, it has long since become unrealistic. For the Empire effectively ceased to exist eight hundred years ago,

and now only the Greek ethnic churches, and a few others, recognize the Ecumenical Patriarchate to be what it claims to be.

While no one denies it a primacy of honor, it has no real institutional role, much less a role of actual leadership. This is partially due to its location in a hostile Islamic society; and partially due to the lack of cooperation and consensus as to its role among the other Orthodox Churches. Primacy of honor without primacy of jurisdiction is meaningless.

Autocephaly without an overarching primacy has given rise in the national churches to an exaggerated self-sufficiency and to the blending of national or ethnic identity with that of Orthodox Christianity. Cultural and political agendas have become central to the missions of these churches. For many believers these agendas are intermingled with or even supersede the Gospel. Ethnos and culture – not Christ – have come to determine identity.

As a result, worldwide there are few expressions of a unified Orthodox Church beyond those of Eucharistic concelebration and a few commonly enunciated positions. Even the Ecumenical Patriarchate is primarily a Greek ethnic institution, unabashedly promoting Hellenism. Ecclesiastically, this has come to mean that an Orthodox Christian's loyalty is to his ethnic homeland and to his "mother church," and that those churches maintain responsibility for all the people of their culture and nation, wherever they may be in the world.

MOTHER CHURCHES AND THE "DIASPORA"

The result is that almost all national churches have extended their jurisdictions beyond their geographic and political boundaries to the so-called diaspora. But Orthodox Christians who are faithful to the Gospel and the Fathers cannot admit of any such thing as a diaspora of Christians. Only ethnic groups can be dispersed among other ethnic groups. Yet the essential principle of geographic canonical boundaries of episcopal and synodal jurisdiction has been abrogated, and every patriarchate, every mother church, now effectively claims universal jurisdiction to serve "its" people in "diaspora." Given this fact, on what basis do we object to the Roman Papacy?

This situation arose in reaction to the mass emigration of Orthodox from their home countries, and is continued as a means of serving the needs of these immigrant communities. It is perpetuated as a means of maintain-

ing ethnic, cultural and political identity for those away from their home country; but also as a means of financial support for the mother churches from their children abroad.

The confusion of ethnic identity and Orthodox Christian identity, expressed by competing ecclesiastical jurisdictions, is the incarnation of phyletism. Due to this confusion of the Gospel with ethnic or political identities, multiple parallel communities, each with its own allegiance to a foreign mother church, divide the Orthodox Church in North America and elsewhere into ethnic and political denominations. This distorts the Apostolic vision, and has severely compromised the catholicity of the Orthodox Churches, in which all Christians in a given territory are called to submit to a local synod of bishops.

The problem is not so much the multiple overlapping jurisdictions, each ministering to diverse elements of the population. This could be adapted as a means of dealing with the legitimate diversity of ministries within a local or national church. The problem is that there is no common expression of unity that supersedes ethnic, linguistic and cultural divisions: there is no synod of bishops responsible for all the churches in America, and no primacy or point of accountability in the Orthodox world with the authority to correct such a situation.

In the 21st century, people emigrate and move around, and Orthodox Christians need to be ministered to in their own language and with familiar traditions at least until they are acculturated. However, these should be particular ministries of the local or national church to particular groups – i.e. ministries to immigrant communities – rather than points of division. The cultural agendas of these external missions both distort the message of the Gospel and prevent people from entering into the Orthodox Church by forcing them to relinquish their own cultural identity in favor of someone else's. This also undermines any genuine missionary activity in the new land.

In reality, people do assimilate to their new cultures, and join "native" churches. This has accounted for a massive apostasy from the Orthodox Church in the West, as people find their parents' ethnic cultures, and thus the churches that promote these cultures, to be increasingly alien. This apostasy begins with the second generation, and by the fourth generation there are few that remain practicing Orthodox Christians. They leave because they were unable to find Christ and salvation through the incompre-

hensibility of the now alien forms and language. No matter how successful they may appear, due to new waves of immigration, churches that superimpose a national or ethnic agenda over the Gospel will die out.

MISSIONARY CHURCHES

But in North America there is another, very different aspect to the ecclesiological complexity. Orthodox Christianity first came to America not as an ethnic diaspora but as a missionary outreach by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1794. While the 19th century saw great immigration of Orthodox people from different countries, nevertheless the normal canonical order embracing all Orthodox of all ethnic backgrounds was observed in America, up to the 1920s, under the supervision of the Russian Mission. There was a united Synod with a single archbishop, and several bishops with missionary outreach and ministries to the various ethnic communities. But for more than a century the overwhelming needs of the new immigrant communities did make the Church in America lose sight of its original missionary purpose.

The division of the Orthodox Mission in America began in 1922 with the collapse of Russian Imperial support of the Mission following the Bolshevik coup, and the formation of parallel hierarchies, beginning with the Greek Archdiocese under Constantinople. They justified their action by a novel and idiosyncratic interpretation of Canon 28 of Chalcedon, relegating to Constantinople jurisdiction in all "barbarian lands." This was followed by the formation of several other ethnic jurisdictions, each subject to an Old World mother church. Further complications ensued as many of these communities were then divided into two or three competing segments corresponding to their various attitudes towards the political situation in their homelands, especially vis-à-vis Communism. Thus not only ethnic but political criteria distorted the message and mission of Orthodoxy in America.

However, missionary work and conversions within the Russian Metropolia and throughout the Church, continued. By the 1970s the missionary expansion of the Orthodox Church had embraced large numbers of converts, as well as the children of immigrants who had only vague identification with their ethnic roots. Today, a great majority of the clergy and laity, including the bishops, are converts or children of converts. We have

an American cultural identity and a multitude of divergent ethnic and racial roots, but our primary identity is as Orthodox Christians who live in America. This missionary expansion has taken hold in all the Orthodox jurisdictions in America, even the ones that assert cultural agendas. In no way are we in diaspora.

In 1970, the Russian Orthodox Church granted autocephaly to its American mission, forming the Orthodox Church in America. While this action remains controversial to this day, it recognized the existence of a local Church in America, with the fullness of sacramental integrity and institutional self-sufficiency. In other words, the gift of autocephaly established a hierarchy with the authority to incarnate the vision and mission of the Orthodox Church in North America by its own work, and to take responsibility for the life and growth of the Church in North America while remaining accountable to the other national Churches throughout the world. Finally, there was an effort to establish church life according to canonical norms.

The dilemma, however, is that with autocephaly, the presence of any other jurisdiction on American territory becomes uncanonical, and membership in the Synod of the Orthodox Church in America becomes the criterion of canonicity for all bishops in America. This, of course, has not been pushed by the OCA. What is at stake, however, is the canonical order of the Church, its vision and mission.

IV. SOME POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

ECUMENICAL PRIMACY

The absence of a functional ecumenical primacy within the Orthodox Church has severe implications. There is no ministry or point of unity or accountability functioning beyond the level of a national church, nothing to point to a Christian identity aside from national, linguistic, political, and cultural identities. This compromises the catholicity of the Orthodox Church, threatening division and competition between its various churches.

The Patriarchate of Constantinople is universally accepted as having a primacy of honor; but given its current situation, it is unable to lead. Furthermore, it promotes a cultural agenda of Hellenism that mutes its

voice to the other churches. Its claim of jurisdiction over the so-called "barbarian lands," or "diaspora" falls on the deaf ears of other patriarchates that have established identical institutions in the same territories, disregarding its claims to jurisdiction outside the geographic boundaries of existing churches. Beyond this, having been the first to abrogate the unity of the Church in America, Constantinople's own political adventurism has divided the Church in Estonia, and threatens the unity of the Church in Ukraine and other places, and hence, its communion with Moscow and other autocephalous churches. By these actions it has broken trust in itself, and sacrificed its ability to lead.

The only way an ecumenical primacy could work is if there is a functional and active ecumenical synod, which meets at regular intervals and is composed of the heads of all the autocephalous Churches. Such a permanent synod, provided for by the canons as a permanent synod presided over by the ecumenical primate, would create a context for the up-building of the sense of unity of the Orthodox Churches, and for the resolution of particular issues as they arise. Its primate would be a point of accountability, responsible for preserving the unity and vision of the Orthodox Church. Now more than at any time in history is this feasible, given available means of communication and transportation. This would take the full cooperation of all the autocephalous churches, providing an opportunity for the Patriarchate of Constantinople to exercise real leadership, inviting the rest of the Church to unity.

MOTHER CHURCHES AND THE "DIASPORA"

The fullness of the Church is present sacramentally in a local bishop and his community; but a local church's integrity is actually compromised when its bishop belongs not to a local synod but to one in a foreign country, a synod which can neither hold its bishop accountable nor be responsible for the life of the remote diocese. We have seen this over and over again in America. The territorial structure of the Orthodox Church is rooted in very practical issues: only through a local structure of accountability is a church able to maintain responsibility for its integrity. Outside that territorial structure, it is a disaster waiting to happen.

Being tied to a "mother church" is not of itself a guarantee of legitimacy, nor even the identity of practices and customs with those of the moth-

er church. The canonical tradition emphasizes the integrity of the local church and its communion with the mother churches; then both its legitimacy and its tradition remain intact. The diversity of traditions within Orthodoxy is completely appropriate, but the identity of the local church has to embrace all these traditions, and respect their integrity. The common vision of the Gospel, to which all these traditions bear witness, is the underlying point of unity, and the real source of identity. We cannot make the traditions something absolute: God is the only absolute. Each tradition is unique and valuable, but is also subject to growth and change if it is alive. Ministry to people who are formed in each tradition is a legitimate function of the local church; but it is also necessary to bring all the diverse ministries and expressions, the whole People of God, into unity and coordinated action, to conciliarity. In this consists the catholicity of the Church and the role of the local bishop.

A feasible option which would both preserve the unity of the local church and minister to people of varying ethnicities and cultures would be for the "mother churches" to send clergy, even bishops, to care for the particular needs of those immigrant flocks, but who would sit on the synod of the local national church, and have their ministries coordinated through the local church. Such a bishop responsible for his ethnic missionary diocese could then be the representative of the American Church to his mother church. This could only promote a sense of unity both among the Churches and within the country, and preserve whatever flow of resources is necessary. Yet the overall vision and mission would remain the same, and the Apostolic canonical order would remain intact.

THE EPISCOPACY: A MONASTIC PERSPECTIVE

The role and nature of episcopal leadership within the Church is the core issue underlying all these institutional problems. All levels of episcopal primacy have been secularized, cast in terms of civil offices. Thus the patriarch is made analogous to an emperor, a bishop to a prince of the Church, etc. They even dress up in Church like Byzantine civil officials. The real nature of ministry, of arch-pastorship, and of Christian leadership, is lost.

What is the structure of leadership within the Church? On all levels, it is a structure of obedience. The presbyters are in a relationship of obedi-

ence to their bishop. The bishops are in a relationship of obedience to their primate. The primate is in the relationship of spiritual father to his bishops. Jurisdiction is about a relationship of obedience, which is precisely responsibility and accountability.

The crisis in the episcopacy is rooted in the breakdown of the basic structure of spiritual obedience, which is the essence of Orthodox Christianity. Spiritual obedience is not subjection and compliance. Rather, it is a hierarchy of love and shared responsibility, a hierarchy of discipleship. What is this but a structure of accountability in a spirit of trust and cooperation, in mutual love and respect? Moreover, it is a complex of very personal relationships. When these relationships become simply institutional, and the personal becomes relativized, the very nature of the Church, which in its very essence is about the actualization of authentic personhood, is distorted.

This breakdown comes from the secularization of the Church's structure by the centuries of imperial subjugation, by the corruption of authority into power, by the reduction of church leadership to an institutional model, and the reduction of membership in the Church to civic duty. The Faith itself was degraded from a personal commitment to Christ to a socio-political ideology. Nominal church membership and nominal Orthodox identity are the foundations of secularization. This kind of corruption began in the fourth century. When the Church was subjected to the Roman, then Ottoman, and then Russian Empires, then to the status of state church, it was effectively reduced to a department of state. The bishops and administration of the Church assumed imperial roles, insignia, and rituals; and with them, the Christian vision of the leader as servant became a hypocritical parody. Of course, there have been notable exceptions.

This led to the separation of charismatic and institutional authority within the Church. What followed was the bureaucratization of church leadership: the reduction of the episcopacy to institutional administration, and the virtual elimination of its pastoral role. Charismatic authority within the church was tolerated among monastic elders, but had little other influence in the life of the Church from the late Byzantine period through the Turkokratia and the suppressions of monasticism in the Russian Empire. The fruit of this was the suppression of creativity and initiative, theologically and organizationally, for fear of being disciplined and

rejected. Instead, personal ambition and competition for position became dominant within the church's institution. Charismatic leadership arising from spiritual vision, the fruit of asceticism, found little context to express itself, even being regarded as dangerous, in the state-controlled institution of the church.

The bishops came to wield power over the lives of their clergy, and instead of being chief pastors, they became distant administrators feared by their clergy. Obedience became confused with compliance and submission. Authority came to be identified with power, humility with subjection, and respect with adulation and sycophancy. Accountability was always referred "upwards:" the bishops to the patriarch and emperor or sultan; the priests to the bishops; while the people simply ignored the hierarchy. Even the monasteries, where the ancient vision of the apostolic church was most clearly maintained, were subjected to this secularization of power and office.

The corrupting fruit of secularization is fear and the lack of trust, hence isolation, autonomy, self-will and the breakdown of the real authority of the episcopacy. It destroys souls and the institution of the Church. Secularization reduces the Body of Christ to a religious organization; it is the form of religion, deprived of its power.

The original vision of the episcopacy was a model of spiritual discipleship, mirroring Christ and the apostles. Christ is the Master: not the master of slaves, but the teacher – not *despota* (!) but *didaskalos*. The apostles were his disciples, his students. Christ did not exercise power over his disciples, but his authority in their lives arose from their voluntary cooperation in love and respect. Thus, He no longer called them disciples, but friends. What made them friends is their obedience – not subjection, but synergy in love. Is this not the model we should be following?

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for man." (Matthew 20 : 25–28)

Christ exercised the role of spiritual father to his disciples. The role of the bishop, as well as that of any headship in the Orthodox Church, is spiritual fatherhood: pastor in a parish, abbot in a monastery, bishop in a diocese, primate in a synod. To be a spiritual father means to be a shepherd and teacher, to exhort, rebuke, and encourage his disciples in their faith, service to one another, and especially, love for one another. It means to take responsibility for the salvation of these particular others, which presumes a relationship of obedience. True obedience is offered freely in love; it is in absolute opposition to the corruption of power and control.

Spiritual obedience is precisely a structure of accountability. The disciples are accountable for their obedience to the father; but the spiritual father is responsible not only to develop each disciple to the fullness of his potential through that obedience, but to unify the whole body through his pastoral role – to keep the whole body in synergy. The authority of the spiritual father comes from the cooperation of his disciples. The spiritual father is thus accountable to his disciples. True obedience is thus a relationship of absolute mutuality. Thus, the ministry of spiritual fatherhood is a charism within the Church and for the sake of the Church, not over it. The bishops and presbyters are part of the People of God, not lords over them; as spiritual fathers, they can only function within this structure of mutual accountability and responsibility, upon which all Christian authority rests.

Christian authority cannot be imposed from above, but has its source in the voluntary cooperation of love, obedience, and mutual accountability. This is conciliarity, sobornost, in the true sense. The bishop recapitulates his local church in himself: this is the charism of ordination. Yet, the bishop has no authority without his church. Ordination only functions within the body of the faithful and is meaningless outside the context of the Church. While grace elevates the one ordained, that grace can only function within a context of the synergy and consensus of the Church – ultimately manifest in the Liturgy. But this vision was distorted by the conflation of the clerical hierarchy and the imperial office, spiritual authority and political power; and the divorce between charismatic and institutional leadership, thus secularizing the clergy.

In other words, the bishops elect the primate of their synod, the pres-

byters *should* elect their bishop, and monastics elect their abbot or abbess. Thus primacy, the authority of the spiritual father, proceeds from the consent of those who offer their obedience to him. And he is responsible to them and for them, as they are to him. Grace acts through and fulfills their synergy and unity of mind and heart in mutual love.

This model works on every level of church organization, and is the core of the evangelical, patristic, and canonical vision. In it there is no place for fear, power, or control but rather, a communion in love and mutual respect in voluntary cooperation.

Even presidency at the Eucharistic celebration is in function of this relationship. The pastor in his parish, abbot in his monastery, bishop in his diocese or primate in his synod, presides because of his role as spiritual father. He is not the spiritual father simply because he presides; this eliminates the personal dimension of ecclesial community leadership. He is the "good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep." This is the ultimate accountability of the spiritual father.

The true spiritual father, like Christ, can never refer or take anything to himself. He always points to God the Father, "from whom every paternity is named." Any kind of ego gratification is spiritual death, but this is especially so in the case of spiritual fatherhood which demands kenotic humility, the death of the ego. The only way to achieve this is spiritual formation.

Spiritual formation has one goal: the ascent to spiritual maturity, to spiritual vision. Spiritual vision, or theoria, is a gift of grace bestowed only after one has prepared oneself to receive it by opening oneself to God through purification, leading to dispassion through ascetic discipline and contemplative prayer. Through the experience of illumination, one gains perspective on all the external forms and issues which constitute temptations. One must first transcend the ego, one must "crucify the old man who is corrupt through the passions of the flesh," in order to attain to a clarity of vision and the gift of discernment. As long as we are controlled by our passions, our motives and desires will be self-serving. Only through attaining dispassion can we be freed from the blindness of our self-centeredness, in order to truly love the other unconditionally, free from any selfish agendas. Then a man has the ability to be a true spiritual father: to discern in

his disciples what holds them back from attaining dispassion and spiritual maturity, having the vision to see what each one needs to grow.

The episcopate, and all primacy, demand this kind of spiritual vision, the charismatic dimension, arising from ascetic self-discipline, in order for the bishops to discern the pastoral task for each person for whom they are responsible, and the clarity of mind to discern the path for the future. This kind of spiritual vision is necessary to discern the will of God, the Presence and the activity of God, in order to guide the church into active cooperation, synergy, with the Divine will, and to see and eliminate any personal agendas or passions which disrupt the communion of the Church with God and with one another.

CONCLUSION: SPIRITUAL FATHERHOOD AND PRIMACY

Real primacy is about leadership, and Orthodox spiritual leadership is inseparable from spiritual fatherhood, in which spiritual children offer their obedience in love to their spiritual fathers, who in turn care for their souls. This model holds true for a monastery with an abbot and his monks, a parish with a pastor and his flock, a diocese with the bishop and his presbyters, or a national church with the primate and his bishops. So it must also hold true on the ecumenical level.

The Church is not a civil society, with its programs, political and social influence, and worldly goals. It is rather a community built on faith in Jesus Christ, united in the common mission of the Gospel. The Church is composed of those who share an identity that comes from faith, and transcends all worldly and secular, ethnic, social, economic and racial divisions. It is the living incarnation of the Kingdom of God on earth. It embraces all human diversity, bringing all to unity in Christ.

Spiritual leadership within the Church, especially the episcopacy, has as its function to lead people into that Kingdom, to illumine and perfect them in the Faith, and thus to transform life in this world one soul at a time. This leadership is primarily a call to repentance, to re-focus on God, and to leave behind all the distractions of sin. This leadership is manifested in authentic spiritual guidance, which exorcises the corruption of sin and ego-centrism, and leads the Church in oneness of mind and heart to the synergetic praise of God in the glorious Liturgy of the Kingdom.