



Contemporary Orthodoxy is the Field of Grace's Action

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Una Sancta



One of the basic principles of the Orthodox ecclesiology (teaching on the nature of Church) is that there is only one holy catholic and apostolic Church, which exists here and now as an empirical, and not just eschatological reality. The Orthodox completely identify their communities with this Church.

As for other Christian communities, which they sometimes call heterodox, there is a variety of views on their relation to the only true Church. Some Orthodox unquestionably refuse to recognise in those communities the true Church of Christ. Some believe that those communities have certain elements of the true Church. It is however out of the Orthodox tradition to recognise in those communities the fullness of Christ's Church. All these beliefs make the Orthodox Church belonging to the family of Churches that support the Una sancta ecclesiology.



How these beliefs correspond to the everyday realities of the Orthodox Church? Are they compatible with the problems that the Orthodox Church faces and the weaknesses that the people from outside observe in her life?

It has been stated some decades ago that the ecclesiology would be in the focus of the theological thought for many years ahead. This prediction appears to be true. The issues discussed below are derivations from the ecclesiological problematic. At the same time, they are not theological abstractions, but the real problems which the Orthodox Churches worldwide live and contend with in accomplishing their mission. I see my primarily task here to identify those problems. I do not feel myself able to give solutions to them. The only thing I will try to do is to give a different perspective to those problems. May be, from apparent disadvantages of the Orthodox everyday life they turn to be advantages?

Between hierarchism and conciliarity

Although the Orthodox believe that their Church constitutes one single body, institutionally, it is a complex system of communities, which are structured hierarchically. It is a common belief that there is a strict hierarchy in the Orthodox Church. This is true, though partly. The Orthodox Church is in fact a fellowship of the Local Churches, without definite hierarchy between them. Also within the Local Churches the conciliar system is quite strong. Alongside the traditional synodal institutions, where mostly Church hierarchs take part, the Orthodox Church retains much of laic participation in the crucial decision-making.

An active laic participation in the Church life was strengthened at the beginning of the XX century. That epoch was marked by radical social changes and revolutions with lower social classes taking upper hand in the political and social life. Similar processes penetrated deep into the life of the Orthodox Churches, having become a sort of 'socialist' fashion. In many Local Orthodox Churches the hierarchical synodal system, consisted exclusively of bishops, was transformed into a mixed system, with combination of both hierarchical and laic elements. In the Russian Church, for instance, this 'socialistic' trend took shape of a so-called 'Local Council' (Поместный Собор). In the Orthodox tradition, the institution of a local council always meant a gathering of bishops only. At the beginning of the XX century, however, under the influence of the social reformations, it was transformed into a sort of clergy-laic congress which included delegates from both clergy and laity. Moreover, this 'socialistic' kind of 'Local Council' was given an ultimate authority in deciding over the most crucial issues of the Church life.

The same processes happened in other Local Churches. For instance, in the Church of Constantinople, the institution with the highest authority consisted of two bodies (δύο σώματα), hierarchical and laic. A



similar institution, Congress of clergy and laity (Κληρικολαϊκή συνέλευση) for a long period of time elected Primates of the Church of Greece and took most important decisions in the life of this Church. This list can be continued. Nowadays the institution of mixed hierarchical-laic councils is in decline. Some Local Churches got rid of it long time ago. Some are just in the transition process of coming back to the hierarchy-only councils.

The process of 'de-laicisation' of the general councils, however, does not always goes smoothly. In the Russian Church, for instance, some ultimately conservative circles resist it as if it would be betrayal of Orthodoxy. This resistance is rather a paradox. Indeed, laicisation of the conciliar institution of the Church, as it was said earlier, was a trend inspired by the socialist movements of the beginning of the XX century. These movements were liberal and eventually strengthened secularism in the societies and, in some cases, went as far as to the military atheism. When the Church applied laicisation to her conciliar institutions, she in fact absorbed liberal values. Nowadays, those who fervently support the laic element in the conciliar system, are ultimate conservatives who pretend to be keepers of an uncompromised Orthodoxy. They do not realise that what they support is in fact a foreign, socialistic and liberal influence upon the Church happened in the period of the social transformations in the beginning of the XX century.

Of course, what is said above does not mean that the Orthodox Church is strictly hierarchical and lacking laic participation. This is especially clear on the level of elementary communities.

Participation of laity in the life of the elementary communities is so active that sometimes it goes too far. It often happens that priests in the communities are fully subjected to the laic communal councils, without right to have a say. This especially happens in the communities where priests do not have any other income but from their parishioners. This is often the case in the United States and other countries where the Churches are not sponsored by the State. There, many parishes are ruled by rich benefactors practically ruling the parish and not by the parochial priests.

'Democratic' elements, as contrary to the principle of hierarchy, exist not only on the level of elementary communities, but also on the level of entire Local Churches. For instance, in some independent or 'autocephalous' Churches, the ties between the dioceses and their administrative centre are rather loose. A good example in this regard is the Church of Greece, where the diocesan bishops (in Greece they have title of Metropolitans) enjoy much of independence from their Primate, who is not even considered to be a Head of the Church, but just a president of the Synod. His abilities to impose his will upon the Synod are very limited. Owing to this 'synodal' system the Church of Greece is administrated not as a unified single Church with a powerful primate, but rather as a confederation of dioceses with quasi-autocephalous diocesan bishops.



Some 'democratic' features can be also distinguished on the level of the inter-Orthodox relations. While the Church of west has a strictly structured hierarchy of the local Churches with the bishop of Rome on top of it, the Church of east is more flexible in this regard. In the eastern Christian world, it is rather unclear what sort of interrelations and hierarchy, if any, between the local Churches should be regarded as traditionally Orthodox. Some believe that the Orthodox oecumene is a sort of confederation of the Local Churches, of which each one enjoys absolutely the same rights and privileges as the others, regardless of their history, size, canonical status (i.e. Patriarchate, Metropolis or Archbishopric). Some believe that the Churches should be separated in two groups, one consisted of ancient Churches (Πρεσβυγενή Πατριαρχεία) which includes the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, on the one hand, and on the other hand those Churches that were established relatively recently (recently means second Millennium). Some interpret this classification as if it would mean that not every local Church has the same rights. For instance, the Church of Constantinople, many believe, is the only that has a right to have dioceses outside her canonical territory.

There is also still a discussion of the nature of the inter-Orthodox relations and autocephaly. What are the local Orthodox Churches at whole? How their unity is related to their independence (autocephaly)? Interesting insights into these matters were given during the recent Meeting of the Primate of the Churches held in Istanbul last October. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in his opening speech criticised the idea of confederation of the Local Churches, which he called 'autocephalism.' He particularly focused on abuses of autocephaly which, in his opinion, loosened the ties between the local Churches: 'This is the healthy significance of the institution of autocephaly: while it assures the self-governance of each Church with regard to its internal life and organization, on matters affecting the entire Orthodox Church and its relations with those outside, each autocephalous Church does not act alone but in coordination with the rest of the Orthodox Churches. If this coordination either disappears or diminishes, then autocephaly becomes "autocephalism" (or radical independence), namely a factor of division rather than unity for the Orthodox Church.' At the same time, he recognised that there is no authority in the Orthodoxy above the Local Church, and the unity of the Churches is secured not by any papacy-like institution, but by the Churches themselves: 'We do not, as during Byzantine times, have at our disposal a state factor that guaranteed – and sometimes even imposed – our unity. Nor does our ecclesiology permit any centralized authority that is able to impose unity from above. Our unity depends on our conscience.'

Whatever interpretation is closer to the truth, it appears that the system of the local Churches in the Orthodox world is in some regard more flexible than the system which was shaped in the western Christian world. It may have its downsides, but its advantages are obvious as well. I would call this system a fellowship, which resembles in some sense a commonwealth of the independent states.

Primacy



The vagueness of the 'horizontal hierarchy' of the Local Churches applies foremost to the issue of primacy as it exists in the Orthodox Church. There is a variety of interpretations of the meaning of primacy in the Orthodoxy. Those interpretations evolve around a nice yet not very comprehensive formula which was accepted by all the local Orthodox Churches: *primus inter pares* – 'first among equals'. This formula, however beautiful it is, does not itemise the rights of the first Church. Neither does it make clear to what extent and in what matters the other Churches should consider positions of the first Church.

It is obvious that the interpretation of the role of the *primus* depends on how the relations between the Local Churches are interpreted. Those who support the idea of 'confederation' of the Churches, would deny any real privilege for the first Church and her primate. Those however who criticise the idea of confederation of the independent Churches want to see a more tangible centre for Orthodoxy. They support the idea that some specific rights should be reserved for the first Church, which is the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

In the variety of the interpretations of what primacy means in the Orthodoxy, there is a consensus at least in one thing – it must not be Roman-like. The fear that some Church one day may take the place of the Roman See is so deeply rooted in the Orthodox consciousness that it can be regarded an essential 'protestant' feature of the Orthodox identity. This fear is shared equally by Greeks and Slavs, Romanians and Georgians, regardless of the fact that they had different historical reasons to reject Roman claims for superiority.

At the same time, clearly rejection of the Roman primacy is not a sufficient basis for building up an Orthodox idea of primacy. Studies of the history of the idea of primacy demonstrate that this idea always existed in the East and derived from the Latin idea of primacy. The East never rejected the idea of primacy. It only warned against deviations from the true primacy, as this can be seen, for instance, from the words of the Patriarch of Constantinople John Kamatiros (XIII c.): 'We agree to venerate Peter as the first disciple of Christ, we agree that his veneration excel the veneration of others, so that he may be glorified for his primacy; we also count the Church of Rome as first in the rank and the honour... However, we do not see that the Scriptures oblige us to recognise her (= the Church of Rome) as either the Mother of the others or as embracing the other Churches.' (Letter to Pope Innocent III)

The idea of a superficial and not real primacy seems to be new to the Orthodox tradition. This idea appeared as a result of the historical processes when alongside the recognised centre of the Orthodox world, Patriarchate of Constantinople, a new centre appeared, supported by the growing political power of Moscow. The Patriarchate of Moscow was established not just as a fifth in the list of the Orthodox Churches, but as a double of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It is not coincidental that initially there were plans to move the See of the Archbishops of Constantinople to Moscow. These plans never became reality. Nevertheless, they gave a push to establishing a new Patriarchate. This Patriarchate appeared to be



the first real Patriarchate established after a long period that followed the era of formation of the Pentarchy of the 'ancient-born Patriarchates'. Historical researches indicate that the other Patriarchates established before Moscow but long after the 'elder Churches' (Serbia, Bulgaria, Georgia), were rather ephemeral, only by 'high name' – ὑψηλῶ ὀνόματι.

Codification of Canon Law

We have just been talking about such concepts as hierarchy between the Churches and the primacy. These concepts are connected with another important issue, that of the Canon Law in the Orthodox tradition. This issue has the same problem as the issues of relations between the local Churches or of the primacy – lack of certainty. Indeed, there is a number of canons that can be interpreted in various, sometimes contradictory, ways. The most obvious one is canon 28 of the IV Ecumenical council held in Chalcedon, which deals with the issue of jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople. On the basis of this canon, the Church of Constantinople claims power over all the communities outside of the traditional jurisdictions, that is to say, in the Diaspora. Some other Churches, first the Moscow Patriarchate, reject any special right over the Diaspora for the Church of Constantinople on the basis of the same canon.

Does the blurriness in interpretations of this and other canons mean that the Canon Law is a weak link in the Orthodox tradition? – I think no. The nature of the Canon Law in the eastern tradition is precedential, like in the British law system. This makes it different from the western Canon Law, which is closer to the Roman legislation system. The canons are either actual historical precedents or they clearly reflect particular problems occurred once upon a time in the life of the Church.

The West at some stage undertook codification of these precedents into abstract rules. Although the East attempted to do the same, such attempts were not successful. An example which is often mentioned in this regard is the Pedalion by St Nikodemos the Hagiorite who lived in the XVIII – beginning of the XIX centuries. Many believe that Pedalion was an 'eastern' attempt of codification of the canons. I personally think that this is not exactly true. St Nikodemos in fact undertook extended interpretations of the canons. His work is not a codification of the canonical cases, but rather a collection of scholia on the canons, a genre traditional for the Orthodox Canon Law and implemented in the works of other eastern canonists.

Because of the precedential nature of the Orthodox Canon Law, the judicial system in the Orthodox Church is 'personified.' The right to judge is concentrated mostly in the hands of bishops or gatherings of bishops. They, on the one hand, exercise judgement on the basis of the historical precedents described in the canons. On the other hand, they investigate concrete situations, which they try to interpret in terms of the ancient precedents. So, at the basement of the Orthodox judicial system, there is interpretation, and not



a universal rule, there is personality of bishop, and not an apparatus of judicial clerics. Probably, this is why the institution of the Church courts remains rather undeveloped in the Orthodox world.

The interpretational character of the Orthodox Canon Law is one of the reasons why there is so much unclarity about the issues which were considered earlier, namely the relationships between the Local Churches and the role of the *primus inter pares*. In fact, there are too many interpretations of these issues, which do not always help to come to consensus.

However, this does not mean that the consensus is unachievable. It needs some more negotiations and talks to reach a common understanding of these issues, which the Orthodox constantly do. The interpretational character of the Orthodox Canon Law allows various ecclesiological concepts to float. A historical inquiry into the concepts of autocephaly, autonomy, primacy, etc., allows us to conclude that these concepts were and still are constantly developing. These concepts were always and still are dependent on the concrete political and social circumstances. This, in turn, happened exactly because of the precedential character of the Orthodox Canon Law which is based on the interpretation.

Church and Nation

One of the ecclesiological concepts that underwent dramatic modifications through the centuries is that of the local Church. During its journey through time, the idea of local Church developed from local community to national Church.

A very important notion that pushed this development forward was the notion of canonical territory. This notion is basic to the Orthodox Canon Law, as it is a starting point for any kind of structural organisation of any local Church. At the basement of this notion is the principle 'one city – one bishop.' This principle implies that the Church is organised according to geographical criteria and covers neighbourhood of cities. A local Church is the Church of certain territory. Its structure reflects the way in which the cities, which are covered by her, are related to each other. A local Church may be the Church of a province, state, or nation.

Indeed, it was the notion of canonical territory that pushed gradual transformation of a local Church into a national Church. The national Churches emerged surprisingly recently, a couple of centuries ago, when after the French revolution national states started appearing on the soil of the Ottoman Empire. These states which were shaped by the national criteria, wanted the Orthodox Churches on their territories to be



organised and functioning on the basis of the same national criteria. And the Churches yielded to these demands of the national states. It does not mean that the process of 'nationalisation' of the local Churches went smoothly. There was resistance to it, primarily from the Church of Constantinople which defended the original idea of the local Church being shaped by geographical and not national criteria. However, resistance of Constantinople failed, and in the modern time the idea of local Church is connected with the idea of national Church.

There are also modifications of the concept of national Churches. For instance, the Russian Orthodox Church is not exactly a national Church, but rather multinational, because she embraces many nations that dwell on the territory of the Russian Federation and its neighbourhood. Nevertheless, she has a different attachment, that to the State. Therefore, she is a rather a State Church and her policies are to a large extent dictated by etatism.

Church and State

Etatism is not as bad as it may look at the first glance. At least, the local Churches do not have bad feelings about it, since their attachment to any sort of political power, whether this power has a form of empire, national state, international structures etc., is quite dear to them. Attachment to the state power is one of the characteristic features of the eastern Christian world. This feature should not be condemned a priori, as it has become a logical result of the development of the historical circumstances, on which I should dwell more.

There are two kinds of the local Churches in the Christian world. One kind are the ancient Churches that were established before Constantine and went through severe persecutions from the hostile Roman state. Those Churches have been vaccinated against collaboration with the state and even in the periods of the state favouritism kept memories about state-sponsored persecutions. They know that however nice may be the state in its attitude to the Church, one day it may turn into a hostile enemy. Those Churches try to keep reasonably distance from the state. Some of them, like the Roman Church, went as far as to establishing its own quasi-state structure, to secure at least relative independence from the state. Some, as the Church of Constantinople, worked out mechanisms of symphonia, which allowed clear distinction between the responsibilities of the Church and the state. In my personal opinion, the rationale of symphonia was not so much to harmonise, but to distinguish the realms of the Church and the state. Although the mechanisms of symphonia historically often failed, at least they were declared as an ideal model of coexistence of the Church and the state.

Another kind of the local Churches are those established with a direct involvement of the state authorities:



kings, knjazes, vojvodas and so forth. These Churches have a similar pattern of birth. A chief of a people accepted Christianity and then forced his people to do the same. Christianity was spread therefore from above, and the State authority substituted apostolic mission. The Church was established by a commandment and with the direct administrative and financial support of the state. Such a pattern does not bring any negative memory about the state. Something the opposite, in the memory of the people, the very being of the Church remains connected with the state authority.

In the history of these Churches, civil authorities always played an important role regarding many aspects of Church life. They founded monasteries and churches, promoted and installed to high positions their own primates and hierarchs. Sometimes they even decided what doctrine should the Church keep. Probably, the most illustrative example in this regard is the role of the emperors in the doctrinal disputes held in the Ethiopian Church. The official doctrine of this Church, including its Tewahedo Christology, was largely shaped by the imperial decrees.

Although many of these Churches inherited Byzantine symphonia, they easily dropped it, under the State's demand. This happened, for instance, in the Churches which adopted the so-called synodal system. Most prominent examples of such Churches are in Russia (in the XVIII-XIX centuries) and in Greece (in the XIX century). Synodal system is a way of administering the Churches, which is a result of transformation of the traditional Patriarchal administration to a collective administering performed by the Holy Synod and controlled by the state through its representatives to the Synod. The Church in this situation is turned into a sort of civil ministry of religious affairs. Her policies are supposed to be coherent with the policies of the state.

Quite surprisingly, even though the state, by introducing the synodal system, violated the rights of the Church and specificity of her inner life, the people of the Church, notably the most conservative ones, remained faithful to the political regime that supported the synodal system, even after the fall of that regime. This is the case, for instance, in the Russian Church, where the 'synodal period' is considered by many to be a sort of 'golden age' for which people feel nostalgia.

I do not want to say that such sort of attachment of the people of the Church to a state or to a political regime is good or bad. I just want to say that this is a specific feature of those Churches which were established with the efforts of the state.

Orthodox civilisation

In the recent years, the issue of the so-called Orthodox civilisation is widely discussed by many Orthodox theologians and publicists. This issue was initially raised not by the Orthodox. For the first time it was



thoroughly explored in the works of the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee. However, it was not his research that made the issue a topic for discussing by the Orthodox, but the works of Samuel P. Huntington. Owing to this American researcher, the Orthodox started developing their own concept of Orthodox civilisation, particularly as opposite to the Western civilisation. According to this theory, Orthodoxy has shaped a huge space with common values. This space embraces traditional Orthodox countries that have close brotherly boundaries. This space and its values are incompatible with the civilisation created by the Latin Church. This incompatibility causes religious, cultural, and political tensions between these two civilisations.

In my personal view, the theory of the Orthodox civilisation, as it is expounded earlier, is not exactly correct. The so-called Orthodox civilisation is something more complicated than what the supporters of this theory think. Indeed, Orthodoxy has had a great deal of influence upon the Orthodox nations, such as Greek, Romanian, Russian, Georgian and so forth. However, it was not only Orthodoxy that had its impact upon them. Also cultural, geographical, national, etc., differences played a decisive role in formation of these nations. Being mixed with Orthodoxy, they shaped the modern profile of these nations. The Orthodox world, thus, is a conglomerate of the nations which, on the one hand, share common features of mentality, keep similar attitude to the basic categories of law, justice, human person, society, etc. On the other hand, the Orthodox nations may be quite dissimilar. They may belong to different and even antagonistic civilisations.

In my opinion, the so-called Orthodox civilisation is actually shared by several geopolitical civilisations: western, eastern, and Arabic. The centre of the western Orthodox civilisation is Constantinople. Moscow is the core of the eastern Orthodox civilisation. Antioch is apparently the centre of the Arabic Orthodox civilisation. Orthodoxy gives to each of the mentioned civilisations its own apochromatism, though it does not melt them into a separate 'Orthodox' civilisation.

There are tensions and conflicts that happen between various local Orthodox Churches, which I would explain through the tensions that exist between the global geopolitical civilisations. Thus, I would explain the tensions between Moscow and Constantinople by the civilisational differences of the worlds they represent: actually, these are the tensions between global east and global west. Constantinople managed to consolidate those Churches that belong to the states that opted for the western civilisation, while the Russian Church, following the Russian state, keeps her adherence to the global east. The tensions between the western and the Arab worlds are reflected in the conflicts between the Orthodox Greeks and the Orthodox Arabs in Israel. The Greeks of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem are closer to the pro-western Israeli than to their Arab flock, and this is a source of antagonism between Greeks and Arabs.

A recent war between Russia and Georgia is a sad and yet eloquent illustration of how virtual is the 'Orthodox civilisation.' Georgia with its orientation to the western world got a full support from the



Georgian Church. The Russian Church fully supported the military campaign against Georgia. Although the two Churches managed to avoid open conflict, a contradiction between their positions is obvious, and these positions are clearly predetermined by the positions of their Governments.

Another illustration of how weak is the concept of the 'Orthodox civilisation' is the situation in Ukraine. This country consists of two parts, one of which, in the West, has a strong orientation to Europe, while the other one, in the East, is attached to Russia. Huntington mentions the example of Ukraine as an illustration of his concept of civilisations being shaped by the religious factor. He understands the barrier between east and west of Ukraine as a 'line that divides Orthodox eastern Ukraine from Uniate western Ukraine' (*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Touchstone, 1997, 37). When researched more accurately, however, the example of Ukraine illustrates exactly the opposite, because in both parts of Ukraine the presence of Orthodoxy is dominating. Both the pro-western and pro-Russian Ukraine are overwhelmingly Orthodox. Moreover, the number of the Orthodox communities in the western Ukraine exceeds the number of similar communities in the eastern Ukraine. Therefore, it is not Orthodoxy that dictates the opposite civilisational choice for the two parts of Ukraine, but the fact that Ukraine is located on the crossroads of two major geopolitical systems, that it equally belongs to the West and to the East.

It should be said in addition that Orthodoxy does not help to reconcile the two antagonistic parts of Ukraine either. Moreover, Ukrainian Orthodoxy itself faces a danger to be split into two parts, alongside the civilisational borderlines within the country. Thus, there are plans to invite the Patriarchate of Constantinople to adopt a part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church which has been in the state of schism since early 90-s. As a result, there is a danger of splitting the Church into two parts, one under the jurisdiction of Moscow, and the other one under the jurisdiction of Constantinople. This will cause a major confrontation between Moscow and Constantinople worldwide and in Ukraine. The real reason of this unfortunate confrontation will be not a violation of rights of one of the jurisdictions, but a civilisational choice of one of the parts of Ukraine.

I also believe that the division of the Universal Church into western and eastern parts that occurred in the XI century, was caused not so much by religious or doctrinal factors, but by geopolitical realities that developed independently from religion. Doctrinal differences at that time were exaggerated and abused by the politicians who persuaded their geopolitical goals.

At the same time, it would be an oversimplification to say that the 'Orthodox civilisation' is divided by major geopolitical systems, and to put a full stop. Orthodoxy has a power to bridge the gaps between civilisations and overcome geopolitical expediencies. Unfortunately, this was not the case in the XI century, when geopolitics won over the unifying power of Christianity. That mistake should not be repeated now, in the antagonism between Moscow and Constantinople.



As an example of such unifying power I would like to mention the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, which brings together Ukrainian west and east, however difficult it is. Nevertheless, she may fail to do this, if two jurisdictions, those of Moscow and Constantinople be established in parallel. This will deepen the civilisational gap between two parts of Ukraine.

Conclusion

In my presentation, I have touched on a few issues that are in the focus of discussions in the Orthodox world. These issues are considered by some observers as weak points of Orthodoxy. Namely, they believe that these issues are the reasons of apparent disunity, internal tensions, and even conflicts within the Orthodox world, inability of the Orthodox to have and demonstrate their unified position concerning various topics. However, I would argue that such evaluations are correct. They seem to be too superficial, because whatever may be considered as problem, at the same time can be an advantage.

Thus, the local Churches may be disunited, too national and state-orientated, but this helps them to be closer to the life of ordinary people and avoid secularisation, which occurs in the western world. The Orthodox Church may be lacking their own Pope, however, this provides more space and responsibility of each Church both in the matters of the global Orthodoxy and in her internal life. The Churches may be missing definite and universal rules, but this urges them to be more creative in self-ordering and self-organisation. In other words, the problems that the Orthodox face due to the specificity of the Orthodox way of life, allow them to be alert and sober, struggling for the pan-Orthodox unity not as something given and constant, but as a goal which should be achieved on the everyday basis. Last but not least, existing problems create a plenty of space for God to intervene in the life of His Church, and make God's presence always appreciable.