THE CHARACTERS OF “PRIMACY”
IN THE LIFE AND TRADITION OF THE CHURCH
ACCORDING TO ST. THEODORE THE STUDITE

Vasileios A. Tsigkos

KEYWORDS: St. Theodore the Studite, Church, primacy, primate, authority, Body of Christ, communion, koinonia, pentarchy, primacy of truth, charismata, antidosis, perichoresis, primacy and eschat

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the sessions of the inter-Christian dialogues currently in progress, it is commonly repeated that the surest basis for approach and the most stable criterion of any agreement or disagreement upon various theological issues cannot be anything else but the ecclesial life and tradition of the first millennium.1 During the final decades of the eighth century and the first decades of the ninth, one extraordinary and dynamic personality stands prominent, a great theologian of the Church, St. Theodore the Studite (759-826).

This venerable father, the voice and vigilant conscience of the Church during his era, is commemorated in all the Synaxaria and festal calendars of the Church, while his memory is celebrated by the entirety of Christendom, both in the East and in the West. With his struggles and writings he bore witness to the identity of the faith and life of the Church during a particularly crucial period in its history. Within his teaching, one can find noteworthy

positions relating to many different theological and more specific ecclesiological topics.

In the pages that follow, we will attempt to present a survey on the particular characteristics that outline the nature of authority and primacy in accordance with the life and tradition of the Church. These are foundational, controversial, but also timely ecclesiological issues that have produced an especial inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian interest. For this reason, it is certain that the answers to these questions, by means of examination and interpretation of the sources, will be able to contribute constructively and creatively to the enrichment of the related bibliography, and by extension to the desired textual evidence for specific topics that are being discussed in the theological dialogues, primarily with the Roman Catholics.\footnote{We must point out that the choice of this specific topic, with focus on the texts of St. Theodore, was motivated not only by the timeless interest of primacy in the operation of any organization, especially the Church, but also by the massive existing bibliography that has not been fully taken advantage of and has even at times been misinterpreted. This bibliography pertains to the important contribution of this venerable father concerning the character of primacy that is suitable to the life and tradition of the Church. For the different readings, approaches, and misinterpretations of some of his positions, see V. Tsigkos, Ἐκκλησιολογικὲς θέσεις τοῦ ἁγίου Θεοδώρου τοῦ Στουδίτου. Αὐθεντία καὶ Πρωτεῖο, ed. Orthodox Kypseli, Thessaloniki 1999, p. 24-25, 249, 253-261.}

I. POWER AND PRIMACY IN THE CHURCH

In our era, despite significant progress in many fields and the democratization of social structures, restrictive and oppressive situations are often still observed in various domains: overly centralized models of governance, despotic behaviour, non-participatory procedures, and a lack of actual communion.\footnote{See for example Matt. 10:1; John 1:12 RSV.} However, in the life of the Church, even from its earliest days, the topic of power (exousia)\footnote{See for example Matt. 10:1; John 1:12 RSV.}, or even authority (authentia), is addressed; Nevertheless even though it has a different significance, both in character and content, this does not always correspond to reality.
The character of ‘primacy’ in the life and tradition of the Church

Power in the life of the Church is expressed through various entities (phoreis). The most important of these, without implying any hierarchy or order, are Holy Scripture, the Apostolic and Patristic Tradition and teachings, the Holy Canons, the function of the synodal institution, and the authority of the primate; that is to say, the head of each level, whether it be abbot, bishop, patriarch, or pope. All of the above constitute expressions of the charismatic dimension of the Church and emanate from Christ, the head of the ecclesial body, a fact which implies that they receive meaning, coexist and cooperate within him. These also have the bishop and the eucharistic community as a stable point of reference and are verified and scrutinized through the daily liturgical practice of the Church.

It must however be mentioned that in order to fully understand these things, they must be considered theologically and interpreted precisely, within the spiritual context of their time of course, and upon the basis of the diachronic experience of the ecclesiastical community. This is due to the fact that, as has been noted many times throughout the history of the Church, every abuse of power or misinterpretation of primacy of any kind provokes disfunction and disharmony, oftentimes creating situations within the ecclesial body that are painful and difficult to overcome.

Regarding the issue of primacy in the life and tradition of the Church, St. Theodore, as abbot of the renowned monastery of Studion, has the experience of an orderly functioning cenobitic monastery with a brotherhood of almost one thousand monks as his reference point. This does not hinder him, however, from formulating opinions concerning the Church’s ecumenical nature, the so-called “Church under heaven.” Indeed, if we take into consideration the fact that for St. Theodore, each community of faithful, even the smallest group, constitutes the Church in its entirety. Then, we can


5 In one of his Epistles, taking into account the words of the Lord: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20), he maintains that the opinion of the Church “is defined” by a few, since even three Orthodox are enough to comprise the Church. Epistles 39, 78-79.
move from a part, such as his monastic brotherhood, outwards to the whole Church in its universal dimension, without it being thought of as a frivolous arbitrariness nor an impermissible transgression.

II. THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST AND ITS INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

Many of the Fathers of the Church have dealt with the Pauline description of the Church as the Body of Christ. This teaching is also prevalent in the Studite’s writings. St. Theodore, without feeling the need to further define the Church, considers her to be the “Body of Christ.” ⁶ All of her members comprise a living organism with one head. For, “we are all one body in Christ Jesus, who is the head of all.” ⁷ This venerable father, in reference to First Corinthians, where the reception of the gifts (charismata) of the Holy Spirit by all the members of the Church is discussed, regularly states “now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it,” ⁸ giving a primary description of the mystery of the Church.

The Church is a community of faithful that is characterized by the synthesis of the multiplicity of its members. Thus, “in Christ we, though many, form one body” and simultaneously we are all “members one of another.” ⁹ As the Apostle Paul underlines, it is a body “with many parts” (polymerēs), in which, “God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” ¹⁰ Moreover, he describes the variety of the gifts distributed by the Holy

---

⁶ See Epistles 221, 87-90; Epistles 446, 5 etc. See also G. Florovsky, Τὸ Σῶμα τοῦ ζῶντος Χριστοῦ. Μιὰ ὀρθόδοξος ἑρμηνεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας (transl. I. Papadopoulos), ed. Patriarchal Institute of Patristic Studies, Thessaloniki ² 1981, p. 33.

⁷ Epistles 441, 33; Epistles 452, 38-41; Epistles 460, 51-55; Small Catecheses in the edition of E. Auvray, A. Tougard, Sancti Patris Nostri et Confessoris Theodori Studitis praepositi Parva Catechesis, Graecum textum e codicibus multis nunc primum critice descriptum, uti et Latinam, J Harduini interpretationem nondum vulgatum, Apud Victorem Lecoffre, Paris 1891, Small Catecheses ⁷.

⁸ 1 Cor. 12:27. Epistles 215, 8-9; Epistles 276, 86-88; Epistles 460, 32; Epistles 547, 8-9; Great Catecheses in the edition of A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Τοῦ ὁσίου Θεοδώρου τοῦ Στουδίτου Μεγάλη Ἐκκλησία, Ἐκδόσεις Κεραμεός, Great Catecheses 93 etc.

⁹ Rom. 12:5; see Epistles 441, 33.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 12:18.
The character of "primacy" in the life and tradition of the Church

Spirit. Assuredly, all the members have been endowed with the diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit and comprise the same body. Despite the fact that the Holy Spirit is one, the gifts, just as the vessels, of the Holy Spirit, are not equal but varied, and to each is given a different gift. In this charismatic body, all the members can move in their own way (eterotrópos), according to the gift that they have been given, the ministry they have been called to, or the function that they have taken on, thus revealing the functioning reciprocal coexistence and cooperation between the different gifts, so that the whole body can be benefited and built up.

The varying distinctions of the gifts and the ministries (diakonimata) are not innate differences nor qualitative, but only functional (leitourgikēs). There is only a charismatic differentiation concerning the ministry of the members in the functioning of the whole body, which does not lead to a standard worldly approach and evaluation that would in turn result in the under-evaluation or over-evaluation of one member in comparison with another. For this reason, from the outset, there are no grounds for any dialectical juxtaposition, which could be turned into a dilemma or a conflict between the gifts (charismata) of the Holy Spirit and the offices (axiōmata) of the Church.

The diversity of the gifts cultivates an interchange (antidosis) and interdependence between them, leading to the loving and mutual embrace (peri-choresis) of the members amongst themselves, which is possible because of the life, order and structure of the entire ecclesial body. For "let us offer our abilities to each other and let us each share our gifts to one another as we would with our own body." The differentiation of gifts exists between the members of the charismatic body, and it is not an ontological differentiation, but a functional one, since there is equality between the members, as they are "equal members of the body of Christ." The organic and unbreakable unity

---

11 See Small Catecheses 93.
13 Great Catecheses 117.
14 Small Catecheses 131.
of Christ, as head of his body’s members, establishes and strengthens the unity and community, which the members are called to develop amongst themselves.

One of the basic positions in the teachings of St. Theodore regarding the organization of everyday life at the Monastery of Stoudion is the necessity for a specific hierarchy and classification of offices and ministries, as well as the recognition, respect and Christ-like submission that each member must show towards their superiors in the hierarchy of the monastery. Having taken up the role of primate as abbot of the large brotherhood of monastics, he was often faced with many problems stemming from the monk’s tendencies to seek out positions of power and primacy. In dealing with these instances, he formulated noteworthy positions which have wider ecclesiastical interest.

Just as in every living organism, the head cannot be conceived of without the body. In the same way, there cannot be a body without a head, since “whatever does not have a head is also chaotic, unorganized and divided.” The Church is not a chaotic, anarchic community without structures, organization and institutions. Instances of anarchism and disorder have no place in the Church’s life, given that God himself is not a God of disorder, but of order and peace.

Order presupposes the classification of ministries and offices in the ecclesial body. Because of this, the Church needed a very thorough institutional organization from early on. For precisely this reason, from very early on, the life of the Church required stronger institutional organization both for the manifestation and establishment of the unity of the faith and experience of the ecclesial body as well as for pastoral reasons such

---

15 For the organization of the ecclesiastical offices during the first centuries of the life of the Church, see V. Stefanidis, Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἑιστορία: Ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς μέχρι σήμερον, ed. Astir, Athens 1998, p. 42-51.

16 He had fully and clearly laid out all of the ministries with the specific duties of each member of the monastic brotherhood. For the life and tradition in the Studite monastery, as well as for the well known Studite reformation in its whole extent, see the fully documented study of Fr. J. Leroy, «La réforme Studite», in: Il monachesimo orientale. Atti del convegno di studi orientali che sul predetto tema si tenne a Roma, sotto la direzione del Pontificio Istituto Orientale, nei giorni 9-12 April 1958, p. 181-214.

17 Epistles 368, 17-18.

18 1 Cor. 14:33, "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace".
The character of ‘primacy’ in the life and tradition of the Church

as spiritual care and protection against the danger of heresy, division, and schism.

The institutional organization of the Church distinguishes between the gifts, offices and ministries and is formed with specific structure, hierarchy and institutions. From its first appearance in history, the Church had a specific order of ministries and functions, and formed an initial form of governance (politeuma). In other words, already from the apostolic period, the Church emerged with order, as well as with some form of primacy.\(^{19}\) It is well known that from the outset of the life and tradition of the church, the principle of spiritual fatherhood\(^{20}\) and obedience existed, according to the standard established by Christ, the head of the Church, who was in obedience to the Father.\(^{21}\) Worthy of special mention is the paternal character of Christ, which is foretold of in the Old Testament; “everlasting Father.”\(^{22}\) From Christ the Father “every family in heaven and on earth is named,”\(^{23}\) which means that from him comes every charismatic and institutional expression that exists in the Church. Consequently, in addition to the charismatic dimension of the primate’s function in the Church as a gift of the Holy Spirit, the paternal character is also connected to the Incarnation and the prolongation of Christ into history.

All of the above-mentioned relate directly and organically to the reality that the Church is the Body of Christ and is based upon a eucharistic-episcopo-centered basis. Moreover, the nature of the Church is eucharistic and all the gifts and offices are liturgical; in other words, they are connected to the holy Eucharist, the “the most fundamental mystery,”\(^{24}\) the recapitulation of

\(^{19}\) See J Thess. 5:12.

\(^{20}\) See J Cor. 4:14-15.

\(^{21}\) See Phil. 2:5-11. For the significance that St. Theodore gave to the role of spiritual father, see Oratio funebris in Platonem ejus patrem spiritualem, PG 99, 804-849. Also related, see V. Christoforidis, Η πνευματικὴ πατρότης κατὰ Συμεὼν τὸν Νέον Θεολόγον, ed. Pournaras, Thessaloniki 1977, p. 13-19, 91 et al.; V. Tsikos, Ο Ανακαινισμός τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατὰ τῆ δογματικὴ διδακτική τοῦ ἁγίου Συμεών τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου, ed. Pournaras, Thessaloniki 2009, p. 174-177, 239.

\(^{22}\) See Isa. 9:6.

\(^{23}\) Eph. 3, 15.

\(^{24}\) Theodore the Studite, Antirrheticus Primus adversus Iconomachos, PG 99, 340.
divine Economy, the mystery of “the whole Christ” (totus Christus), who for these reasons is the “offerer and the offered” (according to the words of the Divine Liturgy), presiding himself as archpriest of the holy Eucharist. This means that the Church cannot exist without the holy Eucharist nor “without a bishop”. The people of God, the faithful, cannot be “without a shepherd” (anepiskopoi). In other words, there is no eucharistic community without hierarchy, over which presides the head, namely the bishop, because there can be no body without a head. For exactly this reason, all are required to “depend on the support of the bishops” in the Church.

The fact that the diversity and distinction of gifts and ministries exist in the body of Christ is reflected in the life of the Church with the development of structures, institutional manifestations, and offices. These reciprocate, as they highlight the fruits of the charismatic life of the members of the community. Moreover, it is not by chance that all the gifts, offices, and institutions have as their stable point of reference, of interpretation and application, but also of critical supervision, the daily liturgical practice and the diachronic experience and conscience of the ecclesial body.

The different offices, such as for example that of the primate, not only do not destroy and abolish the equality of its members, but conversely strengthen, forge and reveal the unity and fullness of the whole body. In addition, the safeguarding and strengthening of the unity of the body does not allow for differentiation between the members to be seen higher as leaders or lower as followers. Also, it does not allow for exaggerated self-promotion and seeking after positions and honors by some members at the expense of others. Precedence must be accompanied by certain characteristics that stem from the life, liturgical experience, and ethos of the Church.

The rudimentary foundational principle and stable rule, which all members of the Church are required to adhere to, is given with the exhortation of the Apostle Paul. Everything that happens within the Church must be carried

---

26 Epistles 501, 5-6.
27 Epistles 267, 28-29.
out “decently and in order.” Each person, aware of “their own position”, is required to act appropriately according to their rank. They are called to act with discernment “within their own boundaries”. The restriction of each member to only do what is appropriate, “each according to their own rank” ensures the “ecclesial order,” the peace, concord, and harmonic, smooth functioning of the entire community so that it can work as a healthy body. The orderliness in the correct functioning of the institutions and offices is connected with the responsibility and maturation in Christ of each faithful member. Through all this, it will become clear that the community of the faithful is a true communion of faithful, it is truly “a cenobitic Church.”

All who have any kind of primacy in ecclesial life, together with the people of God - of course each in their own respective rank, function, and order - comprise, build and coalesce the ecclesial body with “unifying and connecting donation and grace of the Holy Spirit” and with the “cornerstone” being Christ, who is the fountain, source, beginning and end of every expression of primacy in His Church. This clearly implies that no office can be isolated and made autonomous from the entirety of the life of the Church in her varied manifestations.

III. EXERCISING PRIMACY

Throughout the New Testament, as well as patristic theology, the meaning of primacy, and accordingly the office of the primate, does not simply have a canonical basis, but also has a primarily theological foundation and significance. In the life of the ecclesial community, all of the primates, she-
pherds, and bishops, are archpriests of Christ and participate in the priesthood of the “good shepherd”, the “primate”, and “true arch-shepherd" of His Church. Christ is the head of the entire ecclesial body. Simultaneously, his self-characterization as a servant, and not the one being served, shows the deeper interpretation of the office of the primate. In this spirit, despite the fact that he had the office of abbot and spiritual leader, St. Theodore exercised the office of his primacy and possessed “authentic authority” over his fellow monastics. Yet, he did not wish to act “authoritatively and despotsically”, but “brotherly and lovingly.” In other words, those who have taken on a specific office are obliged to act in a brotherly and loving manner, according to the Lord’s example. Thus, if the head of the Church himself serves everyone, then each and every member of the body is called to serve the other members to a degree directly relating to their hierarchical rank.

In one of the Great Catechisms entitled “On keeping the divine commandments and on the restraint of the Primates from being authoritative towards the brotherhood”, addressing the first amongst the brethren, the holy father explains to them how they must exercise their service: “and you who give orders and commands, both first and those below the first, I implore you do not simply pile on commands and directives on those who are serving carelessly by some authoritative mandate or unsympathetic and indiscrete power, but with loving restraint, with mindful understanding, and with a tested method.”

2004, p. 249-264. The office of primate, the leader in the Church, and the interpretation of the exercise of this role is a major topic that the entirety of the Church has always been concerned with and always will. Specifically, the 34th apostolic canon states that in every region the heads of the local churches, the bishops, must recognize one of the bishops, the bishop of the capital, as “first” (primus) and must not do anything without him: “and must consider him as head and not do anything beyond his approval.” See G. Rallis – M. Potlis, Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν Κανόνων…, Athens 1966, vol. 2, p. 45; Panteleimon Rodopoulos (Metropolitan of Tyroloi and Serention), «Εκκλησιολογικὴ θεώρησις τοῦ τριακοστοῦ τετάρτου Ἀποστολικοῦ Κανόνος», Κληρονομία 11 (1979) p. 1-11.

34 Epistles 14, 24-25; Epistles 222, 20-21; Epistles 530, 24-25; Great Catechises 45.
35 Col. 1:18; Epistles 232, 13; Epistles 469, 23-24.
36 See Matt. 20:28, “the Son of man came not to be served but to serve”.
37 Great Catechises 34.
38 Great Catechises 120.
In one of St. Theodore’s Epistles regarding the practices of the Apostles, he asks his disciples a crucial question: "who among the Apostles is greater than Peter and John? But even John allows Peter to speak, Peter is silent while Paul speaks." He points out that none of the Apostles tries to seize the primacy; but they have as their goal the adherence to order and that which is useful "not so that any one of them might seize the primacy, but that their necessities be met and that they see to maintaining order." Having the apostolic practice as a prototype, he encourages the recipients of his epistle to also become imitators of the saints. Moreover, there is no "greed" (pleonexia) between the Apostles since their calling to the office of apostle is common amongst them.

In the same spirit, primacy in the Church cannot be an exercise of worldly force, power, domination, arrogance, egotism, oppression. Among the members of the body of Christ, there can be no expressions of apathy, indiscretion, or antisocial misanthropic practices. Conversely, the manifestations of those exercising the office of primate in the life of the ecclesial community are true love, discernment, the offering of servitude and giving, and even the resignation and withdrawal for the sake of one’s neighbor, “for their benefit,” the building up of the whole ecclesial body. “Does anyone submit to his neighbor out of love? Who submits to their neighbor out of love? Whoever wants to be first among you, let him be your servant.”

In the life of the Church, whoever wishes to be in a position of authority, let him also surpass others in humility and service towards them. For, “whoever desires humility is exalted above the rest” This is why this holy father exhorts his disciples saying: “rise up and compete with each other.” In other words, all those who seek to take on some office of primacy must struggle together, compete amongst themselves and in the spiritual “stadium of virtues,” in order to claim “the primacy of asceticism.” Here it is noted that St. Theodore chooses to highlight and describe a “primacy of asceticism,” which is in many ways an original characterization, instead of referring to well-established expressions (terminus technicus), such as “primacy of honor” or

---

39 Epistles 236, 14-19.
41 Great Catecheses 99.
“primacy of authority,” expressions which do not appear in any of his writings.

Interpreting the exhortation of the Lord, “whoever would be great among you must be your servant,”

St. Theodore notes that whoever seeks to be seated “in the first place of honor” (protoklisia) or “in the first seat” (protokathedria), "be exalted therefore in humility, seeking primacy in deference to others." This means that they must be first in seeking out those which are considered to be the most humble ministries in the Church. According to St. Theodore, every member of the ecclesial body is equally required to “be first” in asceticism, brotherly love, humility, service, in deference to one’s neighbor, submission, and obedience to their spiritual fathers and to their leaders. Therefore, when those with the office of primacy in the life of the Church acquire these characteristics and exercise them within the eucharistic context, then, as has been aptly noted, the primacy must be sought “not between persons, but rather between ministries,” following the Lord’s command and model of service: “whoever would be great among you must be your servant.”

IV. SUBMISSION OF THE PRIMATES TO THE PRIMATES

The equality of all the members of the Church does not lead to a state in which all hierarchical structure is leveled and everyone is equal, resulting in the disturbance of the order and rhythm of the ecclesial body. It is, however, necessary for those who are younger to be subordinate to their presbyters, but also amongst themselves to be subordinate to one another. Also, the subordination of all to their respective spiritual leaders, to their primates, is also necessary. However, the primates cannot be thought of as ecclesiastically

---

43 Great Catecheses 13.
45 See Matt. 20:26; Great Catecheses 13.
46 See 1 Pet. 5:5; Eph. 5:21.
The character of "primacy" in the life and tradition of the Church

unaccountable and insubordinate, since they in turn are also required to subject "to one another."  

From the study of the entire corpus of the Studite, it is clear that when speaking about gifts and institutional expressions of the life of the Church, we would say that this must include: interdependence (allilosymlirose), collaboration (sylleitourgia), exchange (antidosis), interpenetration (alleloperiCHOresis), and communion (koinonia) of the gifts, offices, and institutions. The concept of communion can especially help in overcoming the apparent dichotomy that often times seems to exist between the primates and the primatE in the life of the Church. For example, the synodal institution at all of its levels, as a charismatic and simultaneously contemporary institutional manifestation of unity and communion of all the local Churches, has been primarily and inextricably connected with the eucharistic community over which the bishop presides.

The Church and holy Eucharist are organically and inseparably connected with the concept of communion. In holy Eucharist, the faithful participate "in the communion in the body and blood of Christ," and through it is revealed the "communion of the Holy Spirit," which "holds together the entire institution of the Church." In addition, an ecclesial community cannot be conceptualized in and of itself, but only in unceasing communion with Christ, and with the members of its body in communion with each other, as well as simultaneously with all the members of every other Church that confesses the same faith.

The above theological references are directly related to our topic. They highlight the crucial point that all of the gifts, institutions and offices must


48 Because of Holy Communion, the Church finds itself in a constant "synod". This means that when the ecclesial body is functioning, then it is living the reality of the synod and consequently, the nature of the Church is synodal. See B. Bobrinskoy, «How does the Church remain in the truth? I. An Orthodox response», Concilium vol. 148 (1981), p. 181.

49 See 1 Cor. 10:16; Epistles 453.

50 2 Cor. 13:13.

51 Stichiron, Vespers of the Feast of Pentecost.
necessarily function in a relationship of *communion* amongst themselves. The same must also occur when exercising *primacy*, which cannot be anything but the product of cooperation, synergy, relationships and *communion* between many people and the offices they have taken on.

In this particular case, the ceaseless and complete ecclesial *communion* of the primates amongst themselves - as is expressed through all the manifestations in the life of the Church, such as liturgical practice, the common cup, the synodality (*synodikotita*), the exchange of official correspondence and visits of the leaders and of course their commemoration during the holy services (the *diptychs*) - firstly proclaims, affirms and protects the unity of the faith and life of the Churches they are leading, and secondly, constitutes the fullest expression and, at the same time, the most precise definition for the context of exercising *primacy*.

V. THE PRIMACY OF ROME AND THE PENTARCHY OF THE PATRIARCHS

As it relates to the topic of primacy, we will briefly mention the *primacy* of the pope of Rome, since a complete treatment of this enormous discussion requires further study and research. For St. Theodore the Studite, the position of the Pope, the bishop of Rome – one of the five patriarchs and the foremost of the great ecclesiastical centers of his time – is within the bounds of the "five-headed ecclesial body,"[52] and not, of course, within the nonexistent single-headed (*monokorŷfou*) body. St. Theodore attributed to the Pope, the head of the "Roman Church,"[53] the "apostolic" pope "of the West"[54] the pri-

---


[54] The pope was recognized as the head of the ecclesiastical community of the West, he is the patriarch of the West, "the apostolic [patriarch] of the West", *Epistles* 469, 25. See also *Epistles* 271, 39-40; *Epistles* 272, 6-7. For more see the study by F. Dvornik, *The idea of Apostolicity in Byzantium and the Legend of the Apostle Andrew* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies IV), Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1958, pp. 168-169. For newer developments with the recent (2006) elimination of the above title on the part of Rome, see V. Pheidas and P. Vasile-
The character of “primacy” in the life and tradition of the Church

macy in order and honor as “first among equals” (primus inter pares), only between the five patriarchs, and not all the bishops in their entirety. The five patriarchs are “equal” (omotageis), with Christ as the singular head over them all.55

The institution of the pentarchy of patriarchs56 is a historical creation and an inseparable part of the life and tradition of the Church during the first millennium. The five patriarchs comprise a “five-headed ecclesial body,”57 which constitutes the sure and most supreme criterion of truth for the Orthodoxy of the faith and life, always though within the functional context of the synodal institution of the Church.58 This means that the canonical operation of the synodality, and of the primacy in the historical course of the Church are two realities that are inseparably and organically connected.

In the pentarchy of the patriarchs, there is an order and hierarchy of honor among those who have been “commissioned,” of the successors of the

iadis, Έκθεση ἐπιστημονικοῦ Συνεδρίου περὶ τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Πέτρου’, Εκκλησία 81, 4 (2004), p. 266; V. Τσίγκος, Η θέση του πατριάρχου Ιερουσαλήμ και του Ἀποστόλου Πέτρου στην Καθολική Εκκλησία και η Εκκλησιολογία της "κοινωνίας" στην ἐπιστολογραφία του ἁγίου Θεοδώρου τοῦ Στουδίτου, Scientific Annals of the Theological Faculty of the University of Thessaloniki, School of Pastoral and Social Theology, n.s. 11 (2006) p. 41-45.

55 Epistles 469, 23-24; Epistles 478, 90-91.

56 The historical and canonically ordained institution of the pentarchy was mainly established by decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, and specifically with the sixth canon of the First Ecumenical Council, the third of the Second Council, the twenty-eighth of the Fourth Council of Chalcedon, and the thirty-sixth canon of the Fifth Ecumenical Council; according to which the patriarch of Rome was established as “first” in order and honor, and the patriarch of Constantinople as second, “being after him” and “enjoying the same honor.” I. Karmiris, Τὰ Δογματικὰ καὶ Συμβολικὰ Μνημεῖα τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Εκκλησίας, vol. 1, Athens 1960, p. 232. For a documented description, see V. Pheidas, Εκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία, v. 1, Athens 2002, p. 831-840. For the institution of the pentarchy of the patriarchates, see p. 855-863; J. M. Hussey, The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1990, p. 38. Of course, the institution of the pentarchy of the patriarchates may have waned and no longer maintain its original form, nevertheless, it constitutes a historical creation from a specific period that undeniably declares and sets the canonical relations between the leaders of the so-called ancient and first-ranked patriarchates among which this of West holds the first rank under the bishop of Rome.

57 Epistles 407, 21-22.

58 See V. Pheidas, Εκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία, p. 863.
Vasileios A. Tsigkos

apaties. For, “who then are the successors; the first is the one now presiding over the Romans, the second over Constantinople, and then Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. This is the five-headed governance of the Church and from these we receive the criterion of divine doctrines.”

It is noted here parenthetically that from the Orthodox side there is no objection to such a primacy of the Pope of Rome. Moreover, the disagreement of the Orthodox does not concern the primacy itself, but rather the way in which the Roman primacy is understood and exercised. In any case, the uninterrupted, full, and ecclesial communion of faith and love of the equal (homotagon) patriarchs, with honorary prominence given to the Pope - as of course to all the bishops - affirms and secures the unity of the entire Church.

Considering all that has been mentioned, already by the end of the eighth century, it can be supported that in the corpus of the Studite, the roots of the lately developed “Ecclesiology of communion”, or “eucharistic Ecclesiology,” are present. Here exactly, to pinpoint the nature of primacy in the life of the Church, one of the most important and essential contributions of St. Theodore the Studite must be acknowledged.

VI. THE PRIMACY OF TRUTH

In the life of the ecclesial community, and in addition to the primacy of service, asceticism, honor and order, St. Theodore acknowledged and argued for the existence of yet another primacy. Namely, this is what could be called the primacy of the truth of faith. He himself considered correct faith and life

---

59 Epistles 478, 56-66.
60 It is a historical reality that the papal primacy of authority “was always refuted by the Church of the East as a very serious ecclesiological and canonical deviation, whereas the exceptional privileges of the papal throne in the canonical institution of the pentarchy of patriarchates was always accepted”. V. Pheidas, Εκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία, p. 854.
61 See related to this V. Tsigkos, «Ἡ θέση τοῦ πατριάρχου Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ τοῦ “πατριάρχου τῆς Δύσεως” στὴν Καθολικὴ Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησιολογία τῆς “κοινωνίας” στὴν ἑπιστολογραφία τοῦ ἁγίου Θεοδώρου τοῦ Ἰστορικοῦ», p. 47-49; Ibid, Θεσμικὴ καὶ χαρισματικὴ διάσταση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας: Ἡ ἑνότητα Χριστολογίας καὶ Πνευματολογίας στὴν Ἐκκλησιολογία τοῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, ed. Pournaras, Thessaloniki 2010, p. 210-212, where there is also a citation of the relevant bibliography.
to be a matter of paramount significance and supreme worth, since “nothing has priority over the truth.” He struggled his whole life for the truth of the faith, for orthodoxy in inseparable union and co-existence with orthopraxia (correct practice). Correct life cannot exist wherever there is not correct faith, and orthodoxy must coincide essentially with orthopraxia.

This holy father, following with precision and consistency the unified tradition of the Church, first and foremost considered and sought the primacy of truth above any other primacy. An immediate consequence of this is the recognition of primacy in a certain member that presupposes the inviolable condition of preserving the truth of the faith. For this reason, there cannot be a Church, nor can the office be recognized of anyone who had distanced themselves from the correct faith. As a result, whosoever of the primates safeguards the truth, the “evangelical faith of the fathers,” he will also enjoy the primacy of truth and he is truly first (prōtos) in the Church.

The truth and the safeguarding of the integrity of the Church is a matter of relationships, interchanging of gifts, the reaching out to many people, and the manifestation of continuous ecclesiastical communion. The proper and orderly functioning of the Church as a charismatic body gives complete meaning and sufficient characterization to the primacy in her life. The communion of truth is realized through the communion of love between all the members of the Church, both clergy and laity, through the submission to the leaders, as well as through the submission of the primates to the primates. Accordingly, when the primates confess the “unity of the faith” and request “communion of the Holy Spirit,” they serve “rightly” (kalōs) the office of the primate according to the Lord’s example and to the experience of the ecclesial community in its long course throughout history.

VII. INTERPRETATION OF PRIMACY IN ITS ESCHATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

---

62 Epistles 443, 48-49.
63 See I. Karmiris, Ορθόδοξος Ἐκκλησιολογία. Δογματικῆς τμῆς Ε’, p. 643.
64 See Epistles 71, 61-62.
65 The Petitions in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.
Regarding the character of primacy, one interpretive dimension still needs particular attention. The charismatic life of the members of the Church and her institutions cannot be thought of beyond its historical reality, which is sometimes smooth and painless, sometimes difficult and painful, just as the historical course of humanity within the boundaries of its created reality.

This means that the structures, institutional manifestations and offices, such as any charismatic ranking whatsoever, just as the primacy of certain members of the Church, are necessary historical forms and institutions that serve the needs of this present world. They undoubtedly minister to the Church of the Comforter in the boundaries of her present stage in history, but are given meaning and interpreted more fully in light of their eschatological significance. In addition, it is noted that the ministries and offices exist to serve and support the members of the Church in their life in Christ, and not to subjugate them. In other words, these offices were instituted for man and not man for the offices.

Therefore, it is clear that any discriminations, differentiations, and varying primacies of certain members of the ecclesial body are relative, refocused by, and integrated into the eschatological fulfillment of all things and, obviously, do not exist in the future reality. On the ‘last’ day, everyone will stand before God with the same honor and glory. The equality of the members of the body of Christ also has a soteriological dimension from now until the ‘last’ times, since the “harbor of salvation is common to all.” Additionally, the equality of each member means that: “the honor and glory are equal, they are now and will be in the future age.”

In other words, the equality of the members of the Church is not only an earthly or contemporary state, but it will have in some way a continuation in the age to come. Accordingly, in all the above-mentioned attributes of primacy in the life of the Church, we must also remember the fact that the full arrival of the ‘last’ times, which will come about with the end of the present

---

66 Small Catecheses 131.
67 Great Catecheses 117.
world, will also surely signify the end of the structures, forms, discriminations, 
primacies, as well as all of the created means of this “current age.”

CONCLUSIONS

The following concluding statements briefly highlight the main points of 
the present study concerning the character of primacy in the life and tradi-
tion of the Church:

1. The exercising of any office of primacy, according to St. Theodore the 
Studite, is one of the many charismatic operations in the life and tradition of 
the ecclesial body. When the Church as a charismatic body functions based 
on a eucharistic hierarchy, primacy cannot be a display of worldly force, nor 
an exercise of power or oppression of others.

2. Following the Christ’s exhortation and model, the office of primacy at 
every level must manifest itself as a communion of love and service for the 
sake of building up and increasing the members, while also for the safeguards-
ing and strengthening of the unity of faith and life of the entire ecclesial bo-
dy. The primacy of a member must be the fruit of a continuous spiritual 
struggle, asceticism, and an increase and maturation of their life in Christ. 
The office of primate must necessarily be characterized by the truth of faith, 
sacrificial love for one’s brethren, humility, a servant like offering, total self 
offering, sometimes by the resignation and withdrawal “for the benefit” of 
the Church, as well as the mutual submission of the primates to one another 
and to their equivalently ranked brethren. These leaders enjoy the recogni-
tion, respect, honor and the Godly submission of all the other members of the 
community. Since the primates, as the first in rank, must embody these virtu-
es, he who attains and progresses in them, is distinguished and is first in 
these virtues, fully enjoying the office of primate, recognized as truly first, 
and primate of the Church.

3. The interpretation and description of the characteristics of primacy, 
in accordance to the life and tradition of the Church, is assuredly able to be 
redefined more precisely and to contribute therapeutically to inter-ecclesial 
dysfunctions and distortions, as well as to inter-Christian differentiations or
misunderstandings. Moreover, the fullest and clearest understanding of primacy, as well as the most exact context and manner of correctly exercising it, undoubtedly has to do with all of the members of the ecclesial body. However, first and foremost, it is a task and responsibility placed upon the shoulders of those who have been “commissioned,” as many as have taken on the office of primate in the Church.
Το χαράκτηρα του "ΠΡΩΤΕΙΟΥ" στη ζωή και παράδοση της Εκκλησίας κατά τον Άγιο Θεόδωρο Στουδίτη

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Στη μελέτη παρουσιάζονται τα ιδιαίτερα έκείνα γνωρίσματα, τα οποία καθορίζουν το χαρακτήρα του πρωτείου, που προσδιαίει στη ζωή και παράδοση της Εκκλησίας κατά τον Άγιο Θεόδωρο Στουδίτη. Μετά την εισαγωγική αναφορά στην εξουσία και το πρωτείο στην Έκκλησία, άκολουθεί η ένστατη για την Έκκλησία ως σώμα Χριστού και τη θεσμική της οργάνωση. Αυτή θεμελιώνεται στη διαβάθμιση χαρισμάτων, λειτουργήματων και διακονιμάτων και άρθρωνται με συνεκκριμένη, δομή, ιεραρχία και θεσμούς. Ιδιαίτερη μνεία γίνεται στο λειτουργήμα του πρώτου και στις εκθέσεις τών ασκούντων το λειτούργημα του πρωτείου στη ζωή της έκκλησιαστικής κοινότητας. Μεταξύ αυτών, επισημαίνεται ότι δυο πρώτοι να αναλάβουν στην κάποιο πρωτείο υφίστανται να συναγωνίζονται και να συναμιλλώνται στο πνευματικό στάδιο των άρετών, προκειμένου να διεκδικήσουν "το πρωτείο της ασκήσεως".

Όλα τα μέλη της Έκκλησίας πρέπει να υποτάσσονται στους προϊσταμένους τους, στους "πρώτους", όπως έπισης και οι "πρώτοι" υφίστανται και αυτοί να υποτάσσονται στους άλλους "πρώτους" της Έκκλησίας "καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι ἀλλήλους", θέση η οποία μᾶς εισάγει σε μία άλλη θεμελιώδη άρχη ύπαρξεως και ζωής της Έκκλησίας, σ’ αυτήν την κοινωνία. Η αθλιότητα πλήρης έκκλησιαστική κοινωνία πίστεως και αγάπης των όμοταγών πατριαρχών, τημιτικά προεξάρχοντος του πάπα, όπως βεβαιώς και όλων των έπισκόπων, επιβεβαιώνει και διασφαλίζει την ένστατη ολόκληρης της Έκκλησίας. Στη συνάφεια αυτή περιερευνάται το πρωτείο του Ρώμης, υπό το πρίσμα της λειτουργίας του θεσμού της πενταρχίας των πατριαρχών, του "πεντακορύφου έκκλησιαστικού σώματος".

Στη ζωή της έκκλησιαστικής κοινότητας, έκτος του πρωτείου της διακονίας, της άσκήσεως, της τιμής και τάξεως, ο Άγιος Θεόδωρος Αναγνώριζε και επιχειρηματολογούσε για την ύπαρξη ένος άκομη. Πρόκειται γι’ αυτό που
μπορεί να όνομασθεί πρωτεῖο τῆς ἀλήθειας τῆς πίστεως. Στὴ συνέχεια ἐρμη-
νεύεται τὸ πρωτεῖο στὴν ἐσχατολογικὴ του προοπτική, δοκείτω ὅτι ἡ πλή-
ρης ἔλευση τῶν ἐσχάτων θὰ σημάνει καὶ τὴν παρέλευση τῶν δομῶν, τῶν
σχημάτων, τῶν διακρίσεων, τῶν πρωτείων καὶ ὅλων τῶν κτιστῶν μέσων τοῦ
“αἰῶνος τούτου”.

Ἐν κατακλείδι, ἐπισημαίνεται ὅτι ἡ ἀκριβέστερη ἑρμηνεία καὶ περιγραφὴ
tῶν χαρακτηριστικῶν ἀσκήσεως τοῦ πρωτείου, ποῦ προσδιάζει στὴ ζωὴ καὶ
παράδοση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, εἶναι ἀπολύτως βέβαιο ὅτι μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπαναπροσδι-
ορίσει ἐπὶ τὸ ὀρθότερον καὶ νὰ συμβάλει θεραπευτικὰ τόσο στὶς ἀνακύπτουσες
ἐνδοεκκλησιαστικὲς καταστάσεις δυσλειτουργίας καὶ διαστρεβλώσεων, όσο καὶ
σὲ ὑπάρχουσες διαχριστιανικὲς διαφοροποιήσεις ἢ σὲ φαινόμενα παρεμπι-
νείας του.