

Zeitschrift: Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie
Band: 104 (2014)
Heft: 3

Artikel: Metropolitan John Zizioulas on primacy in the Church
Autor: Shishkov, Andrey
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-405135>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 15.04.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Metropolitan John Zizioulas on Primacy in the Church

Andrey Shishkov

1. In any description of the current stage in the debate on primacy in the Church*, it is impossible to leave out the figure of Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon. This outstanding Orthodox theologian has determined for several decades ahead the development of Orthodox ecclesiology and has influenced Christian ecclesiology as a whole.

The first theological writing John Zizioulas produced was a doctoral thesis on *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*,¹ which he defended in 1965 in the University of Athens. It dealt with the local church and the place of the Eucharist and the bishop's office in it. Building on the theology of St. Ignatius of Antioch, he proposed his own model of the local church, which can be described as a variety of Eucharistic ecclesiology.²

The articles Zizioulas wrote in the period from the early 1970s–80s dealt with various aspects of ecclesiology and partly developed affirma-

* Dieser Beitrag steht im Zusammenhang mit einer innerorthodoxen Diskussion über den Primat, die mit dem im Dezember 2013 verabschiedeten offiziellen Text zur Position des Moskauer Patriarchates zur Frage des Primats in der Universalen Kirche (vgl. KNA-ÖKI Nr. 3 vom 14.1.2014) eine gewisse Zuspitzung erfahren hat, was das Institut für Ökumenische Studien der Universität Fribourg als Anlass zu einem im März 2014 durchgeführten Studientag nahm (vgl. dazu <http://www.unifr.ch/iso/de/memoria/news-archiv/primat> [31.8.2014]). Zum Thema ist von griechischer Seite jetzt die Arbeit von Maximos Vgenopoulos, *Primacy in the Church from Vatican I to Vatican II. An Orthodox Perspective*, DeKalb IL (NIU Press) 2013, zu vergleichen; der Verfasser ist seit Juli 2014 Titularmetropolit von Silivri in der europäischen Türkei. *Anm.d.Red.*

¹ The English version of Zizioulas's dissertation came out as late as 2001: John Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries* (Brookline MA: Holy Cross, 2001).

² On Metropolitan John Zizioulas's Eucharistic approach see, for instance, Paul G. McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henry De Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993); Demetrios Bathrellos, "Church, Eucharist, Bishop: The Early Church in the Ecclesiology of John Zizioulas", in Douglas H. Knight (ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

tions he set forth in his dissertation. Since the early 80s, he became, according to Paul McPartlan, «one of the architects»³ of Orthodox-Catholic theological dialogue. In 1985, his book came out, entitled *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, which summed up his previous works. It drew a tremendous response in the Christian theological community. And already the next year, John Zizioulas became Metropolitan of Pergamon, a hierarch of the Church of Constantinople.

During the 5th Conference of the Faith and Order Commission in 1993, Metropolitan John read a paper on *Church as Communion* describing the basic principles of his approach to the ecclesiology of communion. Among Zizioulas's programmatic articles on primacy in the Church are *Primacy in the Church: An Orthodox Approach* (1997) and *Recent Discussions on Primacy in Orthodox Theology* (2003). Both works coincided with the debate on primacy initiated by the Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995). In 2006, the second book by Metropolitan John, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, came out as a response to numerous criticisms directed against him.

In the mid-2000s, two ecclesial theological processes most important for the Orthodox Church resumed after a long interruption, namely, the preparations for a Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church and the Orthodox-Catholic theological dialogue. Metropolitan John Zizioulas occupied a leading position in both processes as chairman of pan-Orthodox preparatory conferences and co-chairman of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue. Both processes are focused at present on ecclesiological issues, especially the problem of primacy in the Church.

2. Characteristic of Metropolitan John's approach to the problem of primacy in the Church is a search for grounds for it not in historical and canonical sources but in theology, namely, Triadology, Christology and the Eucharistic theology. The principled ahistorical approach of Metropolitan John is continuously emphasized in his various works.⁴ His ecclesiology

³ Paul G. McPartlan, Introduction to John Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today* (Alhambra CA: Sebastian Press, 2010), pp. xiii-xxiii.

⁴ John Zizioulas, "Primacy in the Church: An Orthodox Approach", in: James F. Puglisi (ed.), *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church. "Toward a Patient and*

is based on the two basic theological models: the Eucharistic ecclesiology and the ecclesiology of communion.

The principal elements of Zizioulas's model are *the Eucharist, the assembly* and *the bishop*, with the Eucharist representing the element that constitutes the local church. Zizioulas writes, "The basic ecclesiological principle applying to the notion of the local church in Orthodox tradition is that of the identification of the Church with the eucharistic community ... Wherever there is the eucharist there is the Church in its fullness as the Body of Christ".⁵ In the Eucharist, the people of God who comprise a local church are united with Christ, thus becoming one Body with Christ. All the charismata of the Church find their expression in the Eucharist.⁶

At the same time, the Eucharist has two primary properties. Firstly, it is catholic, that is, "each eucharistic assembly should include *all* the members of the Church of a particular place, with no distinction whatsoever with regard to ages, professions, sexes, races, languages, etc."⁷ Secondly, it is geographical, that is, "the eucharistic assembly ... is always a community of some [geographical] place".⁸

The Eucharist is impossible without the assembly in which it is celebrated and the presider who celebrates it. This presider is the bishop. Primacy in the local church is expressed primarily in the bishop's presiding over the Eucharistic assembly which is identical with the local church. The bishop is also the focus of the unity of the local church, in which all Church services come together.⁹

In the Eucharist the Church becomes a reflection of the eschatological community of Christ.¹⁰ The Church of God as an eschatological assembly of saints around Christ becomes the utmost point in Zizioulas's Eucharistic model. He speaks of the Eucharist as an event in which *eschata* are

Fraternal Dialogue". A Symposium (Collegeville MI; Liturgical Press, 1999), pp. 115–125, here 116–118. The paper was also published in *ECJ* 5 (2/1998), pp. 7–20; *Sourozh* No. 84 (2001), pp. 3–13.

⁵ John Zizioulas, "The Local Church in a Perspective of Communion", in *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood NY: SVPS, 1997), pp. 247–260, here p. 247.

⁶ Bathrellos, "Church, Eucharist, Bishop" (as note 2).

⁷ Zizioulas, "The Local Church" (as note 5), p. 247.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ John Zizioulas, "The Bishop in the Theological Doctrine of the Orthodox Church", in: *The One and the Many* (as note 3), pp. 236–253.

¹⁰ Zizioulas, "The Local Church" (as note 5), p. 254.

anticipated. In this sense, every local church “represents the image of the Kingdom to come”.¹¹ Through the Eucharist the assembly of a local church led by the bishop becomes identical with the eschatological assembly of saints with Christ as their Head.¹²

However, Zizioulas sees the Eucharistic approach to the local church as limited, first of all because it makes the local church self-sufficient. If, as the Eucharistic ecclesiology states, a local church contains through the Eucharist the fullness of the Church of God, then its relations with other churches become unnecessary.

To overcome the limitations of the Eucharistic model of the Church, Zizioulas resorts to the ecclesiology of communion.¹³ In this approach, for a local church to become catholic (to have the fullness of ecclesiality) it should be in communion with the other local churches throughout the world.¹⁴

The key element in Zizioulas’s ecclesiology of communion is the principle of “the one and the many”. We find the roots of this principle in his idea of relationship between Christology and Pneumatology, particularly, in the model of the “corporate person” of Christ.¹⁵ The participation of the Holy Spirit, according to Zizioulas, in the event of Christ lies in that “because of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the economy, Christ is not just an individual, not ‘one’, but ‘many’”.¹⁶ “The many” are united in the person of Christ – “the many” to whom St. Paul refers, saying, “The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are *many* are *one* body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16–17). In the Eucharist the faithful are united through the Holy Spirit in one Body of Christ, which is the Church, with the Holy Spirit working as the power of communion (cf. 2 Cor. 13:13). Thus, Zizioulas writes, the Church becomes part of the definition of

¹¹ Ibid., p. 255.

¹² McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church* (as note 2), p. 195.

¹³ See the programmatic paper on this theme: John Zizioulas, “The Church as Communion”, in: *The One and the Many* (as note 3), pp. 49–60.

¹⁴ Zizioulas, “The Bishop in the Theological Doctrine” (as note 9), p. 249.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Zizioulas, “Christ, the Spirit and the Church”, in: *Being as Communion* (as note 5), pp. 123–142, here p. 130. About the “corporate personality” of Christ see McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church* (as note 2), pp. 166–186.

¹⁶ Zizioulas, “Christ, the Spirit and the Church” (as note 15), p. 130.

Christ.¹⁷ At the same time, for him there is no priority of the body of Christ as individual (“the one”) over the Body of Christ as the Church (“the many”), as their relationships are determined by *simultaneity* and *interrelatedness*, which in Zizioulas are characteristics of communion. “The one” cannot exist without “the many” and vice versa.¹⁸ This is the basis for the idea of “the one and the many” principle.

The principle of “the one and the many” became the methodological basis of the approach Zizioulas made in the debate on primacy in the Church.¹⁹ He consistently seeks to discover the interrelatedness and simultaneity of “the one” and “the many” in Triadology, Christology in its relation with Pneumatology and in Eucharistic theology so that he may then move on to Ecclesiology.²⁰

In Trinitarian theology the principle of “the one and the many” is expressed in that “we do not first speak of One God (divine substance) and *then* of the three Persons as relations *within* the one substance”.²¹ According to Zizioulas, there is no priority of the One God whatsoever over the Triune God and vice versa. The triadity of the Persons is the same foundation for the unity of God as unity for the triadity of the persons: “the many” are a constitutive element for “the one” just as ‘the one’ is for “the many”.²²

In Christology (in its relation with Pneumatology), “the one and the many” principle is referred to the model of “the corporate person” of Christ. Zizioulas views Christ not as “one” who becomes “many” but as “the one” who is inconceivable without “the many” who compose His Body. In doing so, he emphasizes the constitutive role of the Holy Spirit through whom “the one” and “the many” dwell in communion. “There can be no ‘head’ without ‘the body’; there is no ‘the one’ without ‘the many’, no Christ without the Spirit”, he writes.²³

Zizioulas applies the same principle to the theology of the Holy Eucharist. According to Zizioulas, simultaneously with a diversity of specific eucharists celebrated in church assemblies, there is “one Eucharist in the

¹⁷ John Zizioulas, “Ecclesiological Presuppositions of the Holy Eucharist”, in: *The One and the Many* (as note 3), 61–74, here p. 68.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 68f.

¹⁹ Zizioulas, “Primacy in the Church” (see note 4), p. 118.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

whole Universal Church”.²⁴ This Eucharist is of eschatological nature and it is the Eucharist celebrated in the eschatological assembly of the saints surrounding Christ in the Heavenly Kingdom. Zizioulas believes that “this unique Eucharist is at the same time many Eucharists”.²⁵ It is impossible to say which is primary, as “the one” and “the many” exist simultaneously and are interrelated. In ecclesiology Zizioulas applies “the one and the many” principle to both the local and the universal Church. He criticizes cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Rahner, on the one hand, for their affirmation that the Church is in the first place universal and only then local,²⁶ and Nikolay Afanasyev and John Meyendorff, on the other, for a directly opposite affirmation. He maintains that the Church is at the same time local (“the many”) and universal (“the one”). In doing so, he believes that “it is the nature of the Eucharist that points to the simultaneity of the local and the universal in ecclesiology”,²⁷ to which a reference was made above.

The local and universal nature of the Church is focused in the person of the bishop. He is “the head and center of the unity”²⁸ of a local church, on one hand. It is in him that all the charismata existing in a local church are united. At the same time, he is “the one” who is unconceivable without “the many”, that is, without the church assembly. The office of the bishop, on the other hand, is at the same time universal since he is part of the synodal episcopate of the Universal Church. The ministry beyond the local church consists in the first place in the bishop’s participation in the ordination of primates for widowed local churches and in his participation in the work of a regional or universal council.²⁹

Every bishop has a right and a duty to participate in church councils as equal to other bishops. At the same time, a council has no power to interfere in the domestic affairs of local churches as its power is limited to the communion of local churches with one another. Therefore, the council cannot become an institution standing above the local church; it only expresses its power through it. It means, according to Zizioulas, that through the synodal system we arrive not at the universal Church but rather at the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 121f.

communion of churches. “Universality becomes in this way identical to communion”, he writes.³⁰

The principle of “the one and the many”, if correctly understood, Zizioulas maintains, runs through every church doctrine and leads directly to the ministry of primacy.³¹ The theologian looks at the ways in which this principle works at various levels of church organization, local, regional and universal.

In the local church, the *primus* is the bishop who heads the Eucharistic synaxis. His ministry of primacy is conditioned by the entire community he heads. According to Metropolitan John, the fact that the celebration of the Eucharist is impossible in the absence of the bishop shows that the *primus* is a constitutive element in the local church. However, the bishop cannot fulfill his functions as head of the community without the assembly. Furthermore, it is only through the bishop (or those he authorizes to do so) that people are ordained to the Church (for instance, through Baptism or Confirmation). This ordination however is made valid by its reception in the Eucharistic assembly. Therefore, “the many” cannot be the Church without “the one”, nor “the one” can be the *primus* without “the many”.³²

At the regional level, primacy is bound in the first place with the existence of synodal institutions. Metropolitan John believes a perfect model can here be found in the order of the ancient metropolis. In this model, the bishop of the capital city in a particular region (metropolitan) automatically became presider of the synod of bishops ruling the local churches in this region. Very soon he became regarded as the *first* and the *head* of the regional bishops. However, his primacy was strictly conditioned by the involvement of his bishops in his every decision and action.³³ This situation is described well in Apostolic Canon 34.³⁴ In the synodal governance over a metropolis, the metropolitan (“the one”) could do nothing without his

³⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “The bishops of all peoples should know the first among them and recognize him as the head, and do nothing that exceeds their authority without his consideration. Each should carry out only that which relates to his own diocese and to areas belonging to it. But the first among them should also do nothing without the consideration of all. For thus will there be concord, and God will be glorified through the Lord in Holy Spirit: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”.

bishops (“the many”), while bishops cannot act without the metropolitan. As case studies on the synodal system, Zizioulas cites the ancient patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

It should be noted that in Orthodox Church practice, the allocations at regional level understood in the spirit of ancient metropolises have ceased to be relevant. The modern Orthodox autocephalous Church consists as a rule of two elements: canonical territory and diaspora. The bishops of the diaspora are administratively subject to the council of the autocephalous Church, not to the bishops’ assembly of a particular region in the diaspora. Therefore in Orthodox ecclesiology, the above principle should be related to the level of the autocephalous Church rather than to the regional level.

For Zizioulas, primacy at the universal level is the utmost case of the regional one. He writes, “The logic of synodality leads to primacy, and the logic of the ecumenical council leads to universal primacy”.³⁵ Zizioulas believes that recent primacy of honour of the Patriarch of Constantinople in the whole Orthodox Church should be understood “in the spirit of Apostolic Canon 34”.³⁶ It should be noted however that in Metropolitan John’s logic described above, for such primacy to exist it is necessary that there should be a permanent synodal institution uniting all the bishops (of the entire Orthodox Church in this case). Yet there were no such councils in the past (Ecumenical Councils were not permanent bodies), and the possibility for their existence remains a matter of the future. Zizioulas applies this understanding of universal primacy (as the utmost case of regional primacy) to the primacy of the bishop of the Church of Rome.³⁷

Metropolitan John has attached a considerable role to universal primacy. He writes, “Universal *primus* is not only ‘useful’ to the Church but an ecclesiological necessity in a unified Church”.³⁸ He is the expression of “unity and oneness of the Church in the world”.³⁹

³⁵ Ioannis Zizioulas, “Recent Discussions on Primacy in Orthodox Theology”, in: Cardinal Walter Kasper (ed.), *The Petrine Ministry: Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue* (Mahwah NJ: The Newman Press, 2006), pp. 231–246, here p. 242.

³⁶ Zizioulas, “Primacy in the Church” (as note 4), p. 123.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 123–125.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

3. The theology of Metropolitan John Zizioulas has awoken a widespread response in the Christian academic community. His works including ecclesiological ones were subjected to criticism^{40, 41} to which responses were given both by himself and his followers.⁴² Because the bulk of critical responses is too big and already well known, I will dwell only on some points, which, in my view, have been little highlighted in critical articles.

The first remark concerns the way in which “the one and the many” principle was applied to the issue of primacy. Metropolitan John’s excursions into Triadology, Christology and Eucharistic theology were supposed to reveal to us that “the one and the many” principle was a universal one, pointing to the theological foundations of primacy in the Church. Yet Zizioulas points out that neither in Triadology nor in Christology or Eucharistic theology is it possible to speak of the priority of “the one” over “the many” and vice versa. “The one and the many” principle as Zizioulas set it forth from the very beginning cannot justify primacy without the use of additional preconditions. Moving to a description of primacy in the Church, he, without any explanation, replaces “the one” in the “the one and the many” model by “the first”.

Let us try to find these additional preconditions in Zizioulas’s works. In Triadology, we find a justification for primacy in his ideas of the monarchy of the Father.⁴³ The Father is the cause of the existence of the Holy Trinity and the source of unity in God. He is the origin Who begets the Son in eternity and brings forth the Spirit. According to Zizioulas, there is order in the Trinity since the Father is always the first.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Miroslav Volf, “Zizioulas: Communion, One and Many”, in: *After Our Likeness. The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 73–123; John Behr, “The Trinitarian Being of the Church”, *SVTQ* 48 (2004), pp. 67–88.

⁴¹ A concise but rather biased review of the English-speaking Orthodox criticism was presented by Alan Brown, “On the Criticism of Being as Communion in Anglophone Orthodox Theology”, in: Knight (ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas* (as note 2), pp. 35–78.

⁴² Zizioulas himself made an attempt to respond to the criticism in his monograph *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006). His followers published a collection of articles, Knight (ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas* (as note 2).

⁴³ See details in John Zizioulas, “Father as Cause”, in *Communion and Otherness* (as note 42), pp. 113–154.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

In the corporate person model, Christ is “the one” in whom “the many” are united and at the same time the source of this unity. He is the Head of His Body – the Church, the New Adam who gives rise to the new humanity. The Old Adam is also “the one” in whom the entire humanity, “the many”, is united. He is the cause, “the father of us all”,⁴⁵ and therefore the first.

Thus, for the principle of “the one and the many” to be also a foundation for primacy, it has to include an additional precondition. “The one” has to be the origin of the existence of “the many” and source of their unity so that it may also become “the first”.

In ecclesiology however, the case is quite different. If this logic is observed in the field of ecclesiology, then there must be a local church that gives rise to the other local churches. This local church has to be “the one” in which “the many” find their unity. In this case, communion with this Mother-Church has to become a guarantee of her being part of the universal Church.

Who is fit for the role of the Mother-Church? In history, this Mother-Church is the Church of Jerusalem. It is in her that the first Holy Eucharist was celebrated. From her came the apostles who founded other local churches, among them St. Peter and St. Paul. In principle, this Mother-Church should be the first among the local churches. Yet in the practice of Church life, the case is different. For instance, in the ecclesiological model of pentarchy, which developed in the period of Ecumenical Councils, the Church of Jerusalem occupied the fifth place. In the tradition of holy diptychs which express the ecclesiological order in the Orthodox Church, the Church of Jerusalem is not the first either. Both pentarchy and the diptychs are based on a completely different logic.

The point is that it is Christ who is the source of the Church’s existence, not a local church. At the same time, the universal Church is identical with the Body of Christ. In this situation, primacy in the Church as based on the “the one and many” principle belongs to Christ.

The fact that it is impossible to attribute primacy to any of the local churches on the basis of “the one and the many” principle only indicates that it cannot be used as universal for all the branches of theological knowledge.

The second remark concerns the use of the term “universal church”. As McPartlan rightly points out, the term “universal church” has several

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 142.

meanings.⁴⁶ On the one hand, the universal Church is the assembly of all the saints, the eschatological heavenly Church of all times. On the other hand, it is the Church spread today (and in every particular moment of time) worldwide. To describe the Church in this second sense, the Orthodox theology often uses the term “oecumenical” (from the Greek *oikoumene*, the inhabited world).

When Zizioulas refers to the Eucharistic nature of the universal Church,⁴⁷ he uses this term in its first meaning as the eschatological heavenly Church. The universal Church in this sense is constituted by the unique Eucharist celebrated in the eschatological assembly of the saints gathered around Christ in the Heavenly Kingdom. It should be noted that the universal Church in the other sense (as worldwide), on the contrary, is not constituted by the Eucharist since there is no worldwide Eucharist of this world. The Eucharist is always an assembly for “one and the same” which always has its *topos*.

In accordance with Zizioulas’s logic, the Church is simultaneously local and universal (universal in the sense of the eschatological assembly). Each local church through the Eucharist “reveals the image of the Kingdom to come”, while its primate, the bishop, is “the image of Christ”. Universality and locality in the Church prove to be tied together iconically. The iconical primacy of the bishop in the local church as presider over the Eucharistic assembly is the expression of the eternal primacy of Christ in the eschatological assembly of saints in the Heavenly Kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ, according to St. Paul, is the Head of the Body of the Church; He is ... the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence (Col. 1:18).

In the eschatological assembly of saints, Christ is “the one” without whom “the many” cannot exist, just as “the many” are the body of the Church without which “the one” cannot exist. At the same time, Christ is not merely “the one” but also “the first” since He is the origin of this Heavenly Eucharist. It conforms to the model of the corporative person of Christ in which Christ is also “the one” and “the head” with regard to His Body, the Church (“the many”). Therefore, the primacy of Christ in the

⁴⁶ Paul McPartlan, “The Local and the Universal Church: Zizioulas and the Ratzinger-Kasper Debate”, in: Knight (ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas* (see note 2), pp. 171–182.

⁴⁷ Zizioulas, “Primacy in the Church” (see note 4), pp. 118f.

universal Church is founded on the principle of “the one and the many” as applied to Christology.

Notwithstanding this, in the same text about primacy,⁴⁸ Metropolitan John speaks of relationships between universality and locality, using the term “universal church” in its second meaning as worldwide. In doing so, he does not stipulate any difference between the two meanings of this notion. The ministry of the bishop is viewed as simultaneously local and universal (in the second sense). And the whole previous chain of theological reasoning suddenly becomes a foundation for oecumenical primacy in the Church. Thus, Zizioulas first traces the way in which the principle of “the one and the many” is present in Triadology, Christology and Eucharistic theology just to discover it in ecclesiology in relationships between the local and the universal Church (in the sense of the eschatological Church). However, later he unjustifiably applies these conclusions to relations between the local and the universal Church (in the sense of the worldwide Church). It turns out that by confusing and substituting different notions of the term “the universal Church”, Zizioulas provides a theological basis for his model of the bishop in the universal Church.

It is interesting to look at the limits of the Eucharistic ecclesiology and the ecclesiology of communion used by Zizioulas. The Eucharistic theology describes the Church only on local level and in case when she has her basic elements, namely, the Eucharist, the assembly and the bishop. In this ecclesiological model, the people of God in the local church enjoy the fullness of life in Christ. Beyond the local church, there is nothing that would provide for this ecclesiological fullness in it.

The Eucharistic model ceases to work when one or several basic elements of the local church are broken. For instance, the primate is lost and makes the local church widowed or the assembly is divided. In the first case, the assembly is left without the bishop and therefore without the Eucharist; in the second, a part of the assembly stops participating in celebration of Eucharist. In order to come back to the normal state, the local church appeals to other churches. These acts of communion with other local churches restore the normal flow of life in this church. Yet these communion actions cannot be described with the help of the Eucharistic model. To describe them, another model is used, namely, the ecclesiology of communion.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 115–125.

The Eucharistic ecclesiology can treat primacy in the Church only within the framework of the local church. The ecclesiology of communion makes it possible to describe church life on regional and universal levels.

As the model of communication in a broader sense is used by Zizioulas also both in Triadology and Christology and anthropology, certain conclusions can be drawn concerning the nature of this communion in ecclesiology as well. The communion of local churches actually represents in this model a way of the very being of the Church. The fundamental ontological affirmation of “being as communion” is used by Zizioulas in ecclesiology to show in the first place that a break in communion between one of the local churches with the others is tantamount to a withdrawal into non-being.

Communion is an inner principle of existence. Following Zizioulas’s logic, one can draw a parallel between the communion of the Persons in the Holy Trinity, the communion of the members of the Body of Christ (Christ Himself is one of these members), with the communion of local churches. However, speaking about communion in ecclesiology, we find one difference from communion in Christology and Triadology. God the Father is the Origin of communion in the Holy Trinity and He is *primus*. Christ is the source of communion in the Body of Christ and He is the head of the Body. But all the local churches being in communion are equal and each of them has ecclesiological fullness. None of these local churches is the source that gives birth to other local churches. Therefore, the communion of local churches does not require the existence of a certain universal center. It is the reason why it is impossible to infer from the ecclesiology of communion the idea that participation in fullness of the Church of God is ensured by communion with the church who has a primacy.

It is essential that Metropolitan John’s model of the ecclesiology of communion is irrelevant of the historical context. It means that it cannot describe reasons for particular historical developments. The ecclesiology of communion cannot help explain the reasons for the establishment of metropolises, patriarchates, autocephalous Churches, confessional Churches or to justify the historical primacy of a particular see. Therefore, it is incorrect to speak of the primacy of Rome or Constantinople from the view of ecclesiology of communion. In this sense, the tradition of holy diptychs adopted in the Orthodox Church, on which the primacy of honour is based, cannot be justified by the ecclesiology of communion. The more so that the ontological principle of communion as applied to ecclesiology does not presuppose the primacy of one of the local churches.

4. Despite the above-mentioned inaccuracies, the contribution made by Metropolitan John Zizioulas to Orthodox, in particular, and Christian theology, in general, remains weighty. He is the theologian who, in the language of Thomas Kuhn, has changed the paradigm, if not of global, then of Orthodox ecclesiology. His innovative approach, in my view, lies primarily in that in the debate on primacy he has avoided the historical-canonical approach that used to prevail in Orthodox ecclesiology for a long time. Perhaps he was the first to detect the crisis that began to show in the polemic between Metropolitan Maxim of Sardis and the lay theologian Sergey Troitsky and reached its pinnacle in the mid-1990s.

Numerous criticisms against the works of Metropolitan John in no way belittle his contribution. On the contrary, the criticism has pointed to a close interest of the Christian theological community in the problems he raised in his works. Moreover, even the most critical responses to the theology of Metropolitan John appear to be rather a continuation of his work since they work in the same system of coordinates given by this outstanding theologian.

As a great pioneer, Metropolitan John has only outlined a new approach. For this reason his models are not devoid of inaccuracies and discrepancies. That is why it is so important that a systemic work should be carried out to clarify the scope and limitations of the theological models. It is especially important when at stake is participation in theological dialogues on the highest level where responsibility for the pronounced word grows manifold.

Andrey Shishkov (born 1983 in Moscow, Russia) is theological consultant of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission of the Russian Orthodox Church, research fellow and lecturer in the Ss. Cyril and Methodius Post-Graduate Institute of the ROC.

Address: 41-1-174 Krylatskie holmy str., Moscow 121614 Russia.

Email: andrey.v.shishkov@gmail.com

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Der Primat in der Kirche gehört zu den wichtigsten Themen der Ekklesiologie. Seit Jahrhunderten wurde darüber gestritten. Der Beitrag bemüht sich, die theologische Konzeption des Primats in der Kirche zu analysieren, wie sie von Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas, einem der einflussreichsten orthodoxen Theologen der letzten Jahrzehnte, entfaltet worden ist. Diese Konzeption beruht auf seiner eucharistischen Ekklesiologie und Communion-Ekklesiologie. Untersucht wird die

Beziehung zwischen Zizioulas' ekklesiologischen, christologischen und trinitätstheologischen Ansätzen im Licht seiner bekannten These, wonach Sein als Gemeinschaft konstituiert ist. Zizioulas' Grundprinzip des «Einen und der Vielen» wird detailliert beschrieben. Dabei wird auf einige Inkonsistenzen seiner Primatskonzeption aufmerksam gemacht.