

1. What were the consequences of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's decision to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church? How did the Orthodox Churches react?

The first consequence is the [suspension of the Eucharistic communion](#) between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This has already happened between the Ecumenical Throne and the largest Church in the Orthodox world: in 1996, the Moscow Patriarchate had also suspended the Eucharistic communion, following the establishment of an Orthodox Church of Estonia by the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

But this time, this decision by the Ecumenical Patriarchate is considered by the Russian Orthodox Church, not only as a transgression of the canons, but also as an attack against the "Russian world". Its fabric is composed of the Russian language and of the Orthodox faith, which obviously goes far beyond the borders of post-Soviet Russia, and its cradle is located in Kyiv.

A second consequence is that the Orthodox are faced with the urgency of finding a unanimous answer not only to the question, "what is the meaning of autocephaly and of the way it is granted", but also to the question of primacy, that is to say, the leadership of the Church, in other words, what are the **reasons and purpose** of primacy in the Church.

It is true that four local Orthodox churches, through their primates, have publicly expressed their support for the Moscow Patriarchate: the Patriarchate of Antioch, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Patriarchate of Serbia, and the Church of Czech countries and Slovakia. The other churches have preferred to take time to think about it, but all agree that the best process is the convocation of a pan-Orthodox Council, which would be entrusted with finding a solution to the "Ukrainian" crisis.

2. What are the practical difficulties and the possible outcome of the granting of autocephaly?

The goal expressed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople is a single Orthodox Church in Ukraine. For that reason, after they realized the Moscow Patriarchate never succeeded in that endeavor, they made the decision to organize the process of reunification of all the Orthodox churches in Ukraine, that is, the two so-called schismatic¹ churches, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. A unification council should soon take place in Kyiv, and all three Orthodox jurisdictions will be invited there to choose the primate of the future unified Orthodox Church in Ukraine. But we already know that the Orthodox Ukrainian Church attached to the Moscow Patriarchate will not participate.

Moreover, it is obvious that the question of who will be elected primate could also be an obstacle to the final agreement, because Filaret, the head of the Kyiv Patriarchate, is known for his unbridled ambition to become the patriarch of Ukraine, no matter what.

At the time of the USSR, he was very close to the Soviet authorities, and was noticed for his excellent political sense in order to achieve his goal. In this regard, once he became the metropolitan of Kyiv in 1966, he often condemned the Ukrainian nationalism and defended the repression against the Greek Catholics, before doing a complete 180 degree turn on the eve of Ukraine's independence.

In 1990, when Patriarch Pimen of Moscow died, Filaret was *locum tenens* of the patriarchal throne and

¹ These are: a) The [Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church](#), born of a schism of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1920. Its current primate is Metropolitan Macarius (Maletych). b) The [Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kyiv Patriarchate](#) (UOC-KP), formed in 1992, after the independence of Ukraine, from a schism with the [Ukrainian Orthodox Church](#) (UOC-MP) canonically attached to the Moscow Patriarchate. Its 89-year-old primate Filaret, who bears the title of Patriarch of Kiev, was defrocked and excommunicated in 1997 by the Russian Orthodox Church. These two hierarchs appealed to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. On October 11, 2018, he [restored](#) them to their episcopal and priestly rank. He also received their faithful in the ecclesial communion.

proposed to be the next Russian patriarch. He was not elected.

[The remark made by a Greek metropolitan about him](#) is very relevant, "If Filaret had been elected as the Patriarch of Moscow in 1990, a thing he desired so much but that slipped through his fingers, would he ask today to become the Metropolitan of the autocephalous Church of Ukraine? And if so, whom would he ask? The Synod of Moscow, which he would preside himself, or Constantinople, which he pretends to respect today and to which he supposedly bows?"

In any case, the most likely solution is that two Orthodox jurisdictions will appear in Ukraine, one still dependent on Moscow, and a second one recognized by the Patriarchate of Constantinople and by the Churches which will follow their stance. Which ones? It is hard to tell at this point!

3. Did the clashes between Bartholomew and Kirill weaken both patriarchs, because of the political pressure they face?

Political pressures have always played a role in the history of the Church, since the origins of Christianity: "Christians live in this world, but are not of this world", basically said the unknown author of the Epistle to Diognetus (2nd century AD). The role of Ukrainian authorities' politics in obtaining the Ukrainian autocephaly is obvious.

And foreign political factors also come into play. On the one hand, the United States support Ukrainian independence in a strategy that aims, according to former US State Counselor Zbigniew Brzezinski², to change the very nature of the Russian state - which without Ukraine would cease to be an empire in Eurasia, depriving it of many resources and of the access to the Black Sea. It is for this reason that we see different statements of US political personalities, who support the granting of autocephaly to Ukraine. In a press release entitled "[Religious Freedom in Ukraine](#)", the US State Department expressed its respect for "the ability of Ukraine's Orthodox religious leaders and followers to pursue autocephaly according to their beliefs". [Kurt Volker](#), the U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine, [declared](#) that his country fully supported the creation of a unique local Orthodox Church in Ukraine, and former U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, in a meeting with Filaret, [expressed](#) his support for the creation of an autocephalous Church in Ukraine. [Last May](#), the same Filaret asked the deputies of the European Parliament to support the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in his "fight" against the Moscow Patriarchate, but also to influence the Orthodox Churches in Europe.

For the Ukrainian authorities, the autocephaly of a Church without the supervision of Moscow is a *sine qua non* condition of Ukraine's independence, but also a great way to win the next presidential elections. Along the roads, you can see billboards with these words signed by Petro Poroshenko: "Independent Church - Guarantee of Independence". (see the picture below)



² See: The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives (Basic Books, 1997)

Russia, on the other hand, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church, defends what they call the Russian world, which goes beyond the borders of the current Russian Federation, thanks to the Russian language still spoken in the former Soviet countries and to the presence of the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate in these same countries.

For those who know a bit about the history of Russia and of the Russian Orthodox Church, it is obvious that the Russians can hardly forget the Kyiv of holy Prince Vladimir, who converted the Rus' to Christianity (in 988). He is considered as the founder of the Russian Orthodox State, which is at the origin of current Ukraine, Belarus, and the Russian Federation. It was thus not strange for Patriarch Kirill to convene the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in Minsk, the capital of independent Belarus, on October 15.

Russian state authorities have also reacted, seeing in the events taking place in Ukraine, a threat to national security. On October 12, 2018, the Security Council of the Russian Federation met to discuss the situation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine and its future. Three of its members, Vladimir Putin, Nikolai Patrushev, and Alexander Bortnikov, had previously been at the head of the FSB (Federal Security Service).

The commitments and support of the Russian and Ukrainian states to defend the independence of "their Churches" can also be seen as a shift to what I call "19th century Orthodox autocephalism". Let me explain!

Let us first of all emphasize the [difference between autocephaly and autocephalism](#). Autocephaly is the expression of the conciliar character of a local Church, namely the right for the bishops of a territory (which may be an administrative unit in the Roman Empire, a province, a kingdom or a national state), circumscribed by empirical data (principle of accommodation, old customs), to choose their colleagues, without any external interference, including from the primate, and consequently the right for them to take care of their pastoral, disciplinary or financial operations without interference from any other Church.

Note also that the adjective "autocephalous" is not found in the canonical corpus of the Orthodox Church. It is used for the first time in the Byzantine author Theodore Lector (6th century) for the Church of Cyprus. Canon 8 of the Third Ecumenical Council (431) had granted them the right to ordain their own bishops, including their primate.

Autocephalism is nothing but the use of autocephaly for political purposes. Thus, starting in the 19th century, autocephaly became synonymous with national Church. The autocephalous Church is then understood as a *sine qua non* condition of the sovereignty of States and nations. Autocephalism resulted in the heresy of [phyletism](#). It advocated the organization of the Church according to the principle of ethnic and national belonging, and was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 1872³.

³ "In September 1872, the patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch, the archbishop of Cyprus, twenty-five metropolitans, several archimandrites and other Greek ecclesiastical dignitaries, met in a synod in Constantinople, and condemned the Bulgarians in those terms, "We denounce, censure, and condemn phyletism, to wit, racial discrimination and nationalistic disputes, rivalries, and dissensions in the Church of Christ, as antithetical to the teaching of the Gospel and the Sacred Canons of our Blessed Fathers, who uphold the Holy Church and, ordering the entire Christian commonwealth, guide it to Divine piety. In accordance with the holy canons, we proclaim that those who accept such division according to races and who dare to base on it hitherto unheard-of racial assemblies are foreign to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and are real schismatics.

When you read the [statement](#) made by the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko concerning the October 11 decision of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, it is impossible not to see it as a fully autocephalist and phyletist speech: "The question of Tomos and Autocephaly goes far beyond the church life, as the State has joined it. This is a matter of our independence. This is a matter of our national security... Tomos is actually another Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine. The [Russian] empire is losing one of the last levers of influence on its former colony!"

However, we must not forget to mention that all the 19th and 20th century Orthodox Churches in the Balkans (with the exception of the Serbian Church) temporarily experienced the phyletism schism: the Greek Church for seventeen years (1833-1850), the Romanian Church for twenty-one years (1864-1885), the Bulgarian Church for seventy-two years (1872-1948), and the Albanian Church for fifteen years (1922-1937). That is actually what the Ukrainian President recalled in his same speech: "By the work of God, their own Local Churches have been set up in all the Orthodox states that have won their independence. This happened in Bulgaria, in Greece, in Georgia, in Serbia, in Cyprus, in Romania, in Russia. Now our State of Ukraine is joining their ranks!"

In any case, in the days and weeks to come, we will see, or not, the outcome of this drama provoked by this religious nationalism which is foreign to the spirit of the Gospel. Thus, the words uttered in 1923 by the great Serbian theologian Justin Popovich, recently [canonized](#), are still relevant: "The Church is God-human, eternity incarnated within the boundaries of time and space. She is here in this world but she is not of this world (John 18:36). She is in the world in order to raise it on high where she herself has her origin. The Church is ecumenical, catholic, God-human, ageless, and it is therefore a blasphemy—an unpardonable blasphemy against Christ and against the Holy Ghost—to turn the Church into a national institution, to narrow her down to petty, transient, time-bound aspirations and ways of doing things. It is now high time—the twelfth hour—time for our Church representatives to cease being nothing but the servants of nationalism and for them to become bishops and priests of the One, Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Her purpose is beyond nationality, œcumenical, all-embracing: to unite all men in Christ, all without exception to nation or race or social strata. "There is neither Greek nor Jew, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), because "Christ is all, and in all." (Col 3, 11)".⁴

4. What is the impact of the situation on the question of primacy in territorial Churches and at the service of communion? And on the question of the place of the national factor in a Eucharistic communion which manifests the unity of all the faithful living in the same place?

It is true that the question of primacy in the universal Church has divided Orthodox and Roman Catholics throughout the second millennium. But now, the Ukrainian crisis brings out two ways of understanding primacy within Orthodoxy itself.

Before looking more closely at these differences, it is necessary to recall some ecclesiological presuppositions concerning the Orthodox vision of primacy.

For Roman Catholics, primacy is seen as a *jure divino* institution that emanates directly from the primacy of Saint Peter in the College of the Apostles. Only the pope can confirm the decisions of councils, both

Accordingly, we declare schismatics and foreign to the Orthodox Church of Christ all those who have separated themselves from the Orthodox Church, who have erected a special altar, and have formed a phyletic assembly". MANSI-PETIT, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova and amplissima (collective)*, t. XLV, col. 533.

⁴The Inward Mission of Our Church, by St. Father Justin Popovich:

<http://archangelsbooks.com/articles/spirituality/InwardMission.asp>

local and ecumenical. He is the one who gives his consent to each episcopal appointment, and who embodies the entirety of ecclesial power.

Such primacy has never existed in the Orthodox tradition. Instead, we have an established *taxis* (order), by which one of the primates has the first place.

What were the criteria for a primate to occupy this first place at both regional and universal level? The first important criterion was the apostolic foundation of an episcopal see. Thus, to allow the ascent of Constantinople, it was suggested that the holy Apostle Andrew himself founded the Church in the city of Byzantium. Which then became the city of Constantine - Constantinople. Today, historians agree that the first known penetration of Christianity in Byzantium took place towards the end of the 2nd century. As for the first Byzantine bishop, he lived in the first years of the 3rd century at the earliest, or in the first years of the 4th century at the latest⁵.

The second decisive criterion in the attribution of primacy was that of the political, cultural, and financial importance of the city of the episcopal see. We read in the 9th canon of the Antiochian local council (341): *"The presiding Bishop in a metropolis must be recognized by the Bishops belonging to each province (or eparchy), and undertake the care of the entire province, because of the fact that all who have **any kind of business to attend to** are wont to come from all quarters to the metropolis. Hence it has seemed best to let him have precedence in respect of honor, and to let the rest of the Bishops do nothing extraordinary without him, in accordance with the ancient Canon of the Fathers which has been prevailing, or only those things which are imposed upon the parish of each one of them and upon the territories under it"*.

And in the 28th canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council: *"Everywhere following the decrees of the Holy Fathers, and aware of the recently recognized Canon of the one hundred and fifty most God-beloved Bishops who convened during the reign of Theodosius the Great of pious memory, who became emperor in the imperial city of Constantinople otherwise known as New Rome; we too decree and vote the same things in regard to the privileges and priorities of the most holy Church of that same Constantinople and New Rome. And this is in keeping with the fact that the **Fathers naturally enough granted the priorities to the throne of Old Rome on account of her being the imperial capital.***

*And motivated by the same object and aim the one hundred and fifty most God-beloved Bishops have accorded **the like priorities to the most holy throne of New Rome, with good reason deeming that the city which is the seat of an empire, and of a senate, and is equal to old imperial Rome in respect of other privileges and priorities,** should be magnified also as she is in respect of ecclesiastical affairs, as coming next after her, or as being second to her. And it is arranged so that only the Metropolitans of the Pontic, Asian, and Thracian dioceses shall be ordained by the most holy throne of the most holy Church of Constantinople aforesaid. "*

The conciliar fathers were very pragmatic and were aware that the episcopal see which should have the primacy had to have a real capacity to exert this primacy, a capacity ensured by the financial and political support of the society that had become Christian. Thus, the imperial power of the Roman Empire provided a framework for synodality, a concept dear to the Orthodox, to be actually achieved. The seven councils recognized as ecumenical by the Orthodox Church were all summoned by emperors, who also ensured the concrete implement of dogmatic and disciplinary decisions.

Today, the See of Constantinople has a primacy of honor inscribed in the holy [diptychs](#) recognized by all local Orthodox Churches. Because of this primacy, the Church of Constantinople has the right to take initiatives on a pan-Orthodox scale and also to address the outside world in the name of the whole

⁵ Vailhé Siméon. « [Origines de l'Église de Constantinople](#) » In: Échos d'Orient, tome 10, n°66, 1907. pp. 287-295.

Orthodox *pleroma*, on the condition of being authorized to do so by all local Orthodox Churches. This was [highlighted](#) by the Patriarchate of Moscow⁶ and other local Churches.

However, [through Metropolitan Elpidoforos of Bursa](#), the Patriarchate of Constantinople recently (in 2014) asserted that the Ecumenical Patriarch is not *primus inter pares*, but rather *primus sine paribus*, that is to say that he has special privileges, such as the right to hear appeals and to grant or withdraw autocephaly (as was the case with the Archdiocese-Patriarchates of Ochrid, Pec, and Tirnovo etc.), a privilege that the Ecumenical Patriarchate has exercised even in the case of recent patriarchies, not yet validated by decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, the first of them being that of Moscow. This position, publicly expressed in 2014, has been today⁷ concretely implemented in the ecclesiastical policy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople towards the Ukrainian issue. It may happen again tomorrow in Montenegro or in the Republic of Macedonia, where there are also two uncanonical Orthodox churches, as in Ukraine.

But [according to Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk](#), number two in the Russian Church, this position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate would be a new understanding of the primacy in the Church. Consequently, "the coordinating role that the Throne of Constantinople played, though not without difficulties, in the Orthodox world in the second part of the 20th century, cannot be played by it now. The Patriarchate of Constantinople has self-destructed as the coordinating center for Orthodox Churches".

Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro (Patriarchate of Serbia) is also critical of the actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. [According to him](#), they could have had "some meaning during the Constantinian period in the history of the Church, but this period is now over". He says the solution would be for the Church to return: "to its pre-imperial structure, without imitating what happened in past centuries when there was a symbiosis between the State, the Church, and the people. It must return to the structure that existed before Emperor Constantine. With an attitude of respect for what happened after, but not limiting itself to the historical experience. What the Church experienced during the imperial period must be left to the past".

⁶ The issue of primacy in the universal Church has been raised many times during the work of the Joint International Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. On March 27, 2007, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church entrusted the Synodal Theological Commission with the study of this problem, and with drafting an official position of the Moscow Patriarchate on this problem (Minutes, # 26). Also, at its October 13, 2007 meeting in Ravenna, the Joint Commission adopted a document on the ecclesiological and canonical consequences of the sacramental nature. Having studied the [Ravenna Document](#), the Russian Orthodox Church did not agree with the part that refers to synodality and to primacy at the level of the universal Church. This question was also relevant to inter-Orthodox relations, particularly in the context of preparations for the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church (Council of Crete, 2016). More specifically, because of the way primacy is currently exercised in the Orthodox Church at a universal level.

⁷ [Let us quote](#) Metropolitan Emmanuel of France of the Ecumenical Patriarchate: "The process of granting autocephaly, as His Holiness mentioned, is an exclusive privilege of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which has the responsibility to put things in ecclesiastical and canonical good order". And Patriarch Bartholomew in his September 3, 2018 [address](#) during the synaxis of the ecumenical throne metropolitans and archbishops in activity: "The Ecumenical Patriarchate—being responsible for the safeguarding of unity, but also the coordination of inter-Orthodox relations and pan-Orthodox initiatives—carries out this sacred ministry in the Orthodox world, faithfully adhering to the unshakable ecclesiological and canonical principles of the Tradition of our Fathers".

In the coming days, we will see if the other Churches agree or disagree with the Patriarchate of Constantinople's vision of primacy, through the acceptance of the new autocephalous Church in Ukraine.

And by way of conclusion, I would like to quote once again Saint Justin Popovich. In 1977, he wrote: "It would be contrary to the Gospel to allow Constantinople... to canonically and dogmatically endorse certain historical forms which could end up becoming chains, instead of wings, for the Church and for her transfiguring presence in the world"⁸.

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⁸ Bernard Le Caro, *Saint Justin de Tchélié*, coll. Grands Spirituels orthodoxes du XXème siècle, L'Âge d'Homme 2017, p. 269.