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CANONICAL CONDITIONALITY OF THE AUTOCEPHALIC ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH IN THE RULES OF THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

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The era of the Ecumenical Councils is rightly considered a “golden period” in the history of the Christian church. The Canon of the Holy Books was finally formed, and the dogmas and rules of the church took perfect forms. In the pre-conciliar period, the teachings of Christ and the apostles were transmitted orally, mainly through the sermons of the holy fathers. The absence of a fixed canon and dogmas led to the emergence of the first heresies and distortions of certain provisions in church teaching. It was during the Ecumenical Councils that all the dogmatic and canonical works of the early church were framed in specific rules in the form of Council resolutions.

The era of the Ecumenical Councils is considered an exemplary period also because it demonstrates the example of the Synod. The Ecumenical Council is the reaction of the whole church to a problem that the church community has never encountered before. It is a panacea to heal a certain wound on the church body, which has manifested itself in the form of a certain heresy or a distorted interpretation of certain passages of Scripture. Fathers and representatives of all the then Local Churches gathered together to resolve the problem that troubled the church.

It was during this period that the autocephalous principle of the existence of individual churches was finally enshrined in the resolutions of several Ecumenical Councils (Second and Fourth). The principle of church-administrative division was formed, which was borrowed from the Byzantine-Roman Empire. Certain ecclesiastical regions, such as dioceses and dioceses, were united into dioceses. The first hierarch of the capital of the metropolitan district received not only the privileges of honor, but also the spiritual authority and the court over the bishops of the subordinate dioceses. The highest level of church organization is the ancient patriarchates, which united several dioceses. A “pentarchy” is being formed, the theory of the management of the Ecumenical Church by the five most influential departments. Such a structure of administrative-church division in the structure of the Ecumenical Church is preserved today. Each of the Local Churches, regardless of its status, is independent and autonomous in its own inner life.

The example of resolving church disputes and combating church divisions and heresies during the Ecumenical Councils should be used by modern hierarchs. Today the Ecumenical Church is on the verge of a great schism. Several local churches broke off the Eucharistic communion, which symbolizes common unity. The ideals of Christianity of the “golden age” are lost. Therefore, further detailed research of the Nicene period and the institutionalization of the autocephalous church system of that time will serve to establish a tolerant dialogue between the hierarchs of the Local Churches in the XXI century.

Key words: autocephaly, Ecumenical Council, patriarchy, diptych, autocephaly, canon, metropolitan, political influence.

The crisis of Ecumenical Orthodoxy, which became clear after the Great Council of Crete in 2016, negatively affected the intra-church life of most Local Churches. The next event of world importance, which became a kind of dividing line in the Ecumenical Church, was the proclamation of the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church, which took 15th place in the diptych. Due to

the lack of a unified and agreed mechanism for the proclamation of a new autocephalous church (the document “Autocephaly and methods of its proclamation” was to be adopted at the Council of Crete, which was not attended by representatives of four Local Churches), hierarchs of world churches have radically opposite approaches to non/recognition equal to their sister church. Discussions about the primacy and powers of the Ecumenical Throne, including the issue of granting autocephalous status, have always taken place in church history. However, they became especially acute in connection with the declaration of independence of the next Local Church (such events took place due to the granting of autocephaly to the Bulgarian OC, the Polish OC, the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, etc.). And the theological discussion is related to the formation of diptychs and the prerogative of granting autocephalous status (conciliar, from the Mother Church or the Patriarch of Constantinople) in connection with the proclamation of independence of the Ukrainian Church. Thus, the issue of autocephalous issues is not new at all. This problem has repeatedly seriously exacerbated relations between the Local Churches. Several national churches, such as the Montenegrin and Macedonian, are still awaiting universal recognition. Therefore, the issue of autocephaly of the new Local Church on a universal scale is extremely relevant today.

All modern church life, as well as the very principles of Christ’s existence, were finally fixed during the Ecumenical Councils, when the canon of Scripture was clearly formed, church dogmas, which the church uses today, and regulated major issues of church life and organization. All the church teachings of the early period are certainly relevant today, because the highest body of church government is the Ecumenical Council. Thus, the study of the problem of autocephalous formation of the first ancient patriarchates during the Ecumenical Councils is not just relevant, but basic for any autocephalous discussions. After all, the resolutions and rules of the Ecumenical Councils are binding and have no statute of limitations. Thus, for a scientific discussion on the possibility of autocephaly in the XXI century, it is necessary to study the problem of church independence in the rules of the Councils.

The state of scientific development of the chosen topic is heterogeneous. On the one hand, there are numerous scientific, both secular and ecclesiastical, studies of the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils and the historical epoch in the formation of Christianity in general. Unequivocally, this is the “golden”, i.e. the fundamental period of formation of church life. On the other hand, the autocephalous issue is poorly studied, because in the period IV–VIII centuries it was not supra-acute. Five ancient patriarchates were clearly formed, which governed the life of the Ecumenical Church. That is, there is a lot of research on cathedral art, but the selection of material on the research topic is meager.

Among the important sources of research are the numerous statements and official appeals of most modern hierarchs and theologians who try to appeal to canons and rules, but there are radically opposite interpretations of the same position depending on the position of the Local Church.

Valuable today are the works of researchers of Ukrainian church history and the canonical structure of the Orthodox Church I. Vlasovsky, O. Kyridon, O. Lototsky, Y. Mulyk-Lutsyk and others, who repeatedly drew attention to the period of canonical church creativity of Christianity and the formation of the institution of autocephaly. Among the scholars who studied the Conciliar period of the formation of Christian dogmas, it is necessary to single out world-renowned researchers of church history: V. Asmus, F. Baur, A. von Harnack, J. Robertson, A. Kartashev, E. Caesariysky, N. Milash, A. Momigliano, E. Smirnov, S. Smirnov, K. Skurat, F. Uspensky, K. Steidlin and many others. The works of the mentioned authors reveal the main periods of development and objective-situational conditionality of the autocephalous principle of the church’s existence. The scientific work of the world-famous theologian Archimandrite Kirill (Govorun) is

a thorough scientific work. In particular, a dissertation on ecclesiology, in which much attention is paid to the period of the Ecumenical Councils and the problem of autocephaly. A fundamental study of the period chosen for the study is a four-volume book by V. Bolotov on the history of the ancient Church, which gradually reveals the external church growth of the parish network and the internal system of Orthodoxy of that time. In general, the works of leading researchers A. Aristova, D. Gorevy, O. Gorkusha, V. Yelensky, S. Zdioruk, A. Kolodny, P. Kraliuk, O. Sagan, P. Saukh, A. Smirnova, L. Filipovich, Y. Chornomorets, A. Yurash, P. Yarotsy and others are devoted to the religious and philosophical understanding of the processes of autocephaly in Orthodox canonism.

Despite the significant scientific interest of both secular and ecclesiastical science in the chosen topic of research, the problem of autocephaly and the possibility of its provision during the Ecumenical Councils remains unsolved. In addition, the autocephalous principle of the existence of the Ecumenical Church during the formation of church canons is not covered. The presence of a number of unresolved scientific problems concerning the autocephalous structure of the Ecumenical Church in the early Christian period significantly actualizes the chosen topic.

The aim of the article is to study the autocephalous principle of the church-administrative system in the era of the Ecumenical Councils. This is the basic period of formation of church doctrine, which has not lost relevance in the XXI century. Today it is important to establish non/compliance with the mechanisms of governing the church structure, which were formed in the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, as the highest bodies of church government. The main question of the study is whether the principles of acquiring autocephaly by the new church in the mentioned period were finally formed, and whether their application is possible in practice in the conditions of the existing system of Local Churches.

Autocephaly, as the basic institution of systematization of the Orthodox Church, is determined on the basis of the ecclesiological doctrine of the locality of the Church. This is expressed in the form in which it has been reflected in the Orthodox Tradition and the life of the church from apostolic times to the present day. Thus, the basic principle of autocephaly is the whole apostolic and patriarchal tradition of the local church, which was presented as the realization of the historical body of Christ in space and time. Thus, there is a direct connection between the canonical institute of autocephaly with the Orthodox ecclesiological doctrine of the structure of the local Church [3, p. 214].

Historically, in the period of early Christianity it was not possible to form a complete code of rules and norms of the modern church structure and life. The apostles and their closest followers considered the preaching of the good news to be the main task. Therefore, the first ordinations were carried out for preaching and pastoral purposes. The rules and norms of Christian life were self-evident and transmitted orally. From the point of view of the Christians of the first centuries, the society of that time was conditionally divided into believers and pagans. Believers knew perfectly the commandments, rules of life and behavior of a Christian, and most importantly – lived according to these norms. Additional fixations of dogmas and canons were superfluous. However, over time, Christianity spread in different countries. Oral tradition distorted the origin of Christ to some extent. The first heretical teachings appeared. Therefore, there was a need to form and fix the foundations of faith in the form of dogmas and canons of the church.

S. Bulgakov believed, and in his opinion the author agrees that faith in its essence is not abstract. Faith will inevitably give rise to a certain dogma or rule. Conversely, dogma is a concrete embodiment of the transcendent manifestation of faith [1, p. 50].

The problem of approving the corpus of sacred rules and dogmas is quite complex. First of all, this is due to the recognition of the “universality” of the cathedral itself. All councils

of the Christian church are divided into two broad categories: before the division of the church, those that were accepted by all churches (their authority was supported by the state authorities); and after the division into Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Accordingly, each church held its own church conventions. On the other hand, in the period before the division, not all church assemblies were recognized as “Ecumenical Council”. For example, the Councils of Sardis in 343, Ephesus in 449, Constantinople in 754 did not receive such a status and were adopted as Local [6, p. 75].

The institutional framework of the early church was formed in the political geography of the Roman Empire and was forced to adapt to the state-administrative system. The institutional basis of the autocephalous structure of the early church came from the apostles themselves, who did not provide for other forms of organization of church life [14, p. 26]. Even in the pre-Nicene period, the church tried to structure its own territorial location, the rights of bishops and first metropolitans, priority in worship and administration of dioceses, the system of interaction between individual, de facto autocephalous entities (dioceses, cesiums, metropolises) and many other organizational issues. Already in the Conciliar period, state regulation of autocephaly as the main form of organizational church change became apparent. The church structure and administration are completely subordinated to the Byzantine political and legal practice of administrative division. Even before the First Ecumenical Council in 325, the church tried to build a similar system of government. One way or another, but the structure of the hierarchical structure of public administration and administrative division (capital-province-metropolis-diocese-specific city with adjacent settlements) was borrowed by the church. At the same time, such a clear hierarchical structure is difficult to formalize in the framework of the autocephalous institutionalization of the early church. It can be argued that the autocephalous system of church structure is transformed into a clear state hierarchy. This was accelerated by the legalization of the church under Constantine I (306–337) and the subsequent adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the empire. The division of the empire into East and West in 395 and the final establishment of the capital in Constantinople laid the foundation for the future distance between the Roman and Constantinople chairs, which constantly competed in matters of power and honor [10, p. 99].

Historically, the Byzantine model of church administration was established in Orthodoxy. This began at the early (Local and Ecumenical) councils of the church. Organizational forms of church government were approved and codified in church law (official rules) and exist alongside ancient customs (informal rules), which actually forms the basic component of the institutional design of the church hierarchy. It is important to emphasize that autocephaly, as a special form of church organization, was not an “invention” of the church, which was expressed through church law. Church law recognized and codified the form of organization and management that already exists [14, p. 27].

Church boundaries, for the most part, corresponded to state and political boundaries. The Church and individual dioceses adapted to the administrative transformations of imperial government. Therefore, some dioceses remained self-governing, while others were integrated into broader church structures. Thus, it can be argued that even in the pre-Nicene period, the church structure, although not officially recognized and approved by the Council’s decisions, corresponded to the civil organization of the Roman Empire.

Such a system of church organization, which provided a stable link between geo- and ethno-politics and the church structure itself, allowed the church to occupy the main cultural-forming niche in Byzantium. It is obvious that the geographical boundaries during the war, the rise and fall of individual provinces did not remain static. Therefore, the church constantly adjusted its own hierarchical self-organization in accordance with the political and territorial changes in the state. Later, such dependence will be called the territorial principle of the church structure [14, p. 51].

The territorial principle of the formation of church government has three main consequences. First, the main form of church-hierarchical system, the local church, which is gathered around its Primate (34th Apostolic Rule), under the pressure of state power could be united into higher-level units, or subordinate to another first hierarch. In the vast Byzantine Empire, transformational trumpeting was a stable phenomenon. For example, the ancient Carthaginian Autocephalous Church disappeared. Second, the territorial principle of church government to determine their own political priorities. The governors of individual provinces supported their metropolitan, who was endowed with higher powers than the local bishops. This led to the emergence of large metropolitan areas, which later claimed the patriarchate. Third, it allowed the church to form its own “political philosophy”, which expressed its institutional framework, and the emperor, in turn, bore direct divine responsibility for the integrity and fidelity of the Christian people [14, p. 52].

In the future, this led to the decisive role of the emperor in church life and very close identification of church ecclesiology with the political and administrative organization of the Byzantine Empire [13]. The institutional design of church government, which in the early Christian period was in its infancy and although it existed, was not canonically justified. During the Council period it acquires outlined forms, which is reflected in the decisions of the Council. The rules of ecclesiastical administration almost completely coincided with state norms.

The territorial principle of church administration quickly formed several basic rules. The main ones are the principle of electing a local bishop by one’s own community, and his ordination already depended on 2–3 neighboring bishops and the metropolitan, who was to give his blessing to the chosen one. The bishops of one large province met and elected from among the collegium a metropolitan whom they considered their first hierarch. Since the first hierarchs of such metropolitanates did not know the external ecclesiastical authority over themselves, but were elected by the local bishops without outside approval or consent, in fact it was an autocephalous church unit. Thus the territorial principle of church administration formed the autocephalous system of Orthodox ecclesiology. Although the official name “autocephalous church” will appear later, because the original sources did not leave such a term in the first three centuries, each of the metropolitanates was independent in nature and according to general ecclesiology [11, p. 21].

Already during the Councils, when the fathers of the Ecumenical Church will meet to discuss urgent church needs, three main ways of proclaiming a new autocephalous church will be formed. They, in theory, remain relevant today, but in practice require universal consent. The first is the granting of autocephalous status by the mother church to some of its dioceses. That is, the mother church separates a certain administrative unit from itself, giving it complete independence from itself. The second is the possibility of granting autocephalous status to the Ecumenical (Constantinople) Patriarch, as the first in honor among other primates. Third, the decision of the church-administrative status at the Ecumenical Council [14, p. 53]. Another option is when already recognized Local Churches agree with the self-proclaimed autocephalous status of a particular church unit. All these methods have taken place and precedents in the history of the formation of the structure of modern Ecumenical Orthodoxy, but none of the mechanisms for granting autocephalous status (except the Ecumenical Council) has unanimous support and sufficient justification in modern canon law.

The reason for the lack of a unified mechanism for granting autocephalous status in the absence of a conciliar discussion of the problem. A church council that could be recognized by the Orthodox Church in Ecumenical Status has not been convened for more than 1,000 years. Other councils convened since the ninth century in both the Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Catholic) Churches have been recognized in the East by purely local councils that do not have a universal, that is, universal character. Preparations for the General All-Orthodox Council gained active

momentum in the XX century, but work on this project was constantly interrupted due to various political complications. And the inability to agree on basic pan-Orthodox documents, including “Autocephaly and ways to proclaim it”, led to the calling of the Great Council in Crete in 2016 [4].

In the Conciliar epoch, when ecclesiastical legislation was formed, the codes of canons in the Eastern and Western churches contained quite serious differences, so it is impossible to speak of the generally accepted canonical-ecclesiastical law even in the period before the division in 1054. At the same time, it was at time that five basic sources of church law were formed, which today underlies the institutionalization of the church structure. In particular, the famous theologian of the twentieth century I. Meiendorf points to the following sources:

- conciliar and pastoral decrees, which contain canons and rules (Ecumenical and Local Councils, and the rules of individual church fathers, such as Basil the Great);
- imperial legislation of Byzantium, such as the Code of Justinian, which could not be adopted contrary to Christian laws and traditions;
- codes of ecclesiastical law, such as the Nomocanon in the “Fourteen Headings” of Patriarch Photius, which became widespread among the Slavs and systematized a large array of ecclesiastical acts;
- commentaries and interpretations of Scripture and ancient canons, such as the explanations of Theodore Balsamon, John Zonaras, and Alexios Aristenos. This also includes all prominent canonists who have published authoritative comments and interpretations of church law;
- official decrees and circulars of the Primates and the Synod, especially in the capital’s Constantinople Department [12, p. 82].

So, this is the main sources of church law in the Council period. They have a clear hierarchical structure that reflects their importance in church life. In the same form, in addition to imperial decrees, these sources are relevant in the XXI century. It cannot be said that after the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the state ceased to play a role in the life of the church and to influence the canonical way of life. On the contrary, the church is constantly adapting to the norms and regulations of state law in the vast majority of countries.

Despite the formation of the main sources of church law, the Council period left unresolved a significant number of issues of concern to the church community in modern society. This happened because the Councils met on a specific occasion, and were a reaction to acute issues that troubled the church consciousness at the time. The official reason for convening the Ecumenical Council has always been a certain new doctrine, which was later, at the Council itself, assessed as heretical. And already in the process of such an All-Orthodox meeting, other global decisions were made that worried the church. In the IV–VII centuries, the problem of autocephaly was not the cornerstone of all general ecclesiastical problems. Under the strong pressure of the empire, 5 ancient patriarchates were formed, with a clearly defined prerogative of the Metropolitan Patriarch, who with the “blessing” of Vasilevs after the Fourth (Chalcedon) Council was given the title of Ecumenical [8, p. 389].

The vast majority of us will not find the reflection of autocephalous issues in the resolutions of the Councils, but this issue has repeatedly been the focus of theological debates of the Council period. Most rules and regulations concerning autocephaly do not explain the mechanism and procedure for forming a new autocephalous church. Most likely, at that time the very possibility of church separation from the already existing ancient departments was not envisaged. Canons, such as the Second, Fourth, and Sixth Councils, fix the already existing autocephalous status of the ancient patriarchates, grant equal privileges and rights to the Constantinople chair (compared to Rome), and do not reveal the possibility of the new church gaining autocephalous status. It is advisable to systematize those rules and regulations that contain references to

church independence or reveal the mechanisms of church government. Thus, if the rule refers to the department where the first hierarch is, it is obvious that it is about the autocephalous structure of such a church, because the very concept of the first hierarch indicates his independence from the external church leadership. In particular, Rule 2 of the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (381) forbids another bishop to seize a cathedral city (that is, the main chair of a certain church); Rule 20 of the Council of Trulli in Constantinople (691), which confirms the previous one; one of the most important Apostolic Rules concerning autocephaly – 34, there cannot be two bishops in one canonical territory. Since we are talking about a specific first hierarch and the impossibility of their multiplicity in one territory, then we mean the independence of a particular church district, which is equated to an autocephalous church. It is necessary to know the rules and regulations, which reveal a similar theme: Apostolic Rules 25, 39, 55 and 82; Rule 15 of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea; Rules 5, 13, 20, 24 and 26 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon; 17th Rule of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Trulli); Rules 4, 11, 12, 14, 17 and 21 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council; Rules 1, 2, 13 and 17 of the Double Council of Constantinople; Rules 24 and 25 of the Local Council of Antioch; Rules 3, 7 and 8 of the Gangra Local Council; Rule 57 of the Laodicean Local Council; Rules 6, 7, 26, 33, 43, 64 and 82 of the Carthaginian Local Council; 9th Rule of the Neo-Caesarea Local Council; Rule 15 of the Ancyra Local Council [5].

In addition, from an ecclesiological point of view, there is no difference between the function of the head in general and the management of his cathedral city, as well as the church in general: the city itself according to ancient canons gives or recognizes the primacy of its hierarch: Rule 3 of the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (381); Rule 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon (451). The Orthodox Church does not share the functions of the primates and bishops of the cities for which they were elected and ordained. The new leader needs to take on both, because they come from him, not the other way around. That is why, in ancient times, the first hierarch had the title, for example, the bishop of Antioch. This meant that he was the head of the entire metropolis. Thus, if the canons and rules refer to the election and functions of the Primate of the church, such an administrative unit inevitably had an autocephalous status, which follows from the independence of its first hierarch [2].

Summing up, we note that the period of the Ecumenical Councils is a “golden” time for the development of theology and canonical creativity of Christianity. Most of the dogmas, canons, rules and norms of church law and the very essence of the church arrangement were formed during this period. This also applies to the institutionalization of the church government system. After the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion in Byzantium began a radically new, different from the previous period of qualitative filling of Christianity with dogmas, canons and theological terms, which tried to convey the transcendent concept of God and the basic norms of faith with immanent concepts.

Compared to the early Christian period, when the concept of autocephaly did not rise directly, but, in fact, was one of the basic principles of the church in the first centuries. The apostles did not know and did not foresee any other form of church system than the autocephalous one. Every community, especially the one headed by the bishop, was completely self-sufficient and independent. As early as the beginning of the II century, the first metropolitanates began to form as a result of the unification of several dioceses into a single church unit. Such transformational changes took place under the pressure of the state apparatus of the Roman Empire. The church hierarchy completely borrowed the state-administrative division, which later formed the basis of the territorial principle of the formation of the autocephalous church. This approach did not take into account the national factor that underlies the self-identification of each nation,

which will play an important role in the future formation of Local Churches in the Balkans and Europe in the XI–XX centuries.

The formation of a code of dogmas and rules in the Council period has a decisive role for the Ecumenical Church today. Most of the basic rules of church life remain relevant today. However, it should be noted that autocephalous issues were given insufficient attention in the cathedral resolutions. This is due to the lack of direct need for such solutions. The Ecumenical Council is always a certain reaction of the whole ecclesial whole to certain problems and issues that concerned not only a particular province or metropolis, but the church as a whole. Mostly, the Council is a certain response to the new teaching of individual preachers, which at the same Council was recognized as heretical, i.e. one that contradicts the Holy Scriptures and Tradition. As for autocephaly, under imperial pressure, five ancient patriarchates (pentarchies) were clearly formed to govern the entire church. Again, with the support of the emperor, the role of the capital's Constantinople chair, which was awarded the title of "Ecumenical", was especially elevated. That is why the Council Rules do not reveal the essence of the mechanism of formation and proclamation of a new autocephaly in the future, but only state the existence of ancient departments with their elevation to patriarchal dignity, and subordination of individual metropolises and dioceses, even of apostolic origin to these patriarchates. The proclamation of a new autocephalous church was not envisaged in principle within the framework of imperial policy, as it could provoke the national factor of the peoples conquered by the empire. Therefore, it was during the Conciliar period that the territorial principle was taken as the basis of the church-administrative system, which was finally refuted after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the proclamation of new national autocephalous churches in the Balkans.

The rules and resolutions of the Councils concerning the autocephalous subject of this church administration testify to the existence of separate independent church units, which were governed by their own first hierarch, who was independently elected by the council of bishops of the metropolitanate under his control. The lack of external influence on the election and ordination of the bishop of the capital city of a certain province indicates the autocephalous status of a particular church unit.

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КАНОНІЧНА ЗУМОВЛЕНІСТЬ АВТОКЕФАЛЬНОГО УСТРОЮ ЦЕРКВИ У ПРАВИЛАХ ВСЕЛЕНСЬКИХ СОБОРІВ

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Епоха Вселенських соборів справедливо вважається «золотим періодом» у історії становлення християнської церкви. Остаточно було сформовано Канон священних книг, догмати та правила церкви набули довершених форм. У дособорний період вчення Христа та апостолів передавалось усно, в основному через проповіді святих отців. Відсутність зафіксованого канону та догматів спричинило зародження перших ересей та перекручувань окремих положень у церковному вченні. Саме у період Вселенських соборів уся догматично-канонічна творчість ранньої церкви була оформлена у конкретні правила у вигляді постанов Соборів.

Епоха Вселенських соборів вважається зразковим періодом ще і тому, що демонструє приклад Соборності. Вселенський собор – це реакція всієї церкви на певну проблему, з якою церковний загаль раніше не стикався. Це панацея для того, щоб вилікувати певну рану на церковному тілі, яка виявляла себе у вигляді певної ересі чи викривленому тлумаченні окремих місць Священного Писання. Отці та представники всіх тогочасних Помісних церков збирались разом для соборного вирішення проблеми, яка турбувала церкву.

Саме в цей період було остаточно закріплено у постановах кількох Вселенських соборів (Другого, Четвертого) автокефальний принцип існування окремих церков. Сформувався принцип церковно-адміністративного розподілу, який був запозичений з Візантійсько-Римської імперії. Окремі церковні області, такі як єпархії та дієцезії, було об'єднано у митрополії. Першоєрарх столиці митрополичого округу отримав не лише привілеї честі, але й духовної влади та суду над єпископами підлеглих єпархій. Найвищим рівнем церковної організації стають древні патріархати, які об'єднували кілька митрополій. Формується «пентархія», теорія управління Вселенською церквою п'ятьма найвпливовішими кафедрами. Така структура адміністративно-церковного розподілу у структурі Вселенської церкви зберігається і нині. Кожна із Помісних церков, незалежно у якому статусі, самостійна та незалежна у власному внутрішньому житті.

Приклад вирішення церковних суперечок та боротьби з церковними розділеннями та ересями у період Вселенських соборів необхідно використати сучасним ієрархам. Нині Вселенська церква перебуває на межі великої схизми. Кілька помісних церков розірвали Євхаристичне спілкування, яке символізує загальну єдність. Ідеали християнства «золотого періоду» втрачено. Тому подальші детальні дослідження нікейського періоду та інституалізація автокефального церковного устрою того часу слугуватимуть налагодженню толерантного діалогу між ієрархами Помісних церков у XXI ст.

Ключові слова: автокефалія, Вселенський собор, патріархат, диптих, автокефалія, канон, митрополит, політичний вплив.