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The Institution of the Eparchial Synod in Australia: A Theological Appraisal



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The year 2024 will go down in history for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia not only for being the centenary celebration since the establishment or 'birth' of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia in 1924 under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but also for the fact that in this same year, another achievement of the greatest proportions will have been realised: namely, the Church's 're-birth' in 2024 through the institution of the Eparchial Synod for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia. The significance of this event for our Church here in the Antipodes cannot be overstated. This most notable milestone for our Church in Australia will safeguard Her perpetuity into the future on the most solid of foundations because it is a decision "which seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). Indeed, this synodical system of governance for the Church goes back to the time of the Apostles who themselves met in Synod or Council to deal

with the issues of the day. We see this clearly, for example, with the Council of Jerusalem (49AD) in Acts 15:6-29 where the Apostles of Christ defined for us the essential criteria for reaching common decisions in the Church, specifically through the assembly of the Apostles, and later on, through their successors the Bishops.

From a theological perspective, the reason for the indispensability of the synodical system is that it reflects the very essence of being of the Church as communion. Moreover, it also reflects the very being of our Trinitarian God who is a communion of Three divine Persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) yet indissolubly united together, one God, sharing the very same divine Essence. Theologically speaking, as noted famously by Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamum of blessed memory, the Church, which reflects the mystery of God, is also nothing less than a fellowship—a *κοινωνία*—of faithful who come together “in one place” (Acts 2:1), and in this way become something infinitely greater than what they are as individuals, they become nothing less than the very Body of Christ, as we read in St Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1Cor 10:16), “the fullness of Him who fills all things [τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι πληρουμένου]” (Eph 1:23). The Church is able to bestow upon us this inestimable gift of fellowship with God, because in her deepest ontological level She in fact is ‘communion’. Most importantly, this means all that the Church is and does needs to operate out of this communal framework; indeed, all Her structures, all Her ministries also have to be communally conditioned.

Accordingly, a basic criterion of all forms of authority and governance within the life of the Church is their inherently communal character. In the same way that the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem came together ‘in council’ or ‘in synod’ to deliberate together on issues, to reach ‘one mind’, and then—and only then—to make decisions affecting the Church in New Testament times, our Church too here in Australia will reflect this very same “God-given” means to make decisions for the well-being of our Church into the future. Indeed, in light of the importance of this synodical form of governance, it has been rightly said that the Church ceases to be Church when She does not act communally.

It is precisely for this reason, that the Holy Archdiocese of Australia is overcome with profound joyfulness and gladness because the latest decision taken by the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on 28th February 2024, to approve the New Constitution for the Holy Archdiocese of Australia which states that henceforth the Church’s governance will be exercised by the Holy Eparchial Synod will see this God-given synodical mode of governance established also for our Church here in Australia. It was announced that this newly constituted

Eparchial Synod will be presided by the incumbent Archbishop of the day, in our specific case, the first ever Eparchial Synod will be presided by His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia and its membership will be constituted by the Assistant Bishops in their new capacity as Regional Bishops (Chorepiskopoi). We are eternally grateful to His Eminence our Archbishop and Chief Shepherd for all his tireless work to prepare the New Constitution for our Church, especially in light of the fact that the existing one was written in 1959 and could no longer adequately meet the needs of our Church today; and to bring it before His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who with His endorsement and blessing presented it to the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Patriarchate and was passed.

Thanks and glory be to God for the wonderful Father-Son relationship we see between our Patriarch with our Archbishop which brings us into fellowship with the Venerable See of Constantinople, rightly characterised as the Pre-eminent but also Suffering Centre of all Orthodox Churches world-wide; thanks and glory be to God for our Ecumenical Patriarch's God-inspired vision for the future of Orthodoxy in the Antipodes whose long tenure as Ecumenical Patriarch has brought with it an unprecedented and unparalleled wisdom; and thanks and glory be to God for the 'Spiritual Father' that He has bestowed upon our Church in the remarkably noble and most honourable Archbishop Makarios—indeed, a shining example for many of us, of a genuine 'Father in Christ' who on a daily basis sacrifices Himself without reservation, because of His unwavering love for the betterment of our Church, giving us, His children, a safe sanctuary and sound shelter so that the joy of the resurrected Christ may continue to be witnessed as the fullness of joy well into the future.

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