

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ROMANIAN AUTOCEPHALOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH

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### Abstract

The acknowledgment of autocephaly represents a historical moment for the Romanian Orthodox Church, it means full freedom in organizing and administering internal affairs, without any interference or control of any church authority from outside. This church act did not remove the Romanian Orthodox Church from the unity of ecumenical Orthodoxy, but, on the contrary, was such as to preserve and ensure good relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and all other Sister Orthodox Churches, and promote a dogmatic, cult, canonical and work unity. The Orthodox Church in the Romanian territories, organized by the foundation of the Metropolis of Ungro-Wallachia (1359) and the Metropolis of Moldavia and Suceava (1401), became one of the fundamental institutions of the state, supporting the strengthening of the ruling power, to which it conferred spiritual legitimacy.

The action of formal recognition of autocephaly culminated in the Ad Hoc Divan Assembly's 1857 vote of desiderata calling for "recognition of the independence of the Eastern Orthodox Church, from the United Principalities, of any Diocesan Bishop, but maintaining unity of faith with the Ecumenical Church of the East with regard to the dogmas". The efforts of the Romanian Orthodox Church for autocephaly were long and difficult, knowing a new stage after the Unification of the Principalities in 1859 and the unification of their state life (1862), which made it necessary to organize the National Church. This was strongly supported by the metropolitans Nyphon of Ungro-Wallachia (1850-1875) and Calinic of Moldavia (1865-1875) and warmly embraced by the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1859-1866) and by the political class of that time.

The efforts for autocephaly did not cease on Cuza's abdication, but they also continued under King Carol I, who supported the efforts of the Orthodox Church in Romania to fulfil its aspirations, in accordance with the will of the Romanian clergy and believers, while acknowledging that the institution of the Church "has always been closely bound to the destinies of the country." It was a long, yet so impressive way that the Romanian Orthodox Church has come, from centuries of brilliant history to a period of over two decades of the nineteenth century, at the end of which the status of Romanian Orthodoxy as autocephalous church was definitively sanctioned.

**Keywords:** Church, autocephaly, law, Orthodox Church

### MAIN TEXT

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a series of events that were crucial for the history of Romania: the Unification of the Principalities (1859), the War of Independence (1877-1878), the proclamation of the Kingdom of Romania (1881) were the premises and the framework of the aspirations for

a church organization on a higher level which naturally led to the achievement in 1885 of the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church.<sup>1</sup>

The acknowledgment endeavours and the recognition itself represents a historical moment for the Romanian Orthodox Church, it implying complete freedom in organizing and administering internal affairs, without any interference or control of any church from outside. This church act did not remove the Romanian Orthodox Church from the unity of ecumenical Orthodoxy, but, on the contrary, was such as to preserve and ensure good relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and all other Sister Orthodox Churches, and to promote a dogmatic, cult, canonical and work unity.

Autocephaly as a specific church term is grounded in the Apostolic Canon 34 which stipulates the following: *"The bishops of every nation (people) ought to know and honour the first of them, and to consider him as leader, and to consult him when doing all the important things, and to only do those things that are related to each diocese and the lands under its control. But the former (the protoss), in his turn, will not do anything without the others' opinion. For this way there will be understanding, and God will be glorified by the Lord in the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit"*<sup>2</sup>.

The principle of church autocephaly appears, is grounded and developed in light of the following canons of the Ecumenical and Local Synods: 4, 5, 6<sup>3</sup> and 7 of the First Ecumenical Synod; 2 and 3<sup>4</sup> of the Second Ecumenical Synod; 8<sup>5</sup> of the Third Ecumenical Synod, 5, 9, 12, 17, 19 and 28<sup>6</sup> of the Fourth Ecumenical Synod; 8, 17, 36 and 39<sup>7</sup> of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod, 6 of the Seventh Ecumenical Synod; 9, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20 and 22 of the local synod of Antioch 3, 6 and 15 of the Local Council in Sardica; 40 of the Local Synod of Laodicea; 13, 18, 48, 49, 50, 51, 73, 76, 95 and 120 of the Local Council of Cartagena. Canons 3 of the Second Ecumenical Council, 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council and 36 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council establish the honorary ranks of the five autocephalous Churches: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

The post-apostolic literature indicates that the episcopal ecclesiastical units, that is, the ecclesial communities headed by one bishop, were ruled independently of each other, that is, they were autocephalous, so that the bishops of that time could be called autocephalous bishops<sup>8</sup>.

Autocephaly, a term whose etymological origin is to be found by bringing together the Greek words, "autos" (itself) and "kefala" (head), designates in the church life the administrative-judicial independence of an Orthodox church unit, compared to another unity constituted in the same way within the framework of ecumenical Orthodoxy. This means that none of the church units that are autocephalous are subordinated to each other, but rather each of them is lead independently, being "in a state of interdependence in dogmatic, cultic and canonical terms, forming together the ecumenical orthodoxy."<sup>9</sup>

The term "autocephaly" (aftokéfalos, avtokéfalón) was not used at the outset to express the canonical position of independent administrative-judicial churches. In church language, "autocephaly" is used by Theodorus Lector († 525) who speaks about the autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus, by Epiphanius of Constantinople († 535) or Epiphanius of Cyprus of the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century († 403), to whom is assigned a letter

<sup>1</sup> The Archive of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, *Codicele corespondenței patriarhale*, 54, p. 176; *Tomosul autocefaliei Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, Greek text and translation into Romanian, in the Romanian Orthodox Church, IX (1885), no. 5, p. 344-354; the original Greek facsimile in photocopy, in the Romanian Orthodox Church, XXXIV (1910), nr. 7, p. 721-724.

<sup>2</sup> Arhid. prof. PhD Ioan N. Floca, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe, note și comentarii*, III<sup>rd</sup> improved edition, Sibiu, 2005, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> The sixth Canon of the First Ecumenical Synod specifies the jurisdictional rights of the Churches of Alexandria, Rome and Antioch (the Diocese of the East), while affirming that this jurisdiction is not based on previous rights, but only to "preserve the old customs".

<sup>4</sup> Canon II of the Second Ecumenical Council speaks of the limits of the autocephalous Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Pontus and Thrace. By the same canon, regional bishops are forbidden from extending their jurisdiction over their region boundaries for ordination or any other provision.

<sup>5</sup> Canon 8 of the Third Ecumenical Council records the autocephaly of the Church in Cyprus and authoritatively proclaims the principle of its immunity, forbidding the bishop of Antioch to interfere in its internal affairs: "Also, to preserve in other regions and everywhere in the eparchies, that none of the God-loving bishops may extend their power over another eparchy".

<sup>6</sup> Canon 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council confirms the autocephaly of the Church in Constantinople, and at the same time subordinates the Churches of Asia, Pontus and Thrace to its jurisdiction.

<sup>7</sup> Canon 39 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council affirmed for the second time the autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus.

<sup>8</sup> Liviu Stan, *Obârșia autocefaliei*, Rev. *Orthodoxia*, nr.1-4,1956, p. 374

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, *Autocefalia și autonomia în Ortodoxie*, Rev. *Mitropolia Olteniei*, 1961, nr. 5-6, p. 283

in which he speaks about patriarchal, metropolitan and autocephalous archbishops, being noteworthy that, on the list of Archdioceses, the second that is recorded is that of Tomis.

The Orthodox Church in the Romanian territories, organized by the foundation of the Metropolis of Ungro-Wallachia (1359)<sup>10</sup> and the Metropolis of Moldavia and Suceava (1401)<sup>11</sup>, became one of the fundamental institutions of the state, supporting the strengthening of the princely power, on which it conferred spiritual legitimacy. The action of formal recognition of autocephaly culminated in the vote of the 1857 Ad Hoc Divan Assembly of the desiderata calling for "recognition of the unity of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the United Principalities, of any chiriarch, but maintaining unity of faith with the Ecumenical Church of the East with regard to the dogmas."<sup>12</sup>

The efforts of the Romanian Orthodox Church for autocephaly were long and difficult, knowing a new stage after the Unification of the Principalities in 1859 and the unification of their state life (1862), which made it necessary to organize the National Church. This was strongly supported by the metropolitans Nyphon of Ungro-Wallachia (1850-1875) and Calinic of Moldavia (1865-1875) and warmly embraced by the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1859-1866) and by the political class of that time.

Unfortunately, with the secularization of the monasteries by the Romanian state, on December 26, 1863, a great strain was created between the leadership of our Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Thus, the Ecumenical Patriarch Sophronius III (1863-1866) refused to recognize the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

On December 3, 1864, the *Organic Decree for the Establishment of a Central Synodal Authority*<sup>13</sup> was promulgated, stipulating in the first article that the Romanian Orthodox Church is and shall remain independent of any foreign church authority in matters of organization and discipline<sup>14</sup>. This was the first step towards achieving autocephaly. In the following year, Patriarch Sophronius criticized in harsh terms Cuza's laws, and among others, the self-proclamation of the autocephaly of the Romanian Church.

The ruler continued to defend the freedom of organization of the Orthodox Church of Romania<sup>15</sup>, a fact that infuriated the patriarch even more, the latter immediately summoning the council to find that the proclamation of 1864 was beyond the canons and the old tradition of the Church. In April 1865 he sent Archimandrite Eustathius Cleobus with letters to the ruler and the metropolitans.

On May 12 and July 10, 1865, the two Romanian metropolitans<sup>16</sup> replied to the Patriarch demonstrating that "never in the course of centuries had it (translator's note: the Romanian Church) been subjected to the Church of Constantinople, but rather it was completely independent in its administration, keeping intact the true canonical ties with the other Churches, with which it worships the Orthodox faith". This response irritated the Patriarch, who criticized virulently Cuza Voda's church reforms. The efforts for autocephaly did not cease with Cuza's abdication, but continued under King Carol I, who supported<sup>17</sup> the efforts of the Orthodox Church

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<sup>10</sup> The 1359 act of recognition of the Metropolis of Walachia by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, as well as the founding act of the second Metropolis in 1370 and then the raising of the Arges Metropolitan to the position of exarch (1381) are definite indications that the Church of Wallachia was at that time independent (autonomous or autocephalous), having its own metropolitan synod.

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<sup>12</sup> Neofit Scriban, *Scurtă istorie și cronologie despre Mitropolia Moldovei*, Paris, 1857; Dosar 78, Arhiva Patriarhiei Române, *apud* Liviu Stan, *Despre autocefalie*, in *Ortodoxia VIII* (1956), no. 3, p. 369

<sup>13</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, compendium edition II, revised and completed, Editura Andreiană, Sibiu, 2007, p. 336

<sup>14</sup> *Organic Decree for the Establishment of a Central Authority for the Affairs of the Romanian Religion*, Bucharest, 1865, Constantin Drăgușin, *Legile bisericești ale lui Cuza Vodă și lupta pentru canonicitate*, in *Studii Teologice*, an IX, 1957, no. 1-2, p. 86-103

<sup>15</sup> The ruler states that the Ecumenical Patriarchate "never made laws for the Romanian Church, but only gave blessing to choices of hierarchs made in the country", which does not reconcile with "the right of authority and interference that it now claims." According to N. Șerbănescu, *Optzeci de ani de la dobândirea autocefaliei Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, Rev. Biserica Ortodoxă Română, 1965, no. 3-4, p. 255

<sup>16</sup> Nyphon of Ungro-Wallachia (1850-1875) and Calinic of Moldavia (1865-1875)

<sup>17</sup> Addressing the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, King Carol I said: "This good result I obtained through the insistence of my government, with the luminous and patriotic cooperation of the Holy Bishops and Metropolitans of the Romanian Church." According to Cuvântările regelui Carol I, vol. I, 1866-1886, *Mesaj la deschiderea Sfântului Sinod, Sinaia 1/13 mai 1885*, Ed. Fundația pentru literatură și artă, "Regele Carol II", Bucharest, 1939, p. 426

of Romania<sup>18</sup> to fulfil its aspirations, in accordance with the will of the Romanian clergy and believers, while acknowledging that the institution of the Church “has always been undetachable from the destinies of the country” and that the Church had, “*beyond its own character, a totally national character as well. It has ascended or descended with the rise or fall of the nation.*”<sup>19</sup>

On June 30, 1866, Article 21 of the Romanian Constitution stated that “*the Romanian Orthodox Church is free from any foreign dominance, but preserves its dogmatic unity with the Ecumenical Church of the East, and has a central synodal authority to regulate canonical and disciplinary matters*”<sup>20</sup>, nevertheless remaining in the Eastern Orthodox community<sup>21</sup>. Based on this law, a church bill was drawn up in 1869, which stipulated in the first article that *the Romanian Orthodox Church is and shall remain independent of any foreign chiriarchy*. This bill was also sent to the Ecumenical Patriarchate to bring its remarks on it.

The answer came only in 1870 from the Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory VI, who demanded that the law stipulate that, after the Metropolitan is elected, the Patriarchate be asked for recognition, the Metropolitans mention it to the ministry, and the Holy and the Grand Mir be requested from the Patriarchate. Unfortunately, all these requirements led to the cancellation of the Autocephaly in the bill.

The project became an “*Organic Law of the Romanian Orthodox Church*”, in 1872, on December 14, it describes the Romanian Church as *autocephalous* (Articles 8, 9, 12), preserving the dogmatic and canonical unity with all the Churches of the East, without stipulating any of the points required by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This law ordained the creation of the Holy Synod, which consisted of the two metropolitans, of the six eparchial bishops (Râmnic, Buzău, Argeş, Roman, Huşi and Galati) and eight titular bishops, one from each diocese. At the same time, the law conferred the title of Primate Metropolitan of Romania to the Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia. The Primate Metropolitan Nyphon immediately informed the Ecumenical Patriarch Antim VI about the law, but the latter did not answer, which was interpreted as a tacit approval in Bucharest.

When, in a respectful letter, the Synod of the Romanian Church asked for the blessing for the ordination of three Romanian archbishops, the new Patriarch Ioachim III disagreed, expressing some doubts and criticism of the organic law and being less benevolent to the recognition of the Autocephaly of our Church. Finally, the patriarch agreed to the passage of the Orthodox Christians of Dobrogea under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Ungro-Wallachia Metropolitan Church, and gave the canonical blessing for the ordination of the new archbishops.

On the Holy Thursday of March 25, 1882, the hierarchs of the Romanian Church sanctified, for the first time in the country, at the Metropolis of Bucharest, the Holy and Great Myrrhs, without requesting permission from Constantinople, a fact that again worsened relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate which considered this act as a total detachment from its jurisdiction and replied vehemently by a synod letter.

On 30 March 1884, the Ecumenical Patriarch Ioachim III retired from his seat, being replaced with Ioachim IV, who pastored between October 1, 1884 and November 14, 1886<sup>22</sup>. By the tomos of April 25, 1885<sup>23</sup>, the Ecumenical Patriarchate adopted the natural position of the sister Church of the Romanian Orthodox Church. In the Patriarchal Chancellery of Constantinople, the relations with the Romanian Church were less tense and flowed naturally towards the recognition of autocephaly. With the support of the Romanian Government, the Romanian Orthodox Church continued its diplomatic activity through an exchange of letters with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, held at the beginning of 1885.

Meeting on April 25, 1885, the Patriarchal Synod got acquainted with the addresses received from Romania and wrote the letters of reply, which were sent in Romania through Gheorghe Ghica, the Romanian diplomatic representative at Constantinople. The Ecumenical Patriarch Ioachim IV wrote to the representative of King Carol I and of the Government of Romania, Minister Dimitrie Sturdza, “*who demands from our Great Church of Christ the blessing and recognition of the Most Holy Church of the Kingdom of Romania as autocephalous. As this request was received with pleasure as rational, righteous and*

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<sup>18</sup> which he considers to be “a national state institution where the Romanian people can always find support.” According to Cuvântările regelui Carol I, *op. cit.*, p. 426

<sup>19</sup> Cuvântările regelui Carol I, *op. cit.*, p. 50

<sup>20</sup> Official Gazette, no 142 of June 30, 1866; Chiru C. Costescu, *Colecțiune de legi*, I., Bucharest, 1916, p. 13

<sup>21</sup> Cuvântările regelui Carol I, vol. I, 1866-1886, *Mesaj la deschiderea corpurilor legiuitoare 3/15 ianuarie 1868*, Ed. Fundația pentru literatură și artă, “Regele Carol II”, Bucharest, 1939, p. 53

<sup>22</sup> Ioachim the IV<sup>th</sup>, described as a „a zealous archbishop, a careful shepherd, an enlightened man” according to Șerbănescu, Nicolae I., *op. cit.*, p. 247-273; Please see: *Revista teologică*, Iași, year II, no 39, December 16, 1884, p. 312

<sup>23</sup> During the same year, one by one, the churches of Serbia, Jerusalem, Elade, Cyprus and Russia recognized the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

appropriate to church settlements, we hastened to fulfil it". In this sense, he announced the drafting of "the patriarchal and synodal Saint Tomos, a Tomos by which we bless the Most Holy Church of Romania, recognizing it as autocephalous and entirely self-administered, and proclaiming her Holy Synod as a brother in the beloved Christ".

On the same date of April 25, 1885, the response of the Ecumenical Patriarch Ioachim IV to the Prime Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia, Calinic Miclescu (1875-1886)<sup>24</sup>, came and announced the result of the request for recognition of autocephaly: "This request of Your beloved and respected Highness, being considered together with our Holy Synod of the Most Holy Metropolitans, our loving brethren in the Holy Spirit and co-liturgy officiants, and after our thinking together on it, was deemed a rational and righteous one, and corresponding to church settlements", ending the conflicts between the two Sister Churches, thus sanctioning a historical reality and a legitimate fact in concordance with the Holy Canons.

On May 1, 1885, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church met to acknowledge the recognition of Autocephaly. On this occasion, Dimitrie Sturdza, the Minister of the Cults, presented the Patriarchal Tomos of Autocephaly from April 25, 1885, drafted in Greek, and which states the following: "(...) Therefore, after we have deliberated with the Holy Synod of our Beloved Brothers in the Holy Spirit and co-liturgy officiants, we declare that the Orthodox Church in Romania is also to be said and recognized by all as independent and autocephalous, being administered by its own Holy Synod, having as President the High and Most Honourable Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia and Primate of Romania, one by one, not recognizing in his own internal administration any other church authority, other than on the head of the Orthodox Church, the holy, Catholic, and apostolic, one, the Saviour God-Man, which is the only foundation and corner stone of the angle and the first and supreme and eternal Everlasting Arch and Shepherd"<sup>25</sup>. Immediately after this blissful moment in the life of our Church on May 30, 1885, Metropolitan Calinic Miclescu sent a thankful letter<sup>26</sup> to the Ecumenical Patriarch, in which he assured the latter that "The Romanian Orthodox Church will draw from this blessing a new power to fulfil its holy mission"<sup>27</sup>. On this day, he also sent letters of thanks to the other Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, telling them about the recognition of autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It did not take long for the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Church of Serbia, Greece, Cyprus, and Russia to convey the fact that they recognize the new status of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

This important historical moment in the life of our Church was, in fact, the last step towards the establishment of the Romanian Patriarchate since 1925. The blissful Daniel clearly shows the purpose of autocephaly: fraternal church communion or responsible freedom unity. It should be emphasized that both the autocephaly and the autonomy of a Church are not an end in themselves, but they are aimed at achieving a fraternal and responsible communion between different local Churches represented by their bishops, a communion that is neither constraining unity nor schismatic (separatist), or a pretext of isolation and indifference to the life of other Churches.

The autocephalous churches are not independent churches according to the model of the independent and sovereign states, which may, in one way or another, change the social-political regime and their fundamental constitution, because the Orthodox autocephalous churches have a common sacramental and canonical-pastoral constitution, i.e. a fundamental identity that unites them all and transcends the principle of autocephaly as the principle of its own administrative leadership.

This implies the duty of each Autocephalous Church to preserve the unity of faith, of sacramental life, and canonical structure with all other Orthodox Churches in the spirit of the apostolic and patristic tradition of the Church that cannot be separated from Christ. The primordial and essential vocation of the Church is the communion of men with the Holy Trinity, through the preaching of the Holy Gospel, the Holy Baptism, the Holy Eucharist and all the sacraments, all done by canonical Orthodox bishops, priests and deacons, so that the life of the Church is an image or an icon of the communion of the Holy Trinity, "that they will all be one, just as you and I are one" (John 17, 21).

A careful study of the relationship between ecclesial unity and freedom in their Orthodox understanding shows that authentic church unity is not derived from constraining subordination, but from mutual consultation and fraternal cooperation, nor shall the authentic church freedom be derived from isolation and indifference to others, but is rather a freedom for communion, therefore responsible freedom.

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<sup>24</sup> During his time the Autocephaly of the Church was acquired, the Holy and Great Myrrh was sanctified, the Faculty of Theology was established.

<sup>25</sup> \*\*\*, Acte privitoare la autocefalia Bisericii Ortodoxe a României, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, IX, 1885, no. 8, pp. 553 – 554.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>27</sup> \*\*\*, Acte privitoare la autocefalia Bisericii Ortodoxe a României, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, IX, 1885, no. 5, p. 336.

Because Christian love, service and responsibility in the Church are all the more authentic, the more they are fulfilled in more freedom. This close link between maintaining unity of faith and responsible church freedom is admirably expressed in the content of the tomos when recognizing the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church (since 1885), which in fact contains the basic principles of Orthodox teachings on autocephaly.

The following principles can be derived from this tomos:

a. The first condition of granting or recognizing the autocephaly of a Church is: preserving the “indissoluble unity of faith in the bond of love.” “This unity remains untouched and unwavering in all ages, it is stated in the tomos, the issues of ecclesiastical administration and the order of dignities may change according to the state of the countries. That is why the Most Holy Church of Christ, approving with good will and acknowledging with the spirit of peace and love the necessary changes to the spiritual administration of the local Churches, blesses them and confirms them for an enhanced strengthening of the community of believers.” Therefore, we can state that the recognition or granting of autocephaly to a local church that has for a long time failed to prove its ability to keep the unity of Orthodox faith firmly is not beneficial for the spiritual life of that Church and no responsible action on the part of the Church.

b. The ultimate authority responsible for the administration or leadership of an autocephalous Church is its Holy Synod, chaired by an Archbishop, Metropolitan or Patriarch. The Holy Synod of this Church is not subordinated to another ecclesial authority, but the Holy Synod of an autocephalous Church must exercise this total freedom of church leadership having the conscience of direct responsibility before Christ, the Head of the Church and the Everlasting Arch, as stated in the Tomos: “after we have deliberated with the Holy Synod of our Beloved Brothers in the Holy Spirit and co-liturgy officiants, we declare that the Orthodox Church in Romania is also to be said and recognized by all as independent and autocephalous, being administered by its own Holy Synod, having as President the High and Most Honourable Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia and Primate of Romania, one by one, not recognizing in his own internal administration any other church authority, other than on the head of the Orthodox Church, the holy, Catholic, and apostolic, one, the Saviour God-Man, which is the only foundation and corner stone from the angle and the first and supreme and eternal Everlasting Arch and Shepherd”.

c. Recognizing the autocephaly of a local church implies, therefore, the recognition of its canonical authority equal to the canonical authority of the other sister churches. That is why the Synod of the New Autocephalous Church is called “the synod that is brother in Christ”. By recognizing autocephaly, a daughter church becomes a sister church with full ecclesial maturity. This new autocephalous Church is made known to all autocephalous churches in order to be received in their universal communion.

d. The tomos of autocephaly also states that this self-rule, in complete freedom, implies, however, a free conformation with the continuous and uninterrupted tradition of the Orthodox Church.

e. Although the autocephalous church enjoys all the prerogatives and rights inherent in autocephaly, it still has the duty to preserve the communion of faith and sacramental life with the other autocephalous churches, and as such, its Holy Synod must mention in its diptychs the leaders of these churches; to collaborate and achieve understanding with the other Orthodox Churches “in all important canonical and dogmatic matters, which need a more general and common understanding, according to the holy custom of the parents, preserved from the beginning”.

All these illustrate the fact that the principle of autocephaly is not freedom in isolation, but freedom in communion. And if this communion is manifested especially at the level of commemoration during the Liturgy officiated by the Primate of an autocephalous Church, of the mutual information concerning the enthronement of the new primates and of the counsels on church issues, a more intense collaboration in the pastoral life in the diaspora, today the mission and the common Orthodox testimony in the world could further contribute to the belief that the freedom of self-censorship does not manifest in isolation or autarchy, but in the dynamics of church life in cooperative and fraternal aid.

## **CONCLUSION**

From an administrative point of view, the Orthodox Church is defined as a communion of local, autocephalous and autonomous churches, which preserve dogmatic, canonical and cult interdependence. An autonomous church is that local Church that enjoys administrative independence from its Mother Church. More specifically, church autonomy is the capacity of a local church to regulate its problems according to its own laws (the term “autonomous” comes from Greek, it is a derivative of “self, its own” and “law”), while preserving the dogmatic, canonical and cult unity with Universal Orthodoxy.

In other words, in the Orthodox Church, church autonomy is a canonical system that regulates the

relationship between a local Church and its Mother Church. It is a report of communion and, at the same time, of administrative independence.

Autocephaly represents in the Orthodox Church the canonical status of a local Church enjoying maximum church autonomy and the right of its Holy Synod to choose the leader of the respective Church without the intervention of any external authority. An autocephalous church is, therefore, the one in which its own Holy Synod represents supreme authority.

In Orthodoxy, the local autocephalous churches are sister churches, equal to each other and free from one another in relation to the organization of church life. From an administrative point of view, the local autocephalous churches differ, however, by the way they are organized as archbishops, metropolises or patriarchs. For political and ecclesial reasons, the Ecumenical Patriarchate acknowledged, canonically, the full independence of the Romanian Church, thus gaining a partner in the project of solidarity and unity of Orthodoxy in the South-eastern European space.

A new period started, which was important for the strengthening of the Romanian Orthodox Church, for the role it will play in the life of the Orthodox Romanian faithful and of the Romanian society.

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