

# **Orthodox Unity, Evangelism, and the Problem of Universal Jurisdiction**

**By Fr. Bohdan Hladio**



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***This is a summary of a presentation made by Fr. Bohdan Hladio at the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA) Mega-Conference in Volos, Greece, in January 2023, entitled "Universal Jurisdiction: An Obstacle to Orthodox Mission in North America." The full article will be published in upcoming issue of the Journal SALT/ΑΛΑΣ (<https://saltalas.com>).***

The situation of Eastern Orthodoxy in America is anomalous. While the existence of multiple ecclesiastical jurisdictions on the same geographical territory is canonically proscribed, at least eight autocephalous Churches have diocesan structures on this continent. This situation is problematic on several levels: it does not reflect a coherent ecclesiological vision, results in the squandering of human and material resources, hinders effective outreach and evangelism, and contributes to a spirit of competition rather than cooperation among the various Churches.

"Ethnophyletism," the officially condemned idea that dioceses or parishes should be organized according to an "ethnic" rather than a territorial principle, is often identified as the culprit. I would suggest that the deeper problem is rooted in claims to universal jurisdiction on the part of certain autocephalous Churches.

Roman Catholics believe that the Pope of Rome possesses universal jurisdiction over the entire earth. Eastern Orthodoxy, by contrast, teaches that the unity of the Church is not found in a person, but rather in the faith confessed by her believers. All believers belong to a particular autocephalous Church, which is by definition internally self-governing, possesses the right to elect its own bishops and primate, and to resolve all internal matters without reference to any outside body.

"Territoriality" is a fundamental concept in Orthodox ecclesiology. Grigorios Papathomas notes that "Territory is one of the most important elements that defines Church . . . The Church has always been *Eucharistic* (concerning its *mode*) and *territorial* (concerning its *expression*); in other words, it has always been *eucharistically territorial*."<sup>[1]</sup> Though the territory of each autocephalous church is limited to a particular region, country, or continent, many autocephalous churches claim extraterritorial jurisdiction. The Patriarchate of Moscow, for example, claims as its "canonical territory" not only the physical territory of the former Soviet Union, but "Orthodox

Christians living in other countries who voluntarily accept its jurisdiction.”[2] This idea of associating canonical territory with individual believers is a novel ecclesiological concept, and is *de facto* espoused by the Serbian, Romanian, Antiochian, Bulgarian and other Churches who more-or-less overtly claim the same extra-territorial jurisdiction over “their” faithful. The extension of jurisdiction over *persons* rather than physical territory amounts to a claim of jurisdiction over any territory where a believer might live, including the territory of another autocephalous Church.

These extraterritorial claims are related to the idea of “diaspora.” Maria Hammerli notes that when a church “generate[s] her own *diaspora* because a part of her flock migrates, then the bishop can expand his right of jurisdiction to the territories that house the migrant population, in the name of a different criterion (for instance ethnicity) than the traditionally and canonically admitted one (territory).”[3] The very idea of “diaspora” is theologically problematic because Christians do not confess a centralized location for the cult. In the words of John Meyendorff, “All Christians, whether they find themselves in Jerusalem or in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, are in diaspora, and . . . they reach the promised land only within the eschatological anticipation of the Eucharist and of prayer.” He goes on to make the significant observation that the concept of diaspora “*never* appears in Orthodox canon law.”[4] Hammerli goes on to note the paradoxical situation which results: “a co-habitation of national *diasporas* with their respective churches who are nevertheless aware of their religious affinity.”[5]

This problem of universal jurisdiction can only be resolved in one of two ways: either a complete reformation of the current ecclesiological vision and legislation of the Eastern Orthodox Church, or a serious commitment to what can only be termed “ecclesiological asceticism” on the part of the autocephalous Churches, whereby they eschew all claims to jurisdiction over either land or persons outside the physical bounds of their canonical territory. Neither of these possibilities is achievable in the absence of a robust and functional conciliar process requiring humility, institutional kenosis, and some type of primatial leadership. I believe that such primatial leadership can only be exercised by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as it is the only body which, in accordance with canons promulgated at the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ecumenical councils, has a responsibility for ordering the Church “of the outside”, i.e., in the “diaspora.”[6]

Though the interpretation of these canons is not uncontroversial, no canons exist which give any similar prerogatives to any other local Church.

If administrative unity for the Orthodox Church in North America (or anywhere else outside the physical canonical territory of the universally recognized autocephalous Churches) is to be attained, the renunciation of both explicit and implicit claims to universal jurisdiction will be imperative. The eschewing of such claims, while necessary, is obviously not sufficient. But so long as autocephalous churches continue to regard extraterritorial claims to both territory and believers as normative the existing canonical, ecclesiological, and pastoral conundrum will remain unresolvable.

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<sup>1</sup> Grigorios Papathomas, "The Oppositional Relationship Between the Territorial Church and the Ecclesiastical "Diaspora." [https://www.academia.edu/18003966/25\\_The\\_oppositional\\_relationship\\_between\\_the\\_Territorial\\_Church\\_and\\_the\\_Ecclesiastical\\_Diaspora\\_Ecclesiological\\_unit\\_y\\_faced\\_against\\_co\\_territoriality\\_and\\_multi\\_jurisdiction\\_in\\_English](https://www.academia.edu/18003966/25_The_oppositional_relationship_between_the_Territorial_Church_and_the_Ecclesiastical_Diaspora_Ecclesiological_unit_y_faced_against_co_territoriality_and_multi_jurisdiction_in_English)

<sup>2</sup> Russian Orthodox Church, Official Site of the Patriarchate of Moscow: Section One, "General Provisions." <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/133115.html> (accessed 3 January 2023, emphasis my own).

<sup>3</sup> Maria Hammerli, "Orthodox *diaspora*? A Sociological and Theological Problematisation of a Stock Phrase." *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* (10:2): 109.

<sup>4</sup> John Meyendorff, "Mission, Unity, Diaspora," in *Catholicity and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983): 105.

<sup>5</sup> Hammerli, "Orthodox *diaspora*?", 101.

<sup>6</sup> Grigorios Papathomas, based upon the 28<sup>th</sup> canon of Chalcedon, stipulates that Orthodox who find themselves "on territories where no distinct ecclesial entities" exist should have a bishop designated for them from their own local church, thereby "transforming these territories into the land of a local or locally established Church *and not into territories of 'Diaspora.'*" It then becomes the responsibility of the primate of Constantinople to regulate "the ecclesiastical emergence of these local churches "of the outside", for which he is also the canonical interlocutor." Papathomas, "The Oppositional Relationship Between the Territorial Church and the Ecclesiastical 'Diaspora.'"

## Fr. Bohdan Hladio Professional Profile

### Education

- 2021— PhD student at the Toronto School of Theology, Trinity College.  
Supervisor: Dr. Jaroslav Skira
- 2016-20 Master of Theological Studies. Orthodox School of Theology, Trinity College, University of Toronto.  
Thesis: *Construals of Autocephaly: The Metropolia, the Moscow Patriarchate, and the Orthodox Church in America*.  
Supervisor: Prof. Richard Schneider
- 1975-80 Bachelor of Arts, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. Major: Theology; Minor: English and Russian

### Research Interests

- Autocephaly and Ecclesiology
- Ukrainian Orthodoxy
- Russian and Eastern European Church History
- Orthodox Christian polity and globalization
- Orthodox Christianity in North America
- Orthodox Christian – Jewish dialogue

### Publications

- Hladio, Bohdan. "Universal Jurisdiction as an Obstacle to Orthodox Mission in North America." *SALT-AAAΣ, An Orthodox Journal of Cross-Cultural Theology, Dialogue and Mission*. Athens, Greece. (Forthcoming, Autumn 2023)
- Hladio, Bohdan. "From Reticence to Recognition: The Role of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America in the Canonical Recognition of the Ukrainian Orthodox Metropolias of Canada and the USA." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Holy Cross School of Theology, Brookline, MA. (Forthcoming 2023)
- Hladio, Bohdan. "Judaism and Orthodox Christianity: Encounters and Dialogues." In *Eastern Orthodoxy and World Religions: The Theology and Practice of Inter-Religious Encounter in the Contemporary Christian East*, co-edited with Thomas Cattoi and Paul Ladouceur. (Leiden: Brill Publishers, Forthcoming 2023)
- Hladio, Bohdan. "Walls and Ditches." *Jacob's Well*, Spring/Summer 2021.
- Paul Ladouceur, Introduction and Notes: "In Search of the Original Gospel Tradition" by Lev Gillet. Translation by Bohdan Hladio. *Sobornost* 42:1-2 (2020), 93-105.

- Hladio, Bohdan. "Ukrainian Autocephaly: Reflections from the Diaspora." In *The Ecumenical Patriarchate and Ukrainian Autocephaly: Historical, Canonical, and Pastoral Perspectives*. Edited by Evangelos Sotiropoulos. New York: Order of St. Andrew the Apostle, 2019.
- Macola, Andriy. *Axios: The Mystery of Human Nature*. Translated by Fr. Bohdan Hladio. Kyiv, Ukraine: Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyivan Patriarchate, 2016.
- Hladio, Bohdan. *Northopraxis, or From Pastoral Life*. Rives Junction, MI: HDM Press, 2009.

#### **Conference Presentations**

- Hladio, Bohdan. "Ukrainian Orthodox Church Independence as a Decolonization Movement." Presentation at the 2023 Canadian Theological Society Conference, Toronto, Ontario, May 2023.
- Hladio, Bohdan. "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: The Ecclesiastical Dimension." Presentation for the joint meeting of the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Clergy of Southern Ontario, May 2023.
- Hladio, Bohdan. "Universal Jurisdiction: An Obstacle to Orthodox Unity in North America." Presentation at the International Orthodox Theological Association Megaconference. Volos, Greece. January 2023.
- Hladio, Bohdan. "From Reticence to Recognition: The Role of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in the Reception of the Ukrainian Orthodox Metropolias of the USA and Canada by the Ecumenical Patriarchate." Academic Conference Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, Holy Cross School of Theology, Brookline, MA. October 2022.
- Hladio, Bohdan. "Odocephalies: Politics and Polity in Eastern Orthodox Ecclesiology." Sheptytsky Study Days Presentation, Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute, St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. July 2022.
- Hladio, Bohdan. "Systematic Spirituality: Towards Authentic Orthodox Family Life." Presentation at *Symposium: Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the Global Family of Orthodox Churches: Past, Present and Future*. St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, 2014.
- Articles for *Public Orthodoxy*, a publication of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University (<https://publicorthodoxy.org/?s=Hladio>):
- "Of Camels and Gnats." May 2023
- "On Throwing Stones in Houses of Glass: Moscow, Constantinople, and Autocephaly." April 2021

“Community or ‘Comspoonity?’” December 2020  
“Schismophrenia: A Reflection on Ukrainian Autocephaly.” April 2019  
“Russia and Ukraine: The Empire’s New Old Clothes.” July 2018

**Academic experience**

2023 Winter term, Patriarchal Toronto Orthodox Theological Academy,  
Lecturer, THO 2410 GK - “World Religions”  
2023 Winter Semester, Trinity College, Toronto School of Theology,  
Teaching Assistant, TRT3913 – “Orthodox Life I: Eastern Christian  
Understanding of Ethics and the Person”  
2022 Autumn Semester, Trinity College, Toronto School of Theology,  
Teaching Assistant, TRT2680 – “Salvation Is from the Jews:  
Christianity and Judaism in Theological Perspective and Dialogue”

**Pastoral and Administrative Experience**

- Ordained Deacon in 1986 and Priest in 1988
- Full-time ministry in parishes in Toronto (1988-1995), Hamilton (1995-2005), and Oshawa, Ontario (2008-2021)
- Chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada (2005-2008)
- Board of Directors of St. Andrew’s College in Winnipeg (2000-2008)
- Secretary (1995-2005 and 2010-2013) and president (2013-2017) of the Eastern Eparchial Council of the UOCC
- Founder and main contributor to the [www.pastyr.ca](http://www.pastyr.ca) website, involving the preparation of liturgical texts, music and typicon for use by clergy, choir directors, and cantors within the world-wide Ukrainian Orthodox community.

**Memberships**

2008 - present: Member, Orthodox Clergy Association of the Greater Toronto Area (president, 2018-2023)  
2020 - Member, Orthodox Theological Society of America  
2022 - Member, International Orthodox Theological Association  
2022 - Member, Canadian Theological Society

Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) sent a representative of the Board to the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA) Mega Conference in Volos, Greece, in January 2023, to make a presentation about OCL's work. The representative attended Fr. Bohdan Hladio's presentation.

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