

## **Synodality and Primacy in Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue**

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Eccellenze, Eminenze, cari amici, è per me un grand' onore, e una causa di gioia profonda, di partecipare a questo convegno, specialmente in questa città di Bari, luogo così significativo nella storia della fratellanza e di riconciliazione tra Cattolici e Ortodossi. Sono assai riconoscente a Don Cristiano ed alla Conferenza Episcopale Italiana per l'invito di condividere l'esperienza di questi giorni. Che questo convegno, per la grazia di Dio, ci aiuti, Ortodossi e Cattolici entrambi, di proseguire lungo la via che conduca verso quella piena comunione che desideriamo così tanto.

Mi é stato chiesto di offrirVi una prospettiva analitica sul dialogo attuale tra Cattolici e Ortodossi in quanto riguarda il tema di sinodalità e primato. A che punto siamo? Ecco la domanda. Don Cristiano mi ha concesso la possibilità di parlare in inglese. Vorrei ringraziarVi tutti per quella gentilissima considerazione.

The theological dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the dialogue of truth, is essentially and necessarily based on the dialogue of charity that was begun between us in the 1960s, pioneered by Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and Blessed Pope Paul VI. The theological dialogue was announced by Pope Saint John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios in Constantinople in 1979, and it began in 1980, when a formal Plan for the dialogue was agreed at the first plenary meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church in Patmos and Rhodes.

Very wisely, it was decided that: 'The dialogue should begin with the elements which unite the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches', so as to begin 'in a positive spirit', and it was urged

that we should then keep that positive spirit when addressing the problems that have arisen between us.<sup>1</sup> Three important agreed statements quickly followed. There was a statement in 1982, on Eucharist, Church and Trinity ('The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity'; hereafter, 'Munich document'); one in 1987, agreed here in Bari, on faith, sacraments and ecclesial unity ('Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church'); and one in 1988, on ordination, apostolic succession and sanctification ('The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church with Particular Reference to the Importance of Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God'). Those three statements were a blessed reminder of how much we share!

It is important to see the pattern and the purpose behind that sequence of topics. The Plan clearly stated that our goal is the re-establishment of full communion between our two churches, so that we can celebrate the Eucharist in common again. Building towards that goal, first we have to agree on what the Eucharist is (that was the point of the first statement), and that first statement really established the foundation and the framework for everything that has followed. The Church is a communion (*koinonia*) by participation in the life of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, the source of all communion, and in the Eucharist we 'receive communion', as we say, so significantly; we receive the very life of the Church. So the Eucharist makes the Church, and there is a profound correspondence between the Eucharist, the Church and the Trinity itself. The statement said: 'the eucharistic celebration makes present the Trinitarian mystery of the church' (Munich document, I, 6). From the very start, then, the dialogue has adopted a eucharistic

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<sup>1</sup> The Plan and all of the subsequent agreed statements can be found at: <http://www.prounione.urbe.it/new/eng/index.html>

ecclesiology.

So, first we need to agree on what Eucharist is. Then we need to agree on the various preconditions for Eucharist: faith and baptism, first of all (cf. the second statement), then ordination in apostolic succession through the ages, vertically, as it were, through history (cf. the third statement), and finally we need to agree on the bonds of communion that should unite the Church, horizontally, as it were, here and now across the face of the earth, locally, regionally and universally. That is where synodality and primacy fits in; the last piece of the puzzle, so to speak. The whole project has been, and still is, aimed, please God, at restoring eucharistic communion.

With regard to that final topic, a draft document on ecclesial communion, conciliarity and authority was prepared for the plenary meeting of the dialogue at Freising in Germany in 1990, but the dramatic political events of 1989 and 1990, with the fall of communism and the liberation of Eastern Europe, precipitated something of a crisis for the dialogue. A new freedom of religion allowed many members of Catholic Eastern Churches, some of which had been brutally repressed under the Soviet empire, to re-assert their Catholic identity, thus raising again the difficult issue of 'uniatism'. Orthodox delegates insisted that this topic, which has always been controversial, be moved to the top of the agenda. A statement on uniatism was agreed in 1993, but it did not resolve the issue, and, after a difficult further plenary meeting in Baltimore in the USA, it was feared that the dialogue might have come to an end.

Happily, the dialogue was formally resumed in 2005. It was agreed that uniatism would indeed need further discussion in the dialogue, but that, of its very nature, that discussion could not properly take place until the dialogue had resolved the issue of universal primacy. It was also agreed that in order to establish some foundations for the discussion of universal primacy, the draft

document from 1990 should be taken up again.

After plenary discussion in Belgrade in 2006, agreement was reached in 2007 in Ravenna on a document entitled, 'Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority' (hereafter, 'Ravenna document'), regrettably, however, without the participation of the delegates of the Patriarchate of Moscow, who left the meeting because of the presence of delegates from the autonomous Orthodox Church of Estonia, which is not recognised by Moscow. Sadly, Moscow continues to reject the Ravenna document, though it has taken a full part in all of the discussions that have taken place since 2007. This makes it difficult for us to refer to the Ravenna document directly in our ongoing work, though we certainly do refer to ideas and principles from that document which are agreeable to all. The idea that the life of the Church has three levels, local, regional and universal, was adopted by the Ravenna document and is generally agreed. The Ravenna document described synodality as the common responsibility of all the baptised for the communion life of the Church, and especially as the bond between the bishops who lead the Church (cf. Ravenna document, 5), and it established two vital principles: first of all, that there has been and ought to be some kind of primacy, leadership or headship, at all three levels, the bishop locally, the metropolitan or patriarch regionally, and a universal primacy, also; and, secondly, that primacy and synodality are 'mutually interdependent' (Ravenna document, 43).

In that light, we are now trying to address the issue of 'synodality and primacy', especially at the universal level of the Church's life. There is, of course, only one candidate for the office of universal primate, namely the bishop of Rome. The Ravenna document acknowledges that Rome has always been first in the listing or *taxis* of the major sees from ancient times (cf. Ravenna document,

35, 41), and it quotes the famous words of St Ignatius of Antioch that the local church of Rome ‘presides in love’ (41). ‘It remains’, says the document in conclusion, ‘for the role of the bishop of Rome in the communion of all the Churches to be studied in greater depth’. ‘What is the specific function of the bishop of the “first see” in an ecclesiology of *koinonia*...? How should the teaching of the first and second Vatican councils on the universal primacy be understood and lived in the light of the ecclesial practice of the first millennium?’ (45). A historical document on the role of the bishop of Rome in the first millennium was prepared for the plenary meeting in Vienna in 2010, but was not approved. A very theological document on synodality and primacy was prepared for the plenary in Amman, Jordan, in 2014, but that also was not approved. We have learned from those two attempts and have now prepared a third document, which was endorsed by the Joint Coordinating Committee of the dialogue in September, 2015. Another plenary meeting must now be held to consider it. We hope that may be possible next year, 2016, and that our third attempt to find some agreement on this issue may prove to be successful.

The election of Pope Francis has certainly had a positive effect on the dialogue. From the very start of his ministry, he has consistently referred to himself as the bishop of Rome, and referred to Rome as the Church which presides in charity. He has strongly advocated greater synodality in the Catholic Church, and indicated that Catholics have much to learn from our Orthodox brothers and sisters in that regard.<sup>2</sup> In an important address on 17 October this year, he described his vision of ‘an entirely synodal church’ (‘una Chiesa tutta sinodale’), functioning at three levels, local, regional and universal (as in the Ravenna document). Moreover, he cited both Vatican II and Vatican I to show the continuity of his vision with the well-known teaching of both of those councils. ‘Sono

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<sup>2</sup> See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), n.246.

persuaso’, ha detto Papa Francesco, ‘che, in una Chiesa sinodale, anche l'esercizio del primato petrino potrà ricevere maggiore luce. Il Papa non sta, da solo, al di sopra della Chiesa; ma dentro di essa come Battezzato tra i Battezzati e dentro il Collegio episcopale come Vescovo tra i Vescovi, chiamato al contempo – come Successore dell'apostolo Pietro – a guidare la Chiesa di Roma che presiede nell'amore tutte le Chiese.’<sup>3</sup>

So, the topic of synodality and primacy is a very live issue not only within our Catholic-Orthodox dialogue at present, but also within the Catholic Church itself. Eucharistic ecclesiology has been guiding our dialogue since the start, and that must still be our perspective now. As already seen, the programmatic first statement of 1982 strictly linked the Eucharist, the Church and the Trinity. Here is a longer quote from that document: ‘[T]he church finds its model, its origin and its purpose in the mystery of God, one in three persons.... [T]he eucharist ... understood in the light of the Trinitarian mystery is the criterion for the functioning of the church as a whole. The institutional elements should be nothing but a visible reflection of the reality of the mystery’ (Munich document, II, 1). That is a powerful statement, indicating that the very structure of the Church should be Trinitarian, with the Eucharist as the practical criterion. It may be asked, however, what exactly that means? Should we seek to relate the structure of the Church directly to the immanent life of God, with primacy, for instance, reflecting the position of God the Father within the Trinity, or should we seek more immediately to relate the structure of the Church, and the primacy in particular, to the Eucharist, understanding that the Eucharist is what enables the Church to participate in the life of the Trinity. Both of these approaches are theological, and they are not mutually exclusive. They do,

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Discorso alla commemorazione del 50 anniversario dell’istituzione del sinodo dei vescovi, 17 October, 2015.

however, indicate different emphases, and distinguished theologians on both sides have taken various positions. On the Orthodox side, Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon would favour the first viewpoint,<sup>4</sup> whereas, on the Catholic side, Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI would tend to favour the second.<sup>5</sup> These are fascinating questions, at the very frontier of the development of eucharistic ecclesiology.

Nicolas Afanassieff and John Zizioulas have already been mentioned in this convegno as leading exponents of eucharistic ecclesiology on the Orthodox side. I would like briefly to emphasise the development of eucharistic ecclesiology also on the Catholic side in recent decades. The importance of Joseph Ratzinger has just been indicated, but Henri de Lubac was the pioneer who actually coined the phrase, ‘the Eucharist makes the Church’, in the 1940s.<sup>6</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) quotes that phrase (CCC 1396), and describes the Church eucharistically: ‘The Church is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a eucharistic, assembly’ (CCC 752). It also associates the pope with the Eucharist: ‘Since he has the ministry of Peter in the Church, the Pope is associated with every celebration of the Eucharist, wherein he is named as sign and servant of the unity of the universal Church’ (CCC 1369).

Eucharistic ecclesiology has prompted this fresh approach to the papacy in Catholic theology and doctrine in recent times, linking it to the Eucharist, instead of thinking simply in terms of

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<sup>4</sup> See, John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, edited by Paul McPartlan (London: T & T Clark, 2006), pp.147-8.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Joseph Ratzinger, ‘The Pastoral Implications of Episcopal Collegiality’, *Concilium* 1.1 (1965), pp.20-34, at 25-29.

<sup>6</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Paris, Aubier, 1949), p.104.

universal jurisdiction. Both de Lubac and Zizioulas noted with interest an observation of the Calvinist theologian, Jean-Jacques von Allmen, namely that in Luke's Gospel Jesus commissions Peter for his specific ministry in the Church at the Last Supper, in other words in the context of the institution of the Eucharist (cf. Lk 22:31-32). The implication is that, if the Eucharist is meant to continue in the Church, then perhaps the Petrine ministry is meant to continue also, precisely as a service to the Eucharist.<sup>7</sup>

These are exciting developments, opening up fresh avenues for ecumenical dialogue on the papacy. I give a more detailed account of them in my recent book, *A Service of Love: Papal Primacy, the Eucharist, and Church Unity*,<sup>8</sup> translated into Italian as *Un nuovo esercizio del papato: Primato papale, eucharistia e unità della chiesa*,<sup>9</sup> and, looking to the future, I suggest three particular ways in which the bishop of Rome, as universal primate, might serve 'the communion of all the Churches', East and West. These are suggestions within the framework of eucharistic ecclesiology, the framework of our dialogue; they are made with reference to the first millennium, which Catholics and Orthodox agree must be our guide; and they are made with reference to the teaching both of Vatican II and also of Vatican I, as the Ravenna document requests. The three possible services are: moderating disputes, presiding at ecumenical councils, and serving eucharistic communion. I would

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<sup>7</sup> See Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), pp.114-15, 134.

<sup>8</sup> Paul McPartlan, *A Service of Love: Papal Primacy, the Eucharist, and Church Unity*, new edition with a Postscript (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Paul McPartlan, *Un nuovo esercizio del papato: Primato papale, eucharistia e unità della chiesa*, trans. Cristina Frescura (Comunità di Bose: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2015).

like to close by considering them briefly in turn.<sup>10</sup>

#### a) Moderating Disputes

Vatican II said: 'For many centuries the Churches of the East and of the West went their own ways, though a brotherly communion of faith and sacramental life bound them together. If disagreements in faith and discipline arose among them, the Roman See acted by common consent as moderator' (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14). The Church needs a final court of arbitration to restore peace and eucharistic fellowship when those have been broken, and there is plenty of evidence that Rome was recognised in the first millennium as the place to which one could ultimately turn.

In the chaotic aftermath of the council of Nicaea, which refuted Arianism, much of the East remained Arian and orthodox bishops like St Athanasius were deposed from their sees and suffered greatly. In the context of that crisis, in 343, a major council was in fact held at Sardica, which crafted rules for cases where a bishop had a grievance that could not be resolved locally. He could appeal to the bishop of Rome, who would not judge the matter himself, but could decide if there needed to be a retrial, and could send delegates to sit with the local bishops and reach a judgement with them. The rather nuanced rules were accepted not only in the West but also later in the East, too. They might be very helpful in ecumenical discussion today.

#### b) Presiding at Ecumenical Councils

*Lumen Gentium* teaches that 'there never is an ecumenical council which is not confirmed

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<sup>10</sup> Fuller details may be found in my book, *A Service of Love/Un nuovo esercizio del papato*.

or at least recognised as such by Peter's successor. And it is the prerogative of the Roman Pontiff to convoke such councils, to preside over them and to confirm them' (*Lumen Gentium*, 22). The convoking of an ecumenical council by the pope did not happen until the 12<sup>th</sup> century, significantly *after* the split between Christian West and East. Prior to that time, councils were normally convoked by the emperor, often, however, with the encouragement of the pope because of particular pressing needs. Though popes never personally attended ecumenical councils in the first millennium, they normally sent delegates, and their involvement in some capacity was always regarded as a necessary condition for a council to be classed as ecumenical.

The bond between popes and councils is very clear in the first millennium. After the reading of Pope Leo's *Tome* on christology at the council of Chalcedon in 451, the bishops cried out: 'Peter has spoken through Leo'. The second council of Nicaea, held in 787, was the last of the councils recognised as ecumenical by both Catholics and Orthodox, and it actually gave a list of criteria for a properly ecumenical council, among which it clearly stated that 'the pope of the Romans' had to be a 'co-operator' or 'fellow worker' (*synergos*) with the council, at least by letter or via representatives.

I think there would be broad ecumenical agreement today that the bishop of Rome, in consultation with his brother bishops, should convoke and preside at ecumenical councils, which define and settle the Church's faith, unity in faith being necessary for eucharistic communion.

### c) Serving Eucharistic Communion

The previous two services, moderating disputes and presiding at ecumenical councils, though vital, are of course occasional and exercised only as needed. Is there an abiding ministry exercised

by a universal primate, such that that office might indeed be understood as willed and established by the Lord himself as a constitutive part of his Church? Well, recalling the early Church, Vatican II referred to ‘the very ancient discipline whereby the bishops installed throughout the whole world lived in communion with one another and with the Roman Pontiff in a bond of unity, charity and peace’ (*Lumen Gentium*, 22). That communion was celebrated and strengthened in every Eucharist, where the bishop of Rome and other heads of churches were named and prayed for, and visitors from other local churches were welcomed. In essence, I would suggest that the universal primate symbolises and serves the eucharistic communion of the Church as a whole, the universal fellowship enjoyed by Christians thanks to the one Eucharist that is celebrated in countless places across the world. In particular, he symbolises and serves the collegial unity of the bishops themselves, he and they being successors of the apostles who sat with the Lord at the Last Supper.

The understanding of the Church as a communion of local churches was characteristic of the first millennium, before the West became highly juridical and the picture of the Church as a pyramid emerged. As it did, major Eastern figures complained that instead of being an elder sister, as they were quite willing to recognise, Rome was now claiming to be *mother* of all the churches, ‘source and origin’ of the others, with a universal jurisdiction, and so the breach between West and East was hardened. The communion model of the Church has made a big comeback in recent times, the pyramid is much less evident, and the idea of Rome as mother of all the churches has vanished. Vatican II very significantly said that, in any future reconciliation between Catholics and Orthodox, the right of the Eastern Churches to govern themselves had to be recognised, ‘while remembering the necessary unity of the whole Church’ (*Unitatis Redintegration*, 16) – something, some ministry has to express and serve that necessary unity of the whole Church, and that, I think, is precisely

where the universal primate fits in.

Ultimately, it is surely the Eucharist that must guide us towards a solution on universal primacy. What is essential is that the unity that the whole Church has through the celebration of one and the same Eucharist in all of the particular churches, both East and West, must be made visible. ‘Charity’, *agape*, was actually a patristic term for the Eucharist, and that led Cardinal Ratzinger to suggest that ‘presiding in charity’, to recall St Ignatius’ term, actually means, quite simply, caring for the Church’s eucharistic unity.<sup>11</sup>

When he himself became pope, he explained that idea more fully, and I would like to close with his rather moving words. ‘Il ministero petrino è ... primato nell’amore in senso eucaristico, ovvero sollecitudine per la comunione universale della Chiesa in Cristo. E l’Eucaristia è forma e misura di questa comunione, e garanzia che essa si mantenga fedele al criterio della tradizione della fede.’<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), pp.233-34.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Omelia alla concelebrazione eucaristica con i nuovi cardinali, 19 February, 2012.