

HIS BROKEN BODY

LAURENT CLEENEWERCK

HIS BROKEN BODY



Understanding and Healing the Schism
Between the Roman Catholic
and Eastern Orthodox Churches

(An Orthodox Perspective)

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For my wife, Irene



✠ In Memoriam



His ornari aut mori.
S'en couronner ou mourir.

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann

Protopresbyter John Meyendorff

Protopresbyter Sergius Bulgakov

St. Priest-Martyr Pavel Florensky

Memory Eternal!

Nothing so provokes God's anger as the division of the Church.

Yes, though we may have accomplished ten thousand glorious acts, yet shall we, if we cut to pieces the fullness of the Church, suffer punishment no less dreadful than those who mangled His body.

St. John Chrysostom



Offered with prayers to:

† Vsevolod

Archbishop of Scopelos

Memory Eternal!

+John

Metropolitan of Pergamon

With admiration

+ Bartholomew I

Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch

+ Benedict XVI

Pope of Rome and Primate of the Roman Catholic Church

With hope

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NOTE

This book is written in a strictly private capacity. Although the writer is currently (2007) an ordained presbyter in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, in the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople¹, this presentation does not necessarily reflect the views of my bishop, diocese, metropolia or patriarchate and does not engage their responsibility in any way.

Likewise, although the writer is currently professor of theology and applied sciences in the Euclid University {Consortium}, this presentation does not necessarily reflect the views of the institutions, organizations, officials or governments who support the institution and does not engage their responsibility in any way.

I am aware that the subject of Orthodox-Catholic relations is extremely sensitive and emotionally charged. I have tried to make a fair presentation of the issues at stake, with constant reference to the interpretation of the Fathers.

Because both sides are called to painful self-examination and sacrifices to restore the broken unity of the first millennium, it is my hope that many Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic Christians will be inspired to overcome their fears and to be both interested or receptive.

Finally, I am open to corrections, suggestions and critiques to improve this presentation in its subsequent editions (if God wills that there be more than one).

For contact information, updated and additional documentation, please visit:

- <http://www.orthodox-church.info/hbb/>

¹ And in the Diocese of the West of the Orthodox Church in America after June 2007 when the final draft was completed.

SOURCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

The following resources are extensively quoted and referenced to in the footnotes by the abbreviations listed below. For the sake of convenience, I have quoted the Fathers from readily available sources, such as ANF or DECB. In most cases, I have not been able to provide PG, PL or SC references even though I recognize that this would be the most scholarly and verifiable way to cite an original source. This section also functions as an essential bibliography.

For each code, the information is organized as follows:

CODE	Title Author(s) Publisher, City, State, Year
ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Editors Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1951
BAC	Being as Communion John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1985
BEC	Bishop, Eucharist, Church John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, 2001
BT	Byzantine Theology John Meyendorff Fordham University Press, New York, 1983
CAO	Communion and Otherness John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon T&T Clark / Continuum, London / New York, 2006
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church Catholic Church / Holy See Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican, 1994

-
- CTT** **Crossing the Tiber**
Steven K. Ray
Ignatius Press, San Francisco, California, 1997
- DECB** **Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs**
David Bercot, Editor
Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1998
- GILES** **Documents Illustrating Papal Authority**
Edward Giles
SPCK, London, 1952
- HE** **Eusebius – The Church History (Ecclesiastical History)**
Paul Maier, Translator
Kregel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999
- JPK** **Jesus, Peter and the Keys**
Scott Butler, Norman Dahlgren, David Hess
Queenship Publishing, Santa Barbara, California, 1996
- ODT** **Orthodox Dogmatic Theology**
Michael Pomazansky
Saint Herman, Platina, California, 2005
- PCT** **Principles of Catholic Theology**
Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger
Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1982
- RA** **Rome, Autrement (You are Peter)**
Olivier Clement
DDB, Paris, 1997 // New City Press, New York, 2003)
- SEP** **Studies in the Early Papacy**
John Chapman
Sheed & Ward, London, 1928
- TPOP** **The Primacy of Peter**
John Meyendorff, Editor
Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1992
- TCAC** **The Church of the Ancient Councils**
Peter L'Huillier, Archbishop of New York
Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1992
- TOC** **The Orthodox Church**
Timothy Ware, Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia
Penguin Books, London, 1997
- TP** **Two Paths**
Michael Whelton
Regina Orthodox Press, Salisbury, Massachusetts, 1998

- TQFU** **The Quest for Unity**
John Borelli, John Erickson, Editors
Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1996
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, 1996
- TSATR** **The Shepherd and the Rock**
J. Michael Miller
Our Sunday Visitor, Huntington, Indiana, 1995
- TT** **The Truth**
Clark Carlton
Regina, Salisbury, Massachusetts, 1999
- TW** **The Way**
Clark Carlton
Regina, Salisbury, Massachusetts, 2001
- UTR** **Upon this Rock**
Steven K. Ray
Ignatius Press, San Francisco, California, 1999
- WAAB** **We are all Brothers**
Vsevolod of Scopelos, Archbishop
Eastern Christian Publications, Fairfax, Virginia, 1999
- ZION** **Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage**
William Basil Zion
University Press of America, New York, 1992

INTRODUCTION



TERMINOLOGY

It is my experience that most disagreements are caused or at least worsened by “assumed vocabulary.” We often assume that such terms as ‘God’ or ‘Church’ have an obvious meaning. They do not, as even a brief conversation with a Muslim, Hindu or even Mormon will demonstrate.¹

Sometimes, words evolve over time. ‘Worship’ or ‘prayer’ had a much wider meaning two hundred years ago. Today, both terms are almost exclusively understood in reference to God. As a result, we would not say that we ‘worship’ icons (‘venerate’ is proper) and we would rather not say that we ‘pray’ to the saints (‘request their intercession’ is more accurate). The same could be said of such words as ‘catholic’ and ‘orthodox,’ or even ‘Catholic’ and ‘Orthodox.’ In modern English practice, ‘Orthodox Church’ clearly refers to the ‘Eastern Orthodox Church,’ whereas ‘orthodox Church’ might be used to convey an entirely different idea.²

In order to adequately express the theological and historical concepts presented in this book, I would like to clarify the following:

I will always capitalize Church and Eucharist. By Church (without adjectival qualification), I always refer to the ‘eschatological’ (pre-eternal) Church or, by extension, to the local Eucharistic community headed by a bishop (the catholic Church – see below). In this book, ‘Church’ without an adjective is not the so-called ‘universal’ (worldwide), or as I prefer, ‘ecumenical’³ ‘Church.’⁴

By catholic Church (lower case), I mean ‘catholic’ in the sense used by the ecclesiastical writers of the first three centuries. Specifically, I shall

¹ It is only at the end of a public debate on the theme “Is Jesus Christ God or a God” that someone in the audience finally asked “What do you mean by God?” I know by experience that most Christians have no understanding of what it means to say that “Jesus Christ is God.”

² In French, such capitalization is not used. You would find “l’église orthodoxe,” not “l’Église Orthodoxe.”

³ In the sense of ‘economical,’ ‘functional,’ ‘practical’ or even ‘political’.

⁴ The point is that the ‘universal Church’ is not a eucharistic gathering and therefore not properly speaking ‘a Church’.

contend that ‘catholic’ refers to the holographic nature of the local Eucharistic assembly. In other words, what we now call ‘diocese’ or ‘eparchy’ is what Early Christians called ‘the catholic Church.’

I will capitalize to Catholic Church when that expression is used to denote more than one, or indeed all the catholic Churches as a class. This expression can be equivalent to ‘catholic Church’ but generically, without reference to a locality. In that sense, Catholic Church may seem equivalent to Universal Church, but the underlying ecclesiology is different.

By Roman Catholic Church, I mean the communion of the catholic Churches¹ which recognize the primacy of the pope of Rome as expressed by the teachings of Vatican I. For this reason and for the sake of simplicity, I shall include the so-called Eastern or Byzantine Catholic Churches in this expression.

By Orthodox Churches, I mean the catholic Churches which are in communion with each other and who recognize the ‘ecumenical’ primacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople as their first-among-equals. In general, I avoid using the expression ‘Orthodox Church’ (singular) because the main thesis of this book is that the ecclesiology of Eastern Orthodoxy is rooted in the local catholic Church and her bishop. Beyond that, functional gatherings of catholic Churches form, first, metropolitan communions, then ‘autocephalous Churches,’ and finally a universal Orthodox Communion. As the reader will notice, I will tend to use the latter expression (capitalized as Orthodox Communion) instead of ‘Orthodox Churches’ or ‘Orthodox Church.’

Theologically speaking, there is no such thing as the ‘Russian Orthodox Church’ or the ‘Greek Orthodox Church.’ The official terminology, as found in the annual directory of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, would be that of ‘Local Churches,’ in this case: ‘Church of Russia’ and ‘Church of Greece.’ Yet even this language is ‘economical,’ not ‘ontological.’ the best (and theologically accurate) expression would be ‘catholic Churches of the Orthodox faith’ in Russia or Greece, or indeed ‘Moscow Patriarchate’ and ‘Archdiocese of Greece,’ respectively.

¹ I am aware that some Orthodox would deny the authentic catholicity of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, either in canonical Orthodox territory or even within the historical boundaries of the Roman Patriarchate (Western Europe). In practice though, there is no official Orthodox bishop of Paris or Rome, a fact which indicates that Orthodoxy still considers the pope as the catholic (albeit heretical and schismatic) bishop of Rome.

I will sometimes use the classic expression ‘Western Church / Eastern Church’ or even ‘Latin Church / Greek Church’ when making reference to the two geographical and cultural groups of Churches that eventually formed the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. The reader will understand that I am not suddenly embracing a different ecclesiology: I remain strongly committed to heliocentrism even when talking about a sunset!

Christendom is a valuable term in spite of its negative connotation in many Protestant circles. Because it refers to the universal organization of Christianity within political boundaries and avoids an improper use of ‘Church,’ this word is quite accurate to describe the ‘ecumenical common union’ of the first millennium.

By ‘schism,’ I mean any disagreement or event leading to a rupture of Eucharistic communion. This can happen internally, within the (local) catholic Church, as is the case when there are two competing bishops, or externally, between catholic Churches.

By ‘Great Schism,’ I am referring to the ongoing rupture of communion between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox families. The scholarly consensus is that the Great Schism was really a process started during the 900s and consummated during the crusade and the ultimate failure of the council of Florence (1439).

By ‘primacy,’ I mean ‘being first in the assembly with a privilege of presidency.’ Because the concept of primacy exists both in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, I have tried to make it clear whether I am discussing ‘just primacy’ or ‘supremacy.’ I have also tried to distinguish between the local Eucharistic primacy of the bishop and other forms of non-Eucharistic primacy, either regional or universal.

Council is always capitalized in reference to the first seven ‘Ecumenical Councils.’ I realize that this is a purely arbitrary decision.

Finally, the reader will notice that I am not systematic with ecclesiastical titles such as ‘St.,’ ‘Fr.,’ ‘Rev.,’ etc. No disrespect is ever intended. I will sometimes add the abbreviation (RC) or (EO) after a name in cases where the reader would have a doubt or a need to know.

I hope that these clarifications will prove useful.

PROLOGUE AND THESIS

By the time a book is finalized and edited, the writer knows what point he or she is trying to make. If research was involved and opinions were still being formed during the initial writing process, there is a time when conclusions are reached and must be presented. My point is that every book has either ‘an axe to grind’ (meaning that only one side will be heard and defended) or least ‘a conclusion to present’ (hopefully after both sides have been objectively presented and discussed).

His Broken Body is an attempt to fairly represent how sincere Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians reach different conclusions on the central issue of the role of the Bishop of Rome in the ‘universal Church.’ Like many others, I believe that the essential cause of the ‘schism’ between the two communions is a different ecclesiology and with it a different understanding of what it means to believe in ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.’ I am also convinced that properly defined, these two perspectives are largely complementary and compatible.

My main thesis has to do with the nature of the local Church and its relationship with the universal communion of Churches. In this regard, I am especially indebted to the work of John D. Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon (EO). The reader is indeed encouraged to read, or rather study, Zizioulas’ *Bishop, Eucharist, Church* and *Being a Communion* to be in a position to further investigate the underlying ecclesiology of the present book.

At the outset, I should state that I do not believe in the ‘infallibility’ or ‘inerrancy’ of the universal or local Church, at least not in the way that it is popularly understood.¹ What I mean is that the teaching organs of the

¹ The catechism of the Russian Orthodox Holy Synod (COC, p. 51), quoting the *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs*, declares that “the Catholic Church cannot sin, or err, or utter falsehood in the place of truth.” Nobody has ever suggested that the local catholic Church has such characteristics. After all, countless catholic Churches embraced Arianism and iconoclasm before returning to orthodoxy. Hence, the catechism must be referring to the ‘universal Church’ of the Ecumenical Councils. If the catechism is suggesting that later synods and councils have the same degree of inerrancy, we find ourselves incapable of

Church, (presbyters, bishops, councils and popes) can and indeed have erred – which does not necessarily mean that they have failed. I do not think that I need to prove this assertion in the case of individual presbyters, bishops and non-*Ecumenical Councils*. I will on the other hand have to discuss this issue in the case of the teachings, *Ex-Cathedra* or not, of the Bishop of Rome. The infallibility of the *Ecumenical Councils* is another matter, inasmuch as there is broad agreement that the dogmatic teachings of the first seven, properly understood, are accurate witnesses to the truth of who Jesus Christ is. But the Orthodox admit that these Councils are called *ecumenical* and *infallible* only in retrospect, because what they teach is received as true by “the entire body of the Faithful¹,” not based on any intrinsic organizational criteria.²



Christians as individuals and as a corporate body are called to be ‘witnesses to the Truth.’ Yet, it is plain to see that Christians and the visible Church are not always perfect witnesses to the “Truth of Gospel,” as in the case of St. Peter in Galatians 2:14. Most Eastern Orthodox would admit that the local councils of Jassy (1642) and Jerusalem (1672) have produced decrees that are not ‘perfect witnesses’ of biblical and patristic Orthodoxy³. Likewise, most Roman Catholics realize that the decrees of the councils of Lateran (1215) and Florence (1439) should be considered with caution and in context. Even Pope Benedict XVI, when still Cardinal Ratzinger, admitted that the decrees of Vatican I were “harsh” and that the council fathers were “not successful” with their language.⁴

This sense of human imperfection does not mean that theological truth cannot be arrived at and that everything is ‘up for grabs.’ What remains problematic is the precise articulation of certain points of doctrine for which there is no explicit biblical or apostolic testimony. These are areas where we tend to find ongoing controversies and variations of expression. In spite of this, we can say that the Church is infallible and inerrant in a

sustaining this claim. This article may also refer to ‘relative inerrancy,’ i.e. the inability to become a false witness to the saving work of Christ. See below.

¹ As expressed in the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs of 1848

² This is why the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem is not considered to be the First *Ecumenical Council*. Its authority was intrinsic and immediate.

³ For instance, the Council of Jerusalem (in its *Confession of Dositheus*) affirms the full canonicity of the apocrypha, while the Catechism of St. Philaret denies the same.

⁴ PCT, p. 234

soteriological sense. If a Eucharistic community is the Church at all, it truly unites human beings with Christ; it does not and indeed cannot err when witnessing to Christ as Truth and Life. By its very identity as Body of Christ, the Church cannot fail in its struggle against the gates of death: anyone who is truly 'in the Church' is 'in Christ' and therefore saved. This being said, let us move on to the central thesis of this study regarding the Great Schism.

I will suggest that a different understanding of Petrine succession and 'universal' ecclesiology is at the root of the separation between East and West, and that the differences can be traced as early as the second and third century. I further suggest that the concept of an 'undivided Church' during the first millennium is idealistic and tends to assume a faulty ecclesiology. At best, we could say that the (local) Churches within the Roman Empire were in communion with each other most of the time, albeit with significant periods of external 'disunity.' Finally, I will contend that the 'Eastern Church' also adopted a form of universal ecclesiology rooted in the so-called 'principle of accommodation,' i.e. the political realities of the Roman Empire. The reason for the long process of separation is that Rome's version of universal Petrine ecclesiology coexisted with the Eastern approach for many centuries. In the final analysis, I will suggest that the 34th apostolic canon and the ancient council of Sardica still provide the best solution for a resolution of the issue of primacy in today's 'universal Church.'

Because the wounds are so profound, I remain pessimistic on the likelihood of a real healing in the immediate future. The reason is not so much that theologians and bishops cannot work things out. A new and formidable obstacle, since Vatican II, is that the liturgical life of Roman Catholicism has become estranged from that of Eastern Orthodoxy. I fear that unless a great liturgical renewal takes place¹ - a genuine return to the sources - perhaps for the sake of unity, the somber assessment of Patriarch Bartholomew will become fully justified: "the manner in which we exist has become ontologically different."²

¹ I am convinced that both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism are in need of a healthy form of liturgical renewal grounded in the Tradition of first centuries. This desire was strongly represented at Vatican II but the council ended up being used and abused by other interest groups.

² Baltimore address, 1997. Quoted in *Eastern Churches Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Autumn 1997, pp. 77-84

INTRODUCTION

1. *His broken body*

For anyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ as “the Son of the Living God,” nothing should be more disturbing than the sight of Christian disunity. Browsing the Yellow Pages, especially in North America, is a truly bewildering experience. Meet the Adventists, the Baptists, the Calvinists, the Catholics, the Evangelicals, the Lutherans, the Methodists, the Orthodox, the Pentecostals, etc. In all, there are thousands¹ of Christian denominations and, in spite of the chaos, one must assume that every Christian is a sincere believer seeking the closest thing there is to Truth.

Church historians tell us (reassuringly it seems) that there really are only three big branches on the ‘family tree:’ Roman Catholic, Protestant and (the often forgotten) Eastern Orthodox. Most Protestants do not seem very distressed over the multiplicity of denominations because, in their minds, the Church of Christ is to be found invisibly scattered among all true believers. Technically speaking, we can say that Protestant ecclesiology does not hold the view that the Church is in any sense a visible organism. The Anglican Communion (present in North America as the Protestant Episcopal Church) teaches that the branches on the tree are in fact a natural and normal thing. There is no real need to worry, we are told, because in the end, we are all part of the same tree. Yet, even among the inclusive optimists, one will find a concerned admission that this visible ‘branching out’ does not look good at all, especially to non-Christians. It is difficult to convince those “on the outside” that Christians are indeed one body, united by the bond of love and concord. Everybody seems to agree that something must be done, at least for the sake of credibility.²

¹ A realistic number is 5,000 in the Protestant family. It should be noted that Catholicism and Orthodoxy also have their splinter groups.

² I do not interpret John 17:21 (“that they may be one”) as expressing primarily our Lord’s concern over organizational unity among Christians. The ontological and mystical unity between the redeemed creature and the Father is clearly the theme of this discourse. Still,

We Christians must deal with two burning issues: One, if the billion or so people who 'believe in the Lord Jesus Christ' are hopelessly divided, and there is mostly competition, not love among them – or dare I say - among us. Everyone has a haunting suspicion that 'the others' are 'not in the Church,' 'not really brothers,' 'not in the Truth' (read 'heretics') and therefore at a serious risk of being 'not saved.' Moreover, there is a great deal of suspicion that 'the other side' cannot be trusted and that the horrors of the past are only an indication of more betrayals to come.

This situation is simply a scandal, both in the modern sense of the word (something shocking) and even more so in its ancient meaning (a stumbling block). It defeats the prayer of Christ "that they may be one" and weakens the power of the Christian faith. A real disaster indeed and something that should keep us awake at night. And yet, we care very little, having more interest in defending our positions, our little kingdoms, than in dialoguing with the other side in order to 'understand and heal.' This is what this essay is mostly about, with a special focus on the historical and theological reasons for the tragic Roman Catholic – Eastern Orthodox divide.

Second, Christianity is concerned with the salvation of souls. But what does this mean? To dare a short answer, it means that every person has the potential to live beyond this life and beyond this "eon" as an eternal person, indeed as a "partaker of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:9). Assuming that this is indeed possible, the next question is "how can this happen to me?" The Christian answer is that eternity will happen to all human beings no matter what. But this is not universal salvation. The issue is that of the relationship of my eternal person with God. Will we be able to participate in the life of God or will it be 'hell'? This possibility of union with God has been both revealed and made possible by the incarnation of the Word of God as a real human being: Jesus called the Christ. The Church is simply the gathering of those who confess Him as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God" and who have entered through Him into this new relationship with God the Father. In the Church, Christians do more than confess Christ, they become ontologically and mystically united to Him. This eternal unity with God in Christ is salvation. As a result, there is an organic connection between Church and salvation, but does this mean that membership in a particular visible group becomes the condition for salvation? To this question, however radical this might be for the modern mind, it seems that most Church Fathers would have answered by

mystical unity in Christ should (ideally) result in functional unity, and there, the concern of our Lord is quite relevant, "that they [the observers] may believe."

the affirmative. Among many others, Origen, Cyprian, and Augustine expressed their conviction that:

Outside the Church there is no salvation.

(Saint Cyprian, †258)

Outside the catholic Church, one can have everything except salvation.

(Saint Augustine, †371)

This view raises difficult questions that are beyond the scope of this essay. For the purpose of this introduction, the main point is to keep in mind this profound and yet somewhat mysterious link between ‘Church’ and ‘salvation.’ Only then can we fully grasp the importance of this discussion and the possibly tragic and eternal implications of ‘ecclesiastical brokenness.’

2. *Why this book?*

The sad truth is that few Orthodox and Catholic Christians have any kind of longing for the lost days of ecumenical¹ unity. Roman Catholics are disturbed by this ‘Church’ with apostolic succession and valid sacraments which yet “obstinately” refuses to recognize Rome’s supremacy. They know that reconciliation with the Orthodox would entail that the Pope would have to revise his claim of ‘immediate, ordinary and episcopal’² jurisdiction over the whole world. It is also likely that the Latin Ecumenical councils would have to be downgraded to the status of “regional councils” – a rather painful perspective.

Likewise, the Orthodox are extremely distrustful of Roman Catholics and would almost like to forget that their calendar and theology is replete with ‘Popes of Rome’ whose teachings about their own authority is better left unmentioned. They also know that accepting a universal ministry of unity and arbitration – something called for by authentic catholic orthodoxy – would jeopardize their nationalistic and ethno-centric kingdoms. Sadly, everyone is trying to look busy doing nothing about it.

In any given city in North America where this book is written, there is limited interaction between Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic parishes. Are things getting better or worse? It is hard to say. The liturgical and cultural divide remains vast. Much remains to be done in

¹ I use this term in accordance with my ‘Terminology’ introduction, in the sense of ‘functional’ or ‘universal’ communion.

² These are the adjectives used by Vatican I.

terms of education and mutual understanding at the grass-roots level. Dr. David Hart, an Eastern Orthodox professor of theology at Providence University, puts it rather well:

Anyone familiar with the Eastern Christian world knows that the Orthodox view of the Catholic Church is often a curious mélange of fact, fantasy, cultural prejudice, sublime theological misunderstanding, resentment, reasonable disagreement and unreasonable dread: it sees a misty phantasmagoria of Crusades, predestination, ‘modalism,’ a God of wrath, flagellants, Grand Inquisitors, and those blasted Borgias.¹

Of course, there are reasons for this “unreasonable dread,” but my goal is to cut through the fog of fear and prejudice to actually address those ‘reasonable disagreements.’ This does not mean compromising one’s beliefs, but simply trying to understand why other people reach different conclusions when faced with the same question: what and where is the Church of Christ? What is His will for the visible manifestation of His Body in our world?

3. *Seeking the spirit of “truth in love”*

It is noteworthy that the majority of popular works of apologetics, both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, come from converts. The problem is that these books tend to be extremely one-sided if not somewhat deceptive². Indeed, it seems that many self-appointed apologists only write with the purpose to confirm their choice and to ‘prove from the Fathers’ that the other side is schismatic and heretical. To give a mild example, we find James Likoudis, a good man and Greek Orthodox convert to Roman Catholicism, refer to his ancestral communion as “the dissident Greco-Slav Churches.” On the other side, we find Clark Carlton³ affirming in all seriousness:

If you want to find what life in the early Church was like, look at the Orthodox Church today.

There is truth in this statement, but is the reader supposed to believe that the early Church (say Rome or Antioch circa 250) had black cassocks, icons, communion in a spoon, etc? After all, one could convincingly argue that the modern Roman mass, celebrated properly, may be closer to an

¹ *First Things*, March 2001, p. 34

² I do not mean intentionally deceptive, but working with an agenda and within a framework of unchallenged assumptions.

³ A former Baptist who went on to write a book titled: *The Truth: What every Roman Catholic should know about the Orthodox Church* (TT).

early liturgy than its Orthodox counterpart¹. In short, every argument, however speculative, becomes fair game in this attempt to knock out the other side.

On the bright side, there are also genuine attempts to explore the same issues in a more objective and 'irenic' way. Witness for example the following quote from the remarkable *The Primacy of Peter* (Eastern Orthodox):

Finally we come to the highest and ultimate form of primacy: universal primacy. An age-long anti-Roman prejudice has led some Orthodox canonists simply to deny the existence of such primacy in the past or the need for it in the present. But an objective study of the canonical tradition cannot fail to establish beyond any doubt that, along with local 'centers of agreement' or primacies, the Church has also known a universal primacy... It is only for the sake of biased polemics that one can ignore these testimonies, their consensus and significance... Orthodox theology is still awaiting a truly Orthodox evaluation of universal primacy in the first millennium of Church history -- an evaluation free from polemical or apologetic exaggerations.²

Conversely, we find the following admission in *The Shepherd and the Rock*, an excellent Roman Catholic study bearing Imprimatur and Nihil Obstat:

Congar³ concludes that the East "never accepted the regular jurisdiction of Rome.". No evidence exists that the Eastern Tradition as a whole ever admitted Papal primacy as it was formulated in the West.⁴

On a personal note, I find this reference to Cardinal Congar meaningful. When he passed away in 1994, I remember that the following Sunday, the Orthodox priest (who happened to be a world-renowned theologian) prayed during the Liturgy 'for the repose of the soul of the priest Yves,' as if the late Cardinal had been a "fellow presbyter"⁵ of the same one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. And indeed, the works of Cardinal Congar still stand today as a bridge of honest scholarship between East and West.



¹ At least closer to an Early Western liturgy. The 'New Order of the Mass' is largely based on the *Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus of Rome.

² TPOP, p. 164-165

³ Yves Cardinal Congar (1904-1995)

⁴ TSATR, p. 123

⁵ 1 Peter 5:1,2

No one likes to be challenged with new facts, new ideas. This is especially true in the realm of religion: many are eager to share their beliefs with others, asking them to be open-minded. Jehovah's Witness and Seventh-Day Adventists are especially insistent on this point, but as we all know, minds shut down when the reverse is asked of them: there is always a strong emotional response, sometimes close to panic, when a comfortable system of beliefs is challenged. Of course, there are many converts in the ranks of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, which means that many people are genuinely open-minded and willing to make radical and painful changes. Yet, once a decision is made to go 'East or West,' a certain hardening takes place, a need to feel confirmed and settled in 'the right choice.' Very soon, the ability to be objective and critical is replaced with 'the party line,' the need to present an image of 'fullness of Truth,' no matter what.

As a result, I do not expect that this book will be a popular or easy read for Christians on both sides of what is still a great divide. Nevertheless, it is my hope that the present study will foster not only mutual understanding but also mutual love, the kind that once united Anicet and Polycarp.¹ The path to reconciliation is long and arduous, calling for forgiveness, self-examination and sacrifices on both sides. May the Virgin Mother of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, who is herself a perfect icon of the Church, intercede for those who pray with St. Basil: "Make schisms in the Church to cease."²

¹ Cf. III/2/3

² Eucharistic Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, Anaphora. On a side note, it is my conclusion that St. Basil was referring to schisms within the (local) Church, as was the case in Antioch during his lifetime, not schisms within the universal communion. However, the overall intention is the same.

SECTION I:
COMMON GROUNDS
AND DIFFERENCES



SECTION I: COMMON GROUNDS AND DIFFERENCES

1. *The Creed*

This book is not written for ‘Christian revisionists’ and other followers of the radical theories of the Jesus Seminar. Otherwise, all of this would be a waste of time, for as St. Paul frankly admits: ‘If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain and we are the most pathetic of all human beings.’¹ No, this concern for the body of Christ, the Church, is for those who confess and treasure the foundations of our precious apostolic faith. Let us then start with the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople:

I/We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-Begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages; [God of God]², Light of Light, True God of True God, begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried. And the third day He arose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets; and in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Since the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople is considered the basic expression of orthodox Christianity, some may argue that Roman

¹ 1 Co. 15:16-19, EOB

² The clause “God of God” is part of the original Greek text of the Nicene creed of 325 but not of the expanded creed of 381. The conciliar creeds begin with “we believe” but the ancient Orthodox practice is to recite the creed as “I believe” (since it was originally used at baptism, not in the Liturgy).

Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox do not in fact share a common Creed because of the *filioque* insertion in the liturgical practice of the Latin Church. Nevertheless, since the Roman Catholic Church considers the original Creed as true and authoritative, we can certainly start with this text as our 'common ground.'²

2. *Real reasons, real differences*

Beyond these basic elements of the Christian faith, Orthodox and Catholic Christians have a lot in common, certainly more than they do with Protestants. Since nothing can be taken for granted when it comes to theology, I am aware that many well-meaning Orthodox Christians will disagree with me on this point. Roman Catholics, they say, are nothing else than crypto-Protestants, "both sides of the same coin"³ or as one author put it, "Protestantism repackaged in sacramental garb." The argument here is that Western Christianity (in bulk) is dependent on a philosophical mindset that is at odds with the Eastern mind. On the other side, Roman Catholics sometimes affirm that Protestants and Orthodox are basically in the same camp: in rebellion against the authority established by God in the 'see of Peter.' This strange controversy can only be overcome by common sense: Yes, Orthodox theology has been influenced by Greek philosophy (and Byzantine politics), as Western theology by the Franco-Latin mindset and Aristotelian metaphysics.⁴ But at the end of the day (or in this case after two thousand years), a Martian delegation trying to understand Christianity would not see major differences beyond ritual aspects and organizational preferences.

Today, many scholars believe that the Schism was caused by a progressive breakdown in the relationship of love and trust between East and West. This breakdown was the result of a dramatic impoverishment of Christian living on both sides of the old Empire. While only two

¹ "who proceeds from the Father and the Son"

² "The Catholic Church acknowledges the conciliar, ecumenical, normative, and irrevocable value, as expression of the one common faith of the Church and of all Christians, of the Symbol professed in Greek at Constantinople in 381 by the Second Ecumenical Council. No profession of faith peculiar to a particular liturgical tradition can contradict this expression of the faith taught and professed by the undivided Church." (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity)

³ For instance, TOC, Introduction

⁴ There is also a widely acknowledged "Western captivity of the Orthodox Church," discussed also in the Historical section of this study and in my forthcoming book *Anarchy in the Godhead*.

theological disputes can be pointed at as ‘reason for the Schism’¹, the consensus is that other factors (cultural, liturgical and political) played a decisive role. In the course of this study, we will see that our differences have very ancient roots. Yet, for at least nine centuries, these variations did not constitute an obstacle to communion.

To understand the nature of the bond that exists between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, it is useful to understand what makes our theology different from that of the Reformation. Here, the key difference is this attachment to the idea of apostolic Tradition which can be understood as the ‘deposit of faith’ handed down by the Apostles and preserved by the Church Fathers of the first four centuries. This is why Protestants who start reading the Fathers often end up converting, either to Roman Catholicism or to Eastern Orthodoxy.

3. *St. Vincent’s principle*

In addition to the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople, I would like to suggest the famous ‘universality principle’ of St. Vincent of Lérins (c. †450) as another possible common ground between Catholics and Orthodox. Because St. Vincent admits the ultimate authority of Scripture (as we should²) and yet stresses the need for an interpretative context, his famous discourse is very relevant and worth quoting in full:

I have often inquired how and by what sure and universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of the catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical depravity. I have always, in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: We must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways; first, by the authority of the Divine Law [i.e. the Holy Scriptures], and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church.³

But here someone perhaps will ask: “since the canon of Scripture is complete, and sufficient of itself for everything, and more than sufficient, what need is there to join with it the authority of the Church’s interpretation?” For this reason, owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in a difference sense; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters.

¹ Papal supremacy and the *filioque*

² The Orthodox rejection of *Sola Scriptura* does not mean that the Bible is not the ultimate authority or that unwritten traditions are on par with the written word, only that it is impossible (and deceitful) to separate the Scriptures and their interpretation from the proper context of the life of the Church.

³ The context calls for this capitalization.

Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense “catholic,” which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity and consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no way depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the agreed definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors.¹

Even though St. Vincent does not exclude the idea of doctrinal progress or development, his main thesis is that ultimately, no belief can be considered ‘catholic’ or true if it does not find its roots in the consent of the early Fathers.

On the question of ‘progress’ or ‘development,’ St. Vincent adds:

But someone will say, perhaps, shall there be no progress in Christ’s Church? Certainly, all possible progress! Yet on condition that it be real progress, not alteration of the Faith... But the Church of Christ, the careful and watchful guardian of the doctrines deposited in her charge, never changes anything in them, never diminishes, never adds, does not cut off what is necessary, does not add what is superfluous, does not lose her own, does not appropriate what is another’s, but while dealing faithfully and judiciously with ancient doctrine, keeps this one object carefully in view. If there be anything which antiquity has left shapeless and rudimentary, to fashion and polish it, if anything already reduced to shape and developed, to consolidate and strengthen it, if any already ratified and defined to keep and guard it.²

We shall see later that the Roman Catholic understanding and acceptance of theological developments is somewhat wider and more flexible than the Orthodox³. This fact, coupled with a disagreement on the proper authority to ‘authenticate’ or confirm these developments, is a major factor in the perpetuation of the current Schism.

It is my personal assessment that Roman Catholicism is more comfortable with the possibility of defining as dogma beliefs that do not strictly match the criteria set forth by St. Vincent. For instance, most scholars would agree that the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and

¹ *Commonitory*, Chapter II

² *Commonitory*, Chapter XIII

³ Cardinal Newman’s theories are expounded in his essay *On the development of Christian doctrine* and have found wide acceptance in Roman Catholic circles.

of the Assumption of Mary are not explicitly found in the writing of the early Fathers¹.

On the other hand, one will not find in the early Church any clear exposition of the current Eastern Orthodox theology of icons or uncreated energies. Therefore, we must admit from the outset that St. Vincent's principle is not strictly applied on both sides, or rather that there is a difference between doctrine and dogma. Indeed, we must emphasize the fact that both Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics believe that the Church² is empowered by God to make binding decisions. We should therefore try to discern what is truly ancient and universal, and what is the product of a process of theological development, however legitimate.

4. "Now I know only in part"

Only a few pages after St. Paul's warning that "there must be schisms among you," we find these often neglected words:

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.³

How can this theme of 'partial knowledge' be reconciled with the idea that the Apostles were guided "into all truth"⁴? At the apostolic Council of 49, it was possible to write in all simplicity that "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."⁵ And yet, knowledge is by definition limited. Time also is limited. The Apostles were on a mission to spread the Good News to the ends of the world, not to train 'systematic theologians.' Indeed, the Apostles taught a simple faith. Being a Christian was more about living a relationship than believing the right things. The so-called Apostles' Creed is probably a faithful echo of this simple apostolic *kerygma*.⁶ The same can be said of the Nicene Creed, which has nothing to say about predestination, the sacraments, the intermediate state of souls, etc. It is often said that the Church would have liked to keep things simple, but it

¹ The idea of Mary's immaculate conception could be linked with theme of the 'New Eve' in Justin and Irenaeus. The belief in Mary's bodily assumption only has attested references in the fifth and sixth century, although the fact the Coptic Church (separated in 451) recognizes the feast is significant. See: *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Stephen J. Shoemaker, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002

² Defined locally or universally

³ 1 Co. 13:9,12 EOB

⁴ John 14:25 ; 16:13

⁵ Acts 15:28

⁶ "Essential message"

was the heretics who forced the issue.¹ This is probably true, and yet the price to pay has been an increased focus on doctrinal knowledge and exactness at the expense of righteous living. After two thousand years of battle with all sorts of controversies, the Roman Catholic Church has felt compelled to do a lot of defining and anathematizing². To a somewhat smaller extent, the same can be said of Eastern Orthodoxy. My point is that both Church communions have been ‘forced’ to debate subjects not addressed by the Apostles and their immediate successors. Again, we shall see the importance of this reflection as we discuss the history of the Great Schism and possible avenues of reconciliation.

5. *But what does your Church really teach?*

This question is more serious than it seems. Roman Catholics can easily get irritated when discussing theology with their Orthodox friends. What does Eastern Orthodoxy teach on such or such issue? Do you believe in transubstantiation, birth control or in the Immaculate Conception? Is there an official catechism or spokesperson to turn to when there is doubt?

Fr. Thomas Hopko, former professor of Dogmatic Theology and Dean of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, is on the record for stating that “the Orthodox Church does not have a Magisterium or infallible organ.” According to him, we must try to discern the ‘mind of the Church’ to determine what is dogma (read non-debatable) and what is ‘opinion.’ For instance, on the issue of the Immaculate Conception, we find this statement in *The Orthodox Church* by Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia:

The Orthodox Church has never made any formal and definitive pronouncement on the matter of the Immaculate Conception. In the past, individual Orthodox theologians have made statements that, if not definitively affirming the Doctrine of Immaculate Conception, at any rate closely approach it. But since 1854, the great majority of Orthodox reject it as necessary; as implying a false understanding of original sin; as suspecting the doctrine because it seems to separate Mary from the rest of the descendants of Adam and Eve, putting her in a different class. However, if an individual Orthodox today felt impelled to believe it, he could not be termed a heretic for doing so.³

¹ Basil makes an interesting distinction between the public proclamation of the ‘simple Good News’ and its ‘not-public’ expression in the liturgical life of the Church.

² Trent is a good example.

³ TOC, pp. 259-260

In spite of this clear statement that the Immaculate Conception has the status of acceptable opinion within Eastern Orthodoxy, there are many Orthodox Christians who make the sweeping statement that this Roman Catholic belief is a heresy “flatly rejected” by the Orthodox Church. When asked to point to a local or Ecumenical Council of the Orthodox Church to justify this assertion, they reluctantly have to admit that there is no such authority – only one’s very private opinion.



In modern Orthodox thought, the closest thing to an infallible organ is an Ecumenical Council. The problem is that the last council considered Ecumenical by the East took place in 787 – more than a thousand years ago! Some have suggested that the so-called ‘Photian’ council of 989 might also be considered Ecumenical. For instance, the *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs* of 1848 makes reference to “the eighth Ecumenical Council, congregated at Constantinople for the pacification of the Eastern and Western Churches.” Others, such as the late Fr. John Romanides, have advocated the recognition of the so-called Palamite council of 1351 as Ecumenical. What then makes a council Ecumenical? Most Orthodox theologians would agree that ‘reception and acceptance by the whole people of God’ is an essential aspect. In other words, the ‘mind and life of the Faithful’ must agree with a council, which is why councils were acknowledged as Ecumenical only in hindsight. At any rate, the idea is that a new council could not immediately be considered Ecumenical because it necessarily takes time to see if the people of God will receive it.²

Others understand ‘Ecumenical’ to mean ‘imperial’ or ‘political.’ This view rests on three interesting considerations. First, this was a common use of the adjective ‘ecumenical’ in the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire. Secondly, the seven Councils were all summoned by the Emperor. Thirdly, there were always ancient ‘catholic and orthodox’ Churches outside the boundaries of the Roman Empire (e.g. the Churches of St. Thomas in India). Hence, these Councils had a long-term effect and reception within the context of the Roman Empire (the *oecumene*) where they even became civil law. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, this political framework no longer existed. Since then and until recently, the

¹ Clark Carlton (among others) makes this claim.

² The East also compared with five patriarchates (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem) to the five senses. The approval of the five patriarchates was considered a good indication that a particular doctrine was true.

Orthodox Churches have been under a constant yoke of political oppression and therefore unable to hold a plenary council. It might even be argued that even today, the Orthodox patriarchates and 'autocephalous Churches' may have too many conflicts of interests to make this a workable possibility.

What about the local councils of the Eastern Churches, such as those of Jassy (1643) and Jerusalem (1672)? Many Orthodox would like to ignore them on the grounds that 'they show Latin influence' (which is indeed true). Yet again, we often find personal opinions placed against the higher authority of councils and synods. This, I admit, is somewhat unavoidable, but caution should be taken to acknowledge the work of these councils and to deal with them respectfully.

To a certain extent, Roman Catholics have the same problem as the Orthodox. It is more difficult than it seems to pin down what Rome infallibly teaches on any given subject. Often, our Catholic friends fail to realize this because they can claim an infallible organ in the office of the pope (under the conditions defined at Vatican I in 1870). Superficially, it may appear that most issues have been more or less permanently and infallibly settled by the Magisterium¹. And yet, Roman Catholics are unable to produce a list of 'Ex-Cathedra' infallible texts. If what is infallible and irreformable is a matter of personal assessment, the Roman Catholic situation is not much better than the Orthodox.

For instance, the book *That Catholic Church* by Leslie Rumble and Charles Carty, published before Vatican II, offered a list of decrees then regarded as "infallible":²

- Leo I. *Lectis Dilectionis Tuae*. 449.
- Agatho. *Omnium Bonorum Spes*. 680.
- Boniface VIII. *Unam Sanctum*. 1302.
- Benedict XII. *Benidictus Deus*. 1336.
- Leo X. *Exsurge Domine*. 1520.
- Innocent X. *Cum Occasione*. 1653.
- Innocent XI. *Coelestis Pastor*. 1687.
- Clement XI. *Unigenitus*. 1713.
- Pius VI. *Auctorem Fidei*. 1794.
- Pius IX. *Ineffabilis Deus*. 1854.
- Pius IX. *Quanta Cura*. 1864.

¹ The Pope and the bishops in communion with Rome

² Published in Australia by Radio Replies Press, 1954 - Q&A number 314, p. 80

Leo XIII. *apostolicae Cura*. 1896. *

Leo XIII. *Testem Benefolentiae*. 1899. *

Pius X. *Lamentabili*. 1907.

Pius X. *Pascendi*. 1907.

Pius XI. *Casti Connubii*. 1930. %

Pius XI. *Quadregesimo Anno*. 1931. %

Pius XII. *Munificentissimus Deus*. 1950.

* It is noted that some Catholic theologians hold that these encyclicals fall short of the technical requirements for being “ex cathedra.”

% It is noted that some statements in these encyclicals “very probably” comply with the requirements of an “ex cathedra” decision.

Since then, Vatican II has undeniably ‘rephrased’ the Roman Catholic position on a number of issues¹. Today, the consensus among Roman Catholic theologians is that only two Papal declarations, specifically the dogmas of 1854 (Immaculate Conception) and 1950 (Assumption), were positively pronounced Ex-Cathedra and therefore infallibly. Recent attempts to prove that *Humanae Vitae* (the birth-control encyclical of 1964) was proclaimed infallibly have not been widely accepted and the debate still rages over the Ex-Cathedra status of the Papal declaration² rejecting the ordination of women. In fact, many things that were once unthinkable for Roman Catholics have become ‘the norm’ – both liturgically and theologically.

From an historical perspective, it seems clear that there are many past Papal teachings that are no longer part of the Roman Catholic faith. Does Rome still teach that “it is the will of the Holy Spirit that heretics be burned”³ or that “those not living within the Catholic Church⁴, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angel?”⁵ How about the recurring condemnation of “freedom of conscience and of worship” as “insanity” by Gregory XVI and Pius IX?⁶ There is an obvious contrast with the Vatican II affirmation that “the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the

¹ See below.

² *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Pope John Paul II, 22 May 1994. Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, declared as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that this Constitution was “set forth infallibly” (October 28, 1995).

³ *Exsurge Domine* (1520)

⁴ The word is used in the universal sense.

⁵ *Cantate Domino*, Council of Florence (1441)

⁶ *Quanta Cura* (1741)

very dignity of the human person. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed. Thus it is to become a civil right.”¹

In the end, we all must be careful to discern what in our particular tradition is eternal and dogmatic as opposed to unsettled and disputed. Indeed, it takes hindsight and wisdom to determine the context and permanence of any expression of faith. The words of St. Paul are worthy of our constant consideration:

For we know [only] in part, and we prophesy [only] in part; but when what is complete comes, then what is incomplete will be done away with. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become full-grown, I have put away childish things. For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we shall see face to face. Now, I know [only] in part, but then, I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. But now, faith, hope, and love remain: these three, and the greatest of these is love.²

6. *Apostolic Tradition*

Catholics and Orthodox know that not all traditions are bad. What Christ condemned were man-made traditions, especially the kind that overruled and nullified the word of God³. On the other hand, the Apostles clearly taught that their teachings should be handed down and kept unchanged. Thus, St. Paul tells the Corinthians, “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and hold firm to the traditions as I delivered them to you.”⁴ He also commands the Thessalonians: “And so, brethren, stand firm and keep the traditions which we taught you, whether by word or by letter.”⁵ He even goes on to write, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to withdraw yourselves from every brother [or sister] who walks in rebellion and not after the tradition which they received from us.”⁶

The concept of apostolic Tradition is rather simple: it refers to what the Apostles believed, practiced and taught (both orally and in writing). In the context of this book, Tradition is not “the life of the Spirit in the Church” as Fr. George Florovsky (EO) once suggested. While this

¹ *Documents of Vatican II*, Walter Abbot, Guild Press, New York, p. 679

² 1 Corinthians 13:9-13 EOB

³ Matt. 15:3

⁴ 1 Cor. 11:2

⁵ 2 Thess. 2:15

⁶ 2 Thess. 3:6

definition has proved intriguing and very popular in Orthodox circles, it has little to do with what the early Christians meant by Tradition.¹

As we know, most Apostles did not leave anything in writing. Moreover, the writings that we do have are not in the form of a systematic catechism. The simple fact is that the Apostles established Churches, ordained leaders and taught many things orally and by example. This is why reading the early Fathers is so precious and enlightening: they are a close echo of the Apostles' teachings. Regarding the importance of apostolic Tradition, the testimony of the early writers is unanimous:

It is possible, then, for everyone in every Church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the Apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the Apostles and their successors to our own times—men who neither knew nor taught anything like these heretics rave about. In this order and by his succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the Apostles and the preaching of the truth have come down to us. The result of this is most abundant proof that there is one in the same life-giving faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the Apostles until now, and handed down in truth.

(Irenaeus of Lyons, Gaul, †202)²

On the other side of the Mediterranean, Tertullian and Origen also bear witness to this common mind:

No teaching can be received as apostolic other than what is currently proclaimed in the Churches of apostolic foundation.

(Tertullian, North Africa, †225)³

Although there are many who believe that they themselves hold to the teachings of Christ, there are yet some among them who think differently from their predecessors. The teaching of the Church has indeed been handed down through an order of succession from the Apostles and remains in the Churches even to the present time. That alone is to be believed as the truth which is in no way at variance with ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition.

(Origen, Egypt, †250)¹

¹ Anyone who has read all that Fr. Florovsky wrote on the concept of Tradition will agree that this short sentence is often misunderstood. Fr. Florovsky clearly believed that Tradition is 'the right interpretation of Scripture' – not some ever-growing body of doctrines without scriptural and apostolic foundations. See in particular 'The function of Tradition in the early Church', *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, 75 (included in the introductory section of the EOB: Eastern Orthodox Bible)

² *Against Heresies*, 3,3

³ ANF, Vol. 3, pp. 246, 286

Likewise in the post-Nicene era:

Of the dogmas and messages preserved in the Church, some we possess from written teaching and others we receive from the tradition of the Apostles, handed on to us in mystery. In respect to piety, both are of the same force. No one will contradict any of these, no one, at any rate, who is even moderately versed in matters ecclesiastical. Indeed, were we to try to reject unwritten customs as having no great authority, we would unwittingly injure the gospel in its vitals; or rather, we would reduce [Christian] message to a mere term.

(Basil the Great, Asia Minor, †379)²

[Paul commands,] “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or by our letter.” From this it is clear that they did not hand down everything by letter, but there is much also that was not written. Like that which was written, the unwritten too is worthy of belief. So let us regard the tradition of the Church also as worthy of belief.”

(John Chrysostom, Antioch, Constantinople, †407)³

What is important and remarkable is the unanimity found on all the essentials of the Faith among men writing from the four corners of the Roman Empire. In fact, this universal agreement was a sure sign that the same Holy Spirit had revealed the same truth to all the Apostles and through them and their successors to every local Church.

This apostolic Faith delivered “once for all to the saints⁴” is what both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church are supposed to teach and preserve undefiled. Hence this typical statement from the *Encyclical of the Eastern (Orthodox) Patriarchs*:

The holy, evangelical and divine Gospel of Salvation should be set forth by all in its original simplicity, and should evermore be believed in its unadulterated purity, even the same as it was revealed to His holy Apostles by our Savior and, last of all, the very same as the many great and glorious Fathers of the Catholic Church⁵ in all parts of the earth, who heard those apostolic voices, both by their synodical and their individual teachings handed it down to all everywhere, and even unto us.⁶

And likewise on the Roman Catholic side:

¹ *On the First Principles*, 1-2

² *On The Holy Spirit*, 27

³ *Homilies on Second Thessalonians*

⁴ Jude 3

⁵ A typical example of the Eastern patriarchs referring to the ‘Orthodox Church’ as ‘the Catholic Church’.

⁶ *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs*, 1848

The Tradition here in question comes from the Apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus' teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit. The Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.¹

From this clear apostolic voice, both Churches receive in common what we can certainly call 'the essentials' of the Faith as well as a number of 'secondary beliefs':

- Concept of apostolic Tradition as something distinct from (and coherent with) the canonical New Testament
- Threefold order of deacon, presbyter, bishop in physically continuity from the Apostles
- Concept of sacrament or mystery, i.e. physical actions that are vehicle for divine grace
- Baptism of infants
- Belief that the Eucharist 'a sacrifice' and more than a 'symbol'²
- Ecclesiastical reception of the larger Old Testament canon
- Offering of prayers for the departed
- Veneration of saints, relics and holy objects
- Liturgical worship
- Perpetual virginity of Mary.

It is important to remember this common deposit, especially as both communions face growing 'competition' from Protestant denominations (which do not accept some of these basic elements of the Christian Faith).

There are also many apostolic traditions (or rather apostolic customs) that have been abandoned and, in some cases, reintroduced. Such a list would include:

- The sign of the cross
- Praying facing the east
- The kiss of peace (biblically attested)

¹ CCC, par. 85-86

² 'Symbol' is here used in its modern sense.

- Women wearing head coverings (biblically attested)
- Praying while kneeling (in private prayers)
- Praying with uplifted hands (biblically attested).

We Christians should always be challenged by the witness of Scripture and by the voice of the Church Fathers. If we are doing things differently than the apostolic Churches, we should at least feel compelled to ask ourselves: do we have a good reason? Are we honest about it?

7. *Apostolic succession*

Having established the importance and centrality of apostolic Tradition, we will see that it is distinct from and yet inseparably connected with the idea of apostolic succession. In fact, both concepts are often found in the same passage, as in Irenaeus:

In this order, and by his succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the Apostles and the preaching of the truth have come down to us.¹

This conviction is expressed throughout the early Church documents:

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, our Apostles knew that there would be strife over the office of bishop. Accordingly, since they had gained a perfect for knowledge of this, they appointed those men which we have already mentioned. Afterward, they gave instructions that when those men would fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry.

(Clement of Rome, †95)

Therefore, it is within the power of all... [who] wish to see the truth to examine clearly the tradition of the Apostles manifested throughout the whole world. We are also in a position to list those who were instituted bishops in the Churches by the Apostles, and the succession of these men to our own times. Certainly, if the Apostles had known any mysteries, they would have especially delivered them to those men to whom they were also committing the Churches... It is necessary to obey the presbyters that all are in the Church, those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the Apostles. Indeed, those presbyters, together with the succession of the bishops, have received the gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father. On the other hand, we should hold in suspicion those others who are not part of the primitive succession and who gather elsewhere... True knowledge is the doctrine of the Apostles and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout the world. It is the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the succession

¹ All these quotations are in DECB, p. 648-650

of the bishops by which they have handed down the Church which exists in every place.

(Irenaeus, $\dagger$ 202)

Several aspects of apostolic succession are especially interesting:

(1) According to the clear testimony of Clement of Rome (and other sources such as the Doctrine of Addai), apostolic succession was established by the Apostles themselves in order to perpetuate their ministry, to preserve their teachings, and to maintain unity.

(2) Apostolic succession involves a physical link (the laying on of hands) between the Apostles and their successors.

(3) The normative practice in the early Church was that at least three bishops should ordain (“co-consecrate”) another bishop. The practical reason for this requirement was to avoid the risk of a single bishop being able to start ‘a new Church.’ With this system, it would take at least three bishops to agree on a schism and to make it ‘permanent’ or ‘structural.’ Indeed, it is remarkable how effective this mechanism has been in curtailing the number of divisions. If we consider two thousand years of Christian history, we find very few bodies resulting from schisms with apostolic continuity: besides the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, the standard list only includes two more¹. Compared with the breakup rate in the Protestant world (which does not have apostolic succession), this is a rather impressive result. Moreover, the doctrinal differences among the apostolic Churches are rather minimal, as is obvious if one compares the teachings of the Oriental Orthodox (separated since 451) and Eastern Orthodox Churches. After fifteen centuries of schism, the overall identity of faith and life is remarkable. In fact, one could say that the only issue that separates these two communions is the very same one that started the schism in 451: the complex theological formulation of the Incarnation and a political framework antagonistic to ecumenical unity.

At this point in our discussion, let us simply affirm that both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches uphold and maintain this principle of apostolic succession, both as a teaching mechanism and as an institutional structure. At the same time, we must be alert to the fact that Roman

¹ Oriental Orthodox (“Monophysite”), Assyrian (“Nestorian”). Anglican orders are not recognized by the other apostolic Churches. There are also minor schisms related to Roman Catholicism (Society of St. Pius X, Polish National Church, ‘sedevacantism’) and Eastern Orthodoxy (Russian Church outside of Russia (healed in 2007), old calendar groups in Greece, Bulgaria, etc.)

Catholicism teaches that all bishops are successors of the Apostles but that the bishop of Rome alone is the “successor of a particular Apostle” (Peter), a perspective not shared by Eastern Orthodoxy.

8. *Beyond Apostolic Tradition*

The Church is not a dead body but a living organism, animated by the Spirit of God. Time passes, empires fall and things do change. Let us imagine Ignatius, Irenaeus or Cyprian visiting a modern Orthodox or Catholic liturgy, or perhaps a catechism class. What would they think? Probably that things have changed quite a bit, both liturgically and, to some extent, doctrinally. Irenaeus believed in millenarism, a teaching now rejected by both families of Churches. It is almost certain that Ignatius did not worship in a building that looks like a modern Eastern Orthodox temple. The actual text of the mass or liturgy would also be quite different (though surprisingly familiar). Basil or Chrysostom would probably feel more immediately at home in a contemporary Greek Orthodox Church than pre-Nicene Christians. In short, some explaining would have to be done and the authority of conciliar decisions brought to the table. It is my personal opinion that most ‘resurrected’ early Fathers would ultimately accept these practical changes (or developments) and choose an apostolic Church as their home. Remarkably, this is also the path that those who discover the early Church eventually take, some to Rome¹, some to ‘the East.’²

At any rate, the spectacle of these two great communions of apostolic Churches, mired in schisms and internal turmoil, would certainly cause them much grief and concern.³

Therefore, both Churches must admit that there is such a thing as ‘development’ or what St. Vincent called “progress.” The question is: what developments are legitimate and acceptable? In other words, what is consistent with the framework of apostolic Tradition and St. Vincent’s principle of universality? As we shall see, this is where Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology went their separate ways.

¹ For example Scott Hahn, Thomas Howard

² For example Peter Gillquist, Clark Carlton, Frank Schaeffer

³ Sadly, the early Fathers were also used to schism and confusion. For instance, St. Basil exclaimed: “To what then shall I liken our present condition? It may be compared, I think, to some naval battle which has arisen out of ancient quarrels; it is fought by men who cherish a deadly hate against one another, of long experience in naval warfare, and eager for the fight.” (*On the Holy Spirit*, 30.76)

9. *Major and minor differences*

Having covered the main areas of agreement and stressed their importance, let us now briefly mention points of contention. Over the centuries, many lists of ‘differences’ have been established and the importance given to particular issues has varied with each era.

A comprehensive historical list would certainly include:

- The *filioque* clause in the Creed and the associated theology
- The Papacy as defined by Roman Catholicism (Vatican I)
- The discipline of presbyteral celibacy
- The concept of annulments vs. divorce
- The use of unleavened bread
- The priest facing the people (heavenly vs. communal worship)
- The question of beards
- The use of altar girls
- The ‘absence’ of epiclesis in the Roman Mass
- The doctrine of purgatory and indulgences
- The Augustinian view of original sin
- The Augustinian idea of ‘created grace’ vs. Palamite theology
- The new ‘Marian dogmas’ of 1854 and 1950
- Variations in devotional practices (Sacred Heart, Adoration, etc.)

Some of these differences are liturgical or disciplinary in nature and do not affect the essentials of the Faith. The debate that will occupy us most is the nature of the Roman primacy. As James Likoudis aptly puts it:

It must also be said that Papal infallibility (so maligned) is only the logical consequence of a Papal primacy of supremacy.¹

In the Roman Catholic mind, infallible truth is ultimately defined or confirmed by the Roman Pontiff. As a result, any discussion on other points of controversy (such as the *filioque*) is pointless beforehand. We shall therefore concentrate most of our studies on the ‘primacy issue’ before returning to the other points of contention.

¹ DPBR, p. 39

From the outset, it is vital to understand that Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy operate within different paradigms of ecclesiology. In other words, when Roman Catholic theology uses such terms as ‘Church,’ ‘Catholic Church,’ ‘Universal Church,’ ‘primacy’ or even ‘Petrine Succession,’ the Orthodox counterpart can mean something quite different. Let us therefore discuss what is really at the heart of our study: the very nature and structure of the Church of Christ.

SECTION II: ECCLESIOLOGY

SECTION II: ECCLESIOLOGY

I. WHAT IS “THE CHURCH?”

1. *Foreword*

This section on ecclesiology may at first seem biased or “bad news” for the Roman Catholic reader, but this would be a limited and temporary assessment. In fact, Eucharist ecclesiology is both orthodox and catholic and does not negate the need for a universal primacy. The reader is therefore asked to be patient and not to prejudge the outcome of this study.

2. *Defining the word*

What do we mean when we say ‘Church’? We often hear or use such expressions as: “There is no salvation outside the Church,” “The Church of Russia,” “The Greek Orthodox Church,” “The Roman Catholic Church“, “The Church is the Body of Christ,” or “I go to Church!” All contain the term ‘Church,’ but obviously in a very inconsistent way.

First of all, we all understand that properly speaking, the word ‘Church’ refers to people, not to a building. Secondly, we can probably agree that the meaning of ‘Church’ should be defined by the Scriptures and its apostolic interpretation found in the writings of the Early Fathers, not by modern usage.

In this section which is theological in nature and yet practical, I would like to set firm foundations for this study and for a proposed framework of interpretation. The critical issue of ecclesiology (and its matching terminology) has already been alluded to in the opening Terminology and in the footnotes. In fact, I am convinced that it would be impossible to start either our historical study or theological review of the biblical texts without answering these simple questions: What is the Church? What structures or mechanisms must exist to make the Church one? What is truly of divine origin and what is the product of political realities?

If we search the New Testament for every occurrence of the word 'Church' (or 'Churches'), we can get a clear picture of what it is that God established "by the price of the blood of his own [Son]."¹

Essentially, the Church is an eschatological reality that transcends space and time. It could be said that God knows, foreknows and has a relationship with our eternal self. He knows his elect from "before the foundation of the world." The early Christian (and therefore orthodox) doctrine of the 'pre-existence' of the Church is well established². For instance, the Shepherd of Hermas teaches that "She [the Church] was the first of all creation and the world was made for her"³. The early homily known as 2 Clement is even more explicit:

Moreover, the books and the Apostles declare that the Church belongs not to the present, but existed from the origin [beginning, source].⁴

In order to understand reality properly, that is according to the mind of the Spirit, we must discern within time and creation a dynamic movement towards its *telos* or end.⁵ Our human consciousness experiences the universe as "purpose-driven," but could it be that our experience of the arrow of time is only an icon or foretaste of the reality that already exists in God?⁶

In his classic *Being as Communion*, Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon makes the point that the Eucharistic liturgy is also "a remembrance of the future," because the Church below⁷ is a manifestation of the Church beyond.⁸ The great theologian compares us with trees "with

¹ Acts 20:28

² See *Pre-Existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man* by Robert Hamerton-Kelly. This doctrine should not be confused with the Latter Day Saint (Mormon) belief in the pre-existence of spirits. We are dealing here with a reality above space and time, not a temporal sequence. The issue of how the future exists (since it is known by God) is as complex as it is important. Does God know the future because of His decrees (as in Calvinism) or does He know it as reality and part of His super-temporal existence?

³ Hermas, *Vision*, 2:33

⁴ 2 Clement 14:2

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:24

⁶ The reader interested in a beautiful exposition of this profound truth can refer to the writings of St. Maximus the Confessor: "The things of the past are shadow; those of the present icon; the truth is to be found in the things of the future" (*Scolion on the ecclesiastical hierarchy*, 3,3:2). See also James 1:17.

⁷ The catholic Church in its eucharistic gathering.

⁸ See Hebrews 12:23-24 and Revelation 4.

branches in the present and roots in the future.”¹ This is why the great prayer of consecration of the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom can say:

Remembering, therefore, this command of the Savior, and all that has come to pass for our sake, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand of the Father, and the second and glorious coming...

In the Church, we are already “new creatures in Christ”², and even in our present *chronos* (time), we are revealed as foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified. The apparent contradiction between ‘pastoral free will’ passages and those stressing eternal divine election³ simply reflect the tension between equally valid perspectives on reality.

These words of Clement of Alexandria aptly summarize this relationship between the Church of the elect above and the (catholic) Church below:

The earthly Church is the image of the heavenly.⁴

Margaret Barker’s research on the origins and meaning of early Christian worship, which was itself based on Temple worship, confirms this approach. In a paragraph fittingly entitled *Time and Eternity*, the author documents how “beyond the veil” of the Holy of Holies, the whole history of the world appeared in one glimpse, as a literally ‘omni-present’⁵ picture:

In the world view of the temple, there was another, timeless state beyond the veil which was not ‘future’ but always present.⁶

Likewise, commenting on the biblical worldview assumed by the author of Hebrews, James DeYoung describes a “worldview that views reality as both seen and unseen, as earthly and heavenly, as historical and transtemporal, as existential and essential. These two levels of reality are co-existent. They are tied together by a process of actualization whereby essential reality is being actualized more and more in existential reality.”⁷

¹ BAC, p.64-74

² 1 Corinthians 5:17

³ John 6, Romans 9, Ephesians 1

⁴ DECB, p. 147

⁵ Omnipresent is an interesting word which means all-pervading, either in space or in time.

⁶ *The Great High Priest*, Margaret Barker, Continuum, London, 2003, p. 336

⁷ *The heavenly tabernacle/temple as interpretive guide* (faculty paper, posted at westernseminary.edu)



In the perspective of our experience of time, of our *eon* or ‘age,’ the Church is “the body of Christ¹,” the means by which temporal creatures can be united to the eternal God-Man, and become “partakers of the divine nature²” now and in “the age to come.” The purpose of the Church is that the *many* creatures would be *one* with God the Father in Jesus Christ, so that “God may be all in all³.” The Church is the means by which human beings can enter in this new mode of existence not “born of the flesh” but “of the Spirit”⁴. This is what I call “the eschatological⁵, pre-eternal, fulfilled or supra-temporal Church.”

I am keenly aware that this definition can sound identical with that of ‘Universal Church.’ For instance, the *Catechism of the Orthodox Church* has this question and answer:

Q. Why is the Church called *Catholic*, or which is the same thing, *Universal*?

A. Because she is not limited to any place, time, or people, but contains true believers of all places, times, and peoples.

In this sense, both concepts are identical, even though the early Church use of ‘catholic Church’ was reserved for the manifestation of the pre-eternal Church in space and time. The problem is that ‘Universal / Catholic Church’ is mainly used to refer to all believers now alive on earth. As we shall see, this is usual Roman Catholic terminology (and theology) for both ‘Catholic Church’ and ‘Universal Church’.



As we reflect on what makes the mystery of the Church (which is the mystery of Christ himself), we can understand that the Eucharistic gathering is what constitutes and manifests the Church. In the Eucharist,

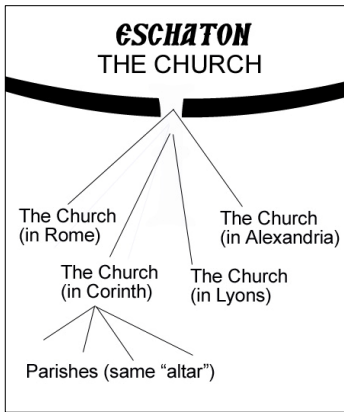
¹ Colossians 1:24-28, also Ephesians 5

² 2 Peter 1:5-9

³ 1 Corinthians 15:28

⁴ John 3:6

⁵ Eschatological means “of the last things.” Most Christian theologians are aware of the complementarity between “realized eschatological” and “future eschatology.”



we experience an intersection of the eternal “lamb slaughtered from the foundation of the world¹” and our temporal present. The very institution of the Eucharist makes the connection, indeed the identity Eucharist-Church obvious: “this is my body” refers to both interchangeably. In 1 Corinthians 11, a chapter entirely dedicated to the Eucharistic life of “the Church of God that is at Corinth²,” we find this significant expression: “when you come together as [a] Church.”³ In other

words, it is the gathering of the people of God to celebrate the Lord’s Supper that makes the Church be – in the sense of a manifestation of the eschatological Church and Lamb. It is the same Holy Spirit who is called upon to manifest the Christ, both in the waters of Jordan and in the Eucharistic assembly.

In the liturgy of St. Basil which is both a Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox liturgical text, we pray:

That thy Holy Spirit may come upon us and upon these gifts here set forth, and bless them and hallow them and show this bread to be itself the precious Body of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, and this cup to be itself the precious Blood of Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ...

We now understand why St. Paul uses the expression “the whole Church⁴” (ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας) to refer to the local Church. The local Church is the whole Church, and Paul always uses the singular (“to the Church of God that is in Corinth”) when he mentions the local Church. By contrast, Churches (plural) refers to regional or organizational groups. In other words, 1 “whole Church” + 1 “whole Church” + 1 “whole Church” = the “whole Church” in 3 places or 3 “Churches.” Paul does not say “the Church in Galatia” or “the Church of Achaia (Greece)” because it is improper terminology!⁵ There is no one Eucharist in Galatia or in Achaia and

¹ Revelation 5 and possible translation of 13:8

² 1 Corinthians 1:1

³ 1 Corinthians 11:28 – or “as Church.”

⁴ Romans 16:23; Acts 15:22

⁵ The only possible exception is Acts 9:31. It seems that the original text may have read “the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up” (RSV). Based on older manuscripts, other versions read “the Churches.” Even if the original was

therefore we cannot consider all the Christians in those areas ‘in bulk’ and call them ‘a Church.’ “Exiles” and “saints” in Asia or Galatia¹ certainly, but not as Church.

The same can be said of our modern use of ‘Church’ to refer to a worldwide communion of Churches, what we call ‘the universal Church.’ As in the case of regional Churches, there is no ‘universal Eucharist’ and because of this, the term ‘universal Church’ is at best improper, and I think misleading.



Allow me to summarize what we have so far. The Church, strictly speaking, is the Body of Christ, the eschatological unity of all those who have been united to Christ’s life in all times and places. This is the foundational use of ‘Church’ in the New Testament. The other proper use for ‘Church,’ in a way that connects with our realm, is in reference to the gathering of Christians from a specific area to celebrate the Eucharist. If in Matthew 16:18, the meaning of Church is uncertain², Matthew 18 undoubtedly uses the same word to describe the local community. This “whole Church” is the manifestation of the eschatological Church in our world, in our town. Beyond that, we have “Churches.”

Church (eschatological = pre-eternal or metaeonic = total). Could also be called space-time universal (ST-U).	= All the saints or elect throughout space and time. Also called ‘Catholic Church’ in the Catechism of the Orthodox Church (COC).
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“church” (or rather “Church”), which is possible, the fact that this text has “throughout” (καθ’ ὅλης – the root expression for catholic) indicates an early ‘distributive class usage’ as opposed to the τῇ οὔσῃ ἐν used for the local Church.

¹ 1 Peter 1:1

² In JPK (Roman Catholic), we read “Matthew 16:18 refers to the Universal Church.” But this is only one of three possibilities (space-universal, local-catholic, eschatological). If “Universal Church” means eschatological Church (that transcends space and time, we could say ST-U), then I would concur. If “Universal Church” means worldwide ‘Church’ (that transcends space only, we could say S-U), then I see a problem in this interpretation.

Church (catholic = local) (a manifestation of the Church in space and time, by the Holy Spirit. In RC terminology, a 'particular Church.'	= the saints in a particular city or area, defined by their unity in the Eucharist presided by the bishop (now called a diocese or eparchy).
Churches (regional, space-universal)	= the saints in an area, who do not gather at the same place and under the same bishop for one Eucharist.

The reader may have noticed that the common expressions 'Church militant' and 'Church triumphant' are not used in the above table. The first is equivalent to (space) 'universal Church' and does not conform to the biblical pattern. The second is more problematic because it does not quite refer to the 'eschatological Church,' only to the saints already in heaven from our temporal perspective. Nevertheless, the two ideas are close, often hard to distinguish in the Scriptures.²

Again, what I would like to emphasize here is the risk of equating (and confusing) the eschatological Church with the sum of all the local Churches in existence on earth at one particular point in time, i.e. the so-called 'universal Church'.³ The idea that all Christians alive on earth form a universal organism or society called Church seems to be at the heart of Roman Catholic ecclesiology. In this view, the Church, the "whole Church" is first and foremost "the faithful everywhere." The unity of the Church then depends on all the local Churches being joined to their ontological head, the Roman Church, to form a single body called "the Catholic Church."⁴

¹ The expression is used in the decrees of Vatican I on the constitution of the Church: "Therefore, if anyone says that blessed Peter the apostle was not appointed by Christ the lord as prince of all the Apostles and visible head of the whole Church militant; or that it was a primacy of honor only and not one of true and proper jurisdiction that he directly and immediately received from our lord Jesus Christ himself: let him be anathema."

² Hebrews 12:24; Revelation 7; 14. According to Orthodox theology, the departed saints are in a 'temporal realm,' in place or state called paradise or Abraham's bosom.

³ In other words, confusing space-universal and space-time universal.

⁴ See the decrees of Vatican I, Session 4: Chapter 2

In a refutation of Eucharistic ecclesiology published by *This Rock* (a Roman Catholic magazine of popular apologetics), Fr. Ray Ryland writes:

In his letter to the Ephesians (17), Ignatius tells us our Lord allowed myrrh to be poured on his head "that he might breathe incorruption upon the Church" - not just a local church. By his Resurrection, Ignatius tells the Philadelphians (1), Christ "raised a banner for all times for his saints and faithful followers, whether among the Jews or the Gentiles, that they might be united in a single body, that is his Church." Again, the universal Church.

Clearly, Fr. Ryland feels that the local Church cannot be "the Church" in the full sense. Hence, he makes the identification (eschatological) Church = "universal Church," an identification which leads to serious ecclesiological distortions. But before going into the details of this critical discussion, let us try to understand what the word 'catholic' originally meant.

3. *The catholic Church as a hologram*

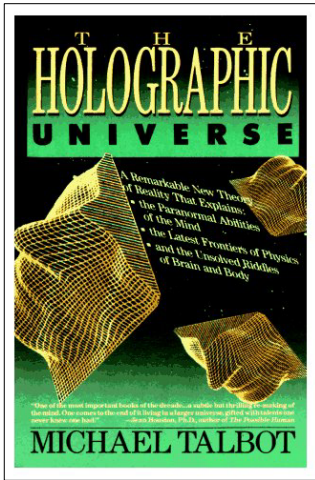
We are now in a position to understand what we mean when we confess our faith in the "Church," or the "catholic Church" (Apostles' Creed) or the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church."

I suggest that we are confessing the existence of the Church, both 'pre-eternal' and 'manifested' in our world, as something essential for our salvation. But what does 'catholic' mean? Does it mean universal or whole or both? And how do we recognize and identify the catholic Church?

It is my contention in this book, not as a pioneer but as a follower of the great proponents of Eucharistic theology, that the catholic Church is fundamentally the local Eucharistic assembly, gathered around its bishop. Thus, the 'Church of God which is at Ephesus or Corinth' is the "whole Church" and the "catholic Church."

In terms of etymology, 'catholic' comes from *kat'holon*, a cognate of *holis*. In other words, catholic means 'according to wholeness.' In fact, I suggest that catholic could really be equated with 'holographic.' After all, the word 'hologram' is based on the same root as 'catholic.' Further, I am convinced that understanding what holograms are is the key to understanding the nature of the catholic Church.

On this fascinating topic, physicist Michael Talbot offers this very clear explanation:



A hologram is a three-dimensional photograph made with the aid of a laser...

When the film is developed, it looks like a meaningless swirl of light and dark lines. But as soon as the developed film is illuminated by another laser beam, a three-dimensional image of the original object appears. The three-dimensionality of such images is not the only remarkable characteristic of holograms. If a hologram of a rose is cut in half and then illuminated by a laser, each half will still be found to contain the entire image of the rose. Indeed, even if the halves are divided again, each snippet of film will always be found to contain a smaller but intact version of the original image. Unlike normal photographs, every part of a hologram contains all the

information possessed by the whole.

The “whole in every part” nature of a hologram provides us with an entirely new way of understanding organization and order. For most of its history, Western science has labored under the bias that the best way to understand a physical phenomenon, whether a frog or an atom, is to dissect it and study its respective parts.

A hologram teaches us that some things in the universe may not lend themselves to this approach. If we try to take apart something constructed holographically, we will not get the partial pieces from which it is made, we will only get smaller wholes.¹

After reading this short overview, the reader will undoubtedly understand that holograms are not just interesting 3D pictures that look real. Holograms are thought to be at the center of how the mind processes reality and stores memory. In fact, holographic technology is now being used to design hyper-capacity DVDs, probably a pale but meaningful imitation of how the brain stores information. Finally, the latest unified theories of physics suggest that the basic algorithm that ‘recreates’ reality every 10^{-43} seconds is based a mathematical process called a Fourier transform – the same process used in holography. This brief scientific excursus has only one point: to convince the reader that it is not preposterous to think of the catholic Church as a hologram. Indeed, the relationship between Church and Eucharist is significant as we recall the words of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom:

¹ Article *The Amazing Holographic Universe* by Michael Talbot, electronically published. See also, *The Holographic Universe*, Michael Talbot (cover shown in-text), HarperPerennial, New York, 1991

Broken and distributed is the Lamb of God; broken, but not divided; forever eaten yet never consumed; sanctifying all who partake.¹

The holographic implications are striking. By contrast, the paradigm of Western science is also that of Western theology, and we can paraphrase Michael Talbot as follows:

Western theology has labored under the bias that the best way to understand a physical phenomenon, whether a frog or an atom (or the Church), is to dissect it and study its respective parts.

In other words, conventional Western ecclesiology (often adopted by Orthodox theologians), used to tell us that there is one big worldwide universal Catholic Church, of which local churches are only parts. According to this view, the parts are not “whole” individually, one has to take all the parts to have the whole. Reflecting this approach, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* uses traditional Western terminology:

[The bishops should] rule well their own Churches as portions of the universal Church.²

Expressing a certain Roman Catholic discomfort with Eucharistic ecclesiology, William J. Tighe (RC) exclaims:

Beyond these, though, there are references to Orthodox ecclesiological thinking that, although they appear strange and even bizarre to those acquainted with the history of Orthodox Christianity, arise in part from the sources Ray has employed... [At] one point he makes the initially astonishing statement that “the Eastern Orthodox Churches” deny “the concept of a universal Church.”

It seems entirely possible that a reader to whom the details of this “eucharistic ecclesiology” are strange, and its presuppositions alien, might construe it as entailing a denial of the existence of a visible universal Church, as opposed to a federation or agglomeration of dioceses or jurisdictions, erroneous as this might be.³

Likewise, in an unpublished article entitled *What Does Catholic Mean? A History of the Word “Catholic”*, Roman Catholic apologist Steve Ray explains:

However, we have yet to define the word catholic. It comes from the Greek *katholikos*, the combination of two words: *kata-* concerning, and *holos*-whole. Thus, concerning the whole. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, the word catholic comes from a Greek word meaning

¹ Prayer at the fraction of the consecrated bread

² CCC, 886

³ Touchstone Magazine, September 2000

⁴ Published electronically on www.catholic-convert.com

“regarding the whole,” or more simply, “universal” or “general.” Universal comes from two Greek words: *uni* - one, and *vertere* - turning. In other words, a “one turning,” “revolving around one,” or “turned into one.” The word church comes from the Greek *ecclesia* which means “those called out,” as in those summoned out of the world at large to form a distinct society.

The Orthodox can only agree with this presentation, although care is required to properly understand what is meant by “those summoned out of the world at large to form a distinct society.” From an Orthodox perspective, the problem arises when Steve Ray concludes:

So the Catholic Church is made up of those called out and gathered into the universal visible society founded by Christ.

But universal is an imprecise word. It can mean “not limited to any place, nor time, nor people, but contains true believers of all places, times, and peoples,” which is what I call eschatological or pre-eternal¹. But I suspect that this is not the intended meaning. Instead, “universal visible society founded by Christ” conveys the idea of ‘worldwide’ visible society founded by Christ.’

Hence, if the Church is disconnected from its Eucharistic nature, the temptation is great to define ‘Catholic Church’ as Steve Ray does, which most Orthodox theologians do not consider an adequate witness to the mind of the early Fathers. Because there is no single universal Eucharist and no single universal bishop, there is no universal Church. A more accurate conclusion to Steve Ray’s introduction, from an Orthodox perspective, would be:

So the catholic Church is made up of those called out and gathered (to manifest the Church) through a visible, local community that participates in and offers the Eucharist under the presidency of its bishop.

‘Space-universal catholic ecclesiology’ is, I believe, based on imprecise terminology and can easily be misleading. More importantly, I shall contend that it does not offer a faithful witness to the ecclesiology of the New Testament or of the early Church.

¹ Or space-time universal (ST-U)

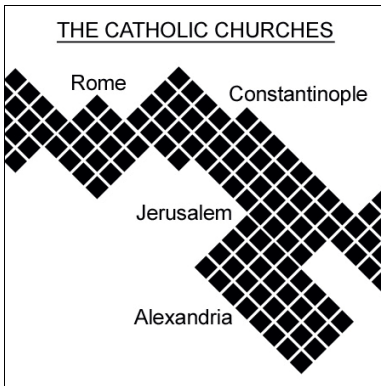


Image 1: the primitive approach: ontological Eucharistic ecclesiology.

Each diamond represents “a catholic Church” or “the catholic Church.”

The tip of the diamond represents the bishop. The other three tips represent the deaconate, the presbyterium and the people.

If we can suggest that the catholic Church (the local Eucharistic assembly) is a hologram, then it is a complete whole which stands on its own. It contains the basic ‘pattern’ or ‘code’ and it is capable of manifesting the “whole picture.” To continue the holographic analogy, if we look at several Churches, we do not have parts coming together like a jigsaw puzzle or a mosaic. We have whole units revealing the eschatological picture with increased accuracy, and the original that is being revealed is the heavenly Church (ST-U), not the so-called ‘universal Church’ (S-U).

As a result, the catholic Church is meant to be “one” by its very own nature¹. If the pattern is there, we have “the whole Church”; if not, there is either nothing or a different picture.

4. *A universal ontology or vocation?*

In his important essay on ecclesiology entitled *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church today*, Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) offers a clear exposition of the Roman Catholic understanding of ‘Church’ and ‘catholic Church’:

The Church embraces the many languages, that is, the many cultures, that in faith understands and fecundate one another. In this respect it can be said that we find here a preliminary sketch of a Church that lives in manifold and multiform particular Churches but that precisely in this way is one Church. At the same time, Luke expresses with this image the fact that at the moment of her birth, the Church was already catholic, already a world Church. Luke thus rules out a conception in which a local Church first arose in Jerusalem and then became the base for the gradual

¹ In a sense, the catholic Church cannot be cut. In another sense, the presbyters can be geographically distributed to parishes which can be considered “parts” of the catholic Church, but these parts always include the bishop.

establishment of other Churches that eventually grew into a federation. Luke tells us that the reverse is true: what first exists in the one Church, the Church that speaks in all tongues – the *ecclesia universalis*; she then generates Church in the most diverse locales, which nonetheless are all always embodiments of the one and only Church. The temporal and ontological priority lies with the universal Church; a Church that was not catholic would not even have ecclesial reality.¹

This short paragraph presents the emphasis of Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Yet, the problem is the potential lack of clarity of the words we use: *ecclesia universalis* seems to be both a “world Church” and, perhaps, what I have called the eschatological Church, in which case the Orthodox would wholeheartedly agree. However, where the Orthodox would say that every (local) Church has universal, missionary vocation, Roman Catholics tend to see universality or internationalism as an ontological requirement from the start. The result of this second view is that the Church (Catholic or universal) is first and foremost a “world Church,” not the local Church. In others words, the reality of the Church is the big picture, the worldwide organism which is being made manifest as more local Churches are created. Indeed, *Called to Communion* rejects the idea that the universal mission of the local Church generates a federation of Churches what could improperly be called ‘Church.’

At the same time, it should be noted that Pope Benedict affirms that “the Church is Eucharist” and that “a Church understood Eucharistically is a Church constituted episcopally²,” to which the Orthodox would give their full assent.

II. UNITY IN THE (LOCAL³) CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. *Who presides over the Eucharist?*

Let us now return to the first occurrence of the expression ‘catholic Church’ in the early centuries. This critical text is found in the Epistle of Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyneans:

Let no one do anything touching the Church, apart from the bishop. Let that celebration of the Eucharist be considered valid (assured) which is

¹ *Called to Communion*, Pope Benedict XI (as Cardinal Ratzinger), Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1996: pp. 43,44

² CTC, pp. 75, 79

³ Precision required by the use of capitalization in the title.

held under the bishop or anyone to whom he has committed it. Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic Church. It is not permitted without authorization from the bishop either to baptize or to hold an agape; but whatever he approves is also pleasing to God.

In this text, the catholic Church is the local Church, the gathering of the people of God around the bishop to offer the sacred Eucharist, not “universal visible society founded by Christ.” In Ignatius and for most early Christians, we have the sequence:

CHRIST-CHURCH > INCARNATION > EUCHARIST <> CATHOLIC CHURCH > PRESIDENT-BISHOP

This is a sequence which makes perfect sense, if, like the early Christians, we understand the Eucharist to be both a meal and a sacrifice. If “God’s own people” is “a royal priesthood¹,” and if the Lord’s Supper is an “*anamnesis*,” the logical consequence is the offering of “sacrifices”³. The resulting question is “who will offer the sacrifices on behalf of the people?” Who will stand up in the middle of the assembly to preside over the Eucharistic liturgy and utter the sacred words of institution? Even in the Jewish mindset, there must be ‘an order’ by which some say the Amen and the Alleluia while others “serve at the altar.” In the context of the Eucharist, the Church did not choose to have a ‘randomly picked’ president of assembly or even a ‘rotational presidency.’ In keeping with biblical pattern, one was set aside to be the institutional celebrant. Among the presbyters, a presiding-presbyter was elected and consecrated. The term ‘bishop’ soon became normative to refer to that office. Hence, the bishop, as president of the Eucharistic assembly, is the living symbol of the catholic Church and the guarantee of its unity.⁴

2. Presbyters and bishops

I further suggest that Peter’s role among the Apostles (*protos*) made him the chief-celebrant whenever the Apostles were gathered. Every order has its *protos*, and Peter was that first-Apostle among the Twelve.

¹ 1 Peter 2:9

² Luke 22:19 – the Greek ἀνάμνησις conveys the idea of sacrifice or invocation in the LXX.

³ Hebrews 9:23 – Christian sacrifices include “a sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15), “the offering of our bodies a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1), “the priestly service of the gospel of God” (Romans 15:16) and the offering of bread and wine.

⁴ This is why Eastern bishops wear a ‘panagia’ around their necks, i.e. an icon of the Mother of Christ who is herself the icon of the Church.

Likewise, the bishop (who is essentially a presbyter ‘ordered’ or ‘ordained’ as *protos*) occupies “the place of Peter” in the Church.¹

In his famous *Letter (146) to Evangelus*, St. Jerome explains:

When subsequently one presbyter was chosen to preside over the rest, this was done to remedy schism and to prevent each individual from dividing the Church of Christ by drawing the people to himself. For even at Alexandria from the time of Mark the Evangelist until the episcopates of Heraclas and Dionysius, the presbyters always named as bishop one of their own number chosen by themselves and set in a more exalted position, just as an army elects a general, or as deacons appoint one of themselves whom they know to be diligent and call him archdeacon. For what function excepting ordination, belongs to a bishop that does not also belong to a presbyter?

In other words, presbyters (including the bishops) are “priests” (ἱερεὺς - *hiereus*) in the sense that only they can offer the bloodless sacrifice on behalf of the people. Yet, a particular presbyter is set aside as visible and permanent sign of unity, as Peter was set aside among the Twelve.

I am well aware that the distinction between *presbyteros* and *episkopos* is a delicate one. The consensus among scholars is that it cannot clearly be found in the New Testament or in such early writings as 1 Clement and some suggest that there was no single bishop in Rome until the middle of the second century.

Basically, we have to choose between two positions. These two views were masterfully (albeit subjectively) expounded at the turn of the twentieth century by Charles Biggs:

In the fourth century there were in the Church two divergent theories of the origin of the Episcopate. The first is that of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the second is that of St. Jerome.

Theodore starts from the observation that Bishop and Presbyter were originally equivalent terms, and asks how the former had come to designate a special and superior grade... According to Theodore, then, the Episcopacy existed from the beginning, though there has been a shifting of titles; the first bishops were specially consecrated by the Apostles and by the Apostles alone...

¹ In modern Orthodox usage, ‘protopresbyter’ is an honorary rank or title bestowed on a senior priest by his bishop. I suggest that this title should in fact be reserved to the bishop himself. The unpronounceable ‘deuteropresbyter’ would be a more accurate title for the second-in-rank after the bishop, and this title would have to be unique in a diocese.

This may be called the accepted view... The essential point is whether the Apostles by a distinct act of consecration instituted a distinct class of ecclesiastical officers whom they intended to step into their own places and wield their own authority.¹

Briggs then contrasts this view with that of St. Jerome (we have already quoted from his *Epistle to Evangelus*):

St. Jerome also starts with the observation that originally bishop and presbyter were convertible titles.

The Presbyter, therefore, is the same as the Bishop, and until parties arose in religion by the prompting of the devil, so that it was said in the communities, I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas, the churches were governed by the common council of the priests. But when each teacher began to think that those whom he had baptized were his own, not Christ's, it was decreed throughout the world that one of the priests should be elected and set over the others, and that on him should rest the general supervision of the Church, so that the seeds of division might be destroyed...

As therefore the presbyters know that by the custom of the Church they are set under him who is put over them, so let bishops know that rather by custom than by the Lord's arrangement are they greater than presbyters.' (Commentary of Titus 1:5)

According to Jerome, therefore, Episcopacy was not directly instituted by our Lord, and it is clearly implied in his words that it was not directly instituted by the Apostles. It rests upon the 'custom of the Church,' and was devised by the Church for a particular object—the maintenance of unity.

At this point, let us clearly express our options.

Option 1: the original biblical pattern is that presbyters and bishops are one and the same, both in terminology and in fact. If one presbyter was elevated to a higher office (then called episcopate), this was a practical decision of the Churches for the sake of unity, not an apostolic institution. Depending on how strongly one feels about the authority of the Church, this 'change' is more or less binding. This position would completely undermine any claim of 'divine primacy of the Roman Pontiff' because

¹ *The Origins of Christianity*. Charles Bigg, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1909, pp.63-71.

I would put the question differently: did Christ and the Apostles intend that one man would be the permanent president of the Eucharist, and if so what would be the ecclesiological significance of this role? Charles Bigg is typically assuming that it would be the bishops only who would 'succeed' to the Apostles, not the presbyters. As we shall see, the question is, did the Apostles intend that one presbyter should hold the place of Peter – *protos* – in the (local) Church.

even the pope, as bishop of Rome would only be the holder of an office created by ecclesiastical preference.

Option 2: the biblical terminology that equates presbyter and bishop does not negate the fact that one presbyter was in fact the institutional Eucharistic president of the community, i.e. the bishop. Regardless of what title was given to this role or office, it was of apostolic and divine origin. What I mean by divine is that if Christ chose Peter to be *protos* (*arche* is not used) among the Apostles, the identification of the bishop with Peter would be based on a divine order, not on ecclesiastical policy.¹

At the risk of sabotaging what could have been a crushing argument in the Orthodox arsenal (yet equally crushing for authentic Orthodox ecclesiology), I must say that along with both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology, I am not convinced by the position articulated by St. Jerome and most Protestant apologists.

It is true that the terms *presbyteros* and *episkopos* were interchangeable, both in the New Testament and in the 1 Clement. In the words of Roman Catholic apologist Mark Bonocore:

Thus, in the original Christian usage, all “elders” were “overseers,” and all “overseers” were “elders.” And, as we’ve also seen, it was only in the time of St. Ignatius of Antioch (writing about ten years after the death of the last Apostle) that the term “overseer” (“bishop”) is assigned exclusively to the leading presbyter of a city-church, as opposed to being applied to all the other presbyters as well. So, here we see a clear change in semantics between the terminology of St. Ignatius and the terminology of St. Paul (author of Titus) or St. Luke (author of Acts), who wrote a generation earlier. So, a change in semantics did occur. Yet, did a change in office accompany that change in semantics?²

An important element in this debate is the pattern established by the Apostles in Jerusalem. In this particular case, there is a general agreement, even among Protestants, that James was the monarchical bishop of Jerusalem. What we observe next is that every other Church eventually adopted this apostolic pattern. This is absolutely clear in the epistles of Ignatius which we have already abundantly quoted. Bonocore offers a compelling summary of the situation as of 100-110.

- Ignatius = Bishop of Antioch

¹ Peter was always called “an apostle” or “the fellow-presbyter” and “first.” There was no distinguishing title for his role of presidency and leadership among the Apostles.

² EOB: Eastern Orthodox Bible, Appendix A (Mark Bonocore is a Roman Catholic contributor).

- Onesimus = Bishop of Ephesus
- Polycarp = Bishop Smyrna
- Damas = Bishop of Magnesia
- Polybius = Bishop of Tralles
- [Unnamed] = Bishop of Philadelphia

At the very end of the apostolic age, we have six separate city-churches governed by monarchical bishops. Furthermore, Ignatius of Antioch had never visited any of these other churches before. Yet, they all possessed monarchical bishops before he reached them on his way to Rome.

With this fact in mind, one cannot help but ask the question: Who appointed all these monarchical bishops? Especially in places such as Ephesus, Smyrna, and Philadelphia, over which the Apostle John himself had so recently wielded authority (and over the very same still-living Christians who Ignatius addresses in his epistles). The most likely and sensible conclusion is that St. John himself appointed these bishops to be the leading shepherds of the Asian city-churches in his absence. And, if this is the case, then who appointed Ignatius as monarchical Bishop of far-off Antioch? Given that Antioch was also clearly an apostolic city-church, it seems obvious that another Apostle had appointed his first predecessor to the office of monarchical bishop as well. Hence, (as we shall confirm from Scripture itself below), the office of monarchical bishop was established by the Apostles themselves...

Bonocore's arguments seem overwhelming and perfectly coincide with the mind of the historic Church. Yes, whether called 'bishop' or not, there always was a presbyter designated as 'head of the table' for the Eucharistic community. This office of presidency gave him a powerful representative and symbolic role: the bishop stood at the altar on behalf of the clergy and people. Christ and the Church intersected in his personal office because the people are 'Christ' and the bishop speaks on behalf of the Great High Priest the words of institution.

What remains somewhat of a mystery is the nature of the relationship between the *protos* and his fellow presbyters. As Jerome rightly remarked, a presbyter can do everything a bishop does except perhaps ordain. Even this last point is controversial. Yet, as early as the third century, the *apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus of Rome makes the distinction between the authority of the presbyter to "seal" and that of the bishop to actually "ordain":

When one ordains a deacon, he is chosen according to what has been said above, with only the bishop laying on his hand in the same manner. In the ordination of a deacon, only the bishop lays on his hand, because the deacon is not ordained to the priesthood, but to the service of the bishop, to do that which he commands... Upon the presbyters, the other presbyters place their hands because of a common spirit and similar duty.

Indeed, the presbyter has only the authority to receive this, but he has no authority to give it. Therefore he does not ordain to the clergy. Upon the ordination of the presbyter he seals; the bishop ordains.¹

Hence, the bishop is first among equals, but in a way that gives him unique privileges, indeed powers, in the Church and “on behalf of the Church”². Notice, though, that the bishop depends on other bishops to perform an episcopal consecration, and likewise needs the assent of the *presbyterium* and the people:

With the assent of all, the bishops will place their hands upon him, with the council of presbyters standing by, quietly...³

If, as we shall see, an attempt is made to make an exact analogy⁴ between the place of the pope among other bishops and that of the bishop among the presbyters, we must elucidate the exact nature of this relationship.

3. Summary

The need to have an established presiding presbyter at the head of the Eucharistic assembly is obvious for practical reasons. It seems equally evident that the early Christians, following the apostolic pattern for Jerusalem, did not opt for a ‘rotational’ type of Eucharistic presidency. Just as Peter, an apostle, had primacy and the privilege to preside whenever the Twelve were gathered⁵, likewise, a presbyter was designated to have this special role. In other words, I agree with Mark Bonocore that the biblical terminology is that the words presbyters (elders) and bishops (overseers) are used for the same group of people. ‘Elder’ refers to their qualification whereas ‘bishop’ speaks of their pastoral charge. But the reality remains that one of them was the appointed “president of the assembly” as Justin calls the ‘monarchical bishop.’

We shall discuss this critical connection between Peter, the bishop and the catholic Church at length just a few pages forward. For now, let us see

¹ *Apostolic Tradition*, 8

² This expression is used of the letter Clement of Rome in Eusebius.

³ *Apostolic Tradition*, 2

⁴ This is the position of Vatican I: “By the Lord’s institution, St. Peter and the rest of the Apostles constitute a single apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, and the bishops, the successors of the Apostles, are related with and united to one another.” The question of the validity of this analogy beyond the boundary of the (local) catholic Church is critical as it does entail the existence of a ‘bishop of bishops’ in a non-Eucharistic context.

⁵ Except, perhaps in Jerusalem, after James was ordained bishop.

if 'holographic and Eucharistic ecclesiology' is indeed the model of the early centuries.

III. THE STRUCTURE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. "One bishop in the catholic Church"

Perhaps the most striking confirmation of our ecclesiological model and terminology comes from a bishop of Rome: Cornelius (†252). Eusebius¹ has preserved for us the content of Cornelius's letter to Fabian of Antioch:

[Referring to Novatian who attempted to seize the bishopric at Rome] This avenger of the Gospel then did not know that there should be one bishop in the catholic Church²; yet he was not ignorant that in it there were forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acolytes, fifty-two exorcists, readers, and janitors, and over fifteen hundred widows and persons in distress...

This early bishop of Rome confirms the holographic ecclesiology of Ignatius: because the bishop is the living symbol of the unity of the Church, "there should be one bishop in the catholic church." Clearly, Cornelius uses the expression 'catholic Church' to refer to the local Church without any doubt of being misunderstood.

In his article, Steven Ray mentions other early occurrences of the expression 'catholic Church' or 'Catholic Church':

Another early instance of the word catholic is associated with St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who used the word many times... In the Martyrdom of Polycarp, written at the time of Polycarp's death, we read, "The Church of God which sojourns in Smyrna, to the Church of God which sojourns in Philomelium, and to all the dioceses of the holy and Catholic Church in every place." Later in the same book it says, "When Polycarp had finished his prayer, in which he remembered everyone with whom he had ever been acquainted . . . and the whole Catholic Church throughout the world." They then gave him up to wild beasts, fire and finally, the sword. The epistle then concludes, "Now with the Apostles and all the just [Polycarp] is glorifying God and the Father Almighty, and he is blessing our Lord

¹ HE, p. 240 (6.43)

² Most translations have "in a catholic Church" but as far as I can tell, the original Greek says "in the catholic Church" (see EBC, pp. 126-127). I can understand that those who are unaware of Eucharistic ecclesiology (or reject it) would be uncomfortable with the more literal translation.

Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls, and the Shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world.”

These quotations, although poorly translated, are clear enough to establish that ‘Catholic’ (as Steve Ray prefers, capitalized) could not possibly mean ‘universal’ or ‘worldwide’ in those early days. If it was the case, ‘Catholic’ would mean “which is in every place” and this leads to the conclusion that the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* would talk about ‘the [which is in every place] Church in every place,’ a meaningless tautology.¹

The evidence, then, is that there was no universal ecclesiology in the second and third century. When the Western model appeared and developed, the result was to have only one ultimate bishop (the pope) in the ‘catholic Church’ (the universal Church). At this point, I can only ask the reader to refer to John Zizioulas’ *Eucharist, Bishop, Church* for further examination of the primary sources.

2. St. Peter, “head” of the catholic Church

I am quite certain that this title “Peter, head of the catholic Church” may cause jubilation among Roman Catholics and consternation among some of my fellow Orthodox Christians. How can an Orthodox theologian write such a thing? The reason is quite simple. If we have a correct understanding of what the catholic Church is, we shall be able to think with the mind of the Fathers on this issue, without being affected by the so-called ‘Peter syndrome’ or ‘unreasonable dread.’²

We have already expressed primitive Orthodox ecclesiology with this formula:

INCARNATION > EUCHARIST <> CATHOLIC CHURCH > PETER
> PRESIDENT-BISHOP = ESSENTIAL / ONTOLOGICAL / DIVINE
ORDER

By comparison, it is significant that in *Jesus, Peter and the Keys* (RC), the introduction by Kenneth Howell offers the universalist equivalent in which the bishop is unavoidably absorbed by the papacy:

INCARNATION > CHURCH > PAPACY³

¹ Also in the Liturgy of St. Basil: “we pray to You, be mindful of Your holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, which is from one end of the inhabited earth to the other.”

² The “Peter Syndrome” is the automatic (and unjustified) application of anything about Peter to the bishop of Rome exclusively. This is deeply rooted in Roman Catholic consciousness.

³ JPK, Introduction, xiv

The major difference, as we can see, resides in what we mean by Church. If the Church is in fact a universal, worldwide organism or society, then the Roman Catholic model makes sense. Orthodox scholar Alexander Schmemmann was very lucid on this point:

If the Church is a universal organism, she must have at her head a universal bishop as the focus of her unity and the organ of supreme power. The idea, popular in Orthodox apologetics, that the Church can have no visible head because Christ is her invisible head is theological nonsense. If applied consistently, it should also eliminate the necessity for the visible head of each local Church, i.e. the bishop.¹

Of course, saying that St. Peter is the “head” of the catholic Church or that the Patriarch of Moscow is the “head” of the Russian Orthodox Church requires some clarification. This headship is that of a representative or primate, according to the spirit of the 34th apostolic canon which reads:

It is the duty of the bishops of every ethnic area to know who among them is the first, and to recognize him as their head, and to refrain from doing anything unnecessary without his advice and approval. Instead, each [bishop] should do only whatever is necessitated by his own district and by the territories under him. But let not [the primate] do anything without the advice and consent and approval of all. For only thus there be concord, and will God be glorified through the Lord in Holy Spirit, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.²

However, such ‘headship’ cannot in any way be identified or in competition with Christ’s ontological headship over the pre-eternal Church.

It is beyond the scope of this study to present a full blown analysis of the strength and weaknesses of both Eucharistic and universal ecclesiology. I have tried, however, briefly, to show that the New Testament and pre-Nicene use of ‘Church,’ ‘whole Church’ and ‘catholic Church’ assumes Eucharistic ecclesiology. I have also brought forward the identity of etymology and concept between ‘catholic’ and ‘holographic.’ I shall now attempt to show that the concept of Petrine primacy is likewise associated with Eucharistic ecclesiology, i.e. with the office of the bishop.

¹ TPOP, p. 151

² *The Rudder of the Holy Orthodox Christians or All the Sacred and Divine Canons*, D.Cummings, Chicago, 1957

3. *The bishop as successors of St. Peter*

We have already introduced the possible significance of the role of a presiding-presbyter (later called bishop) as successor of Peter who was *protos* among the Twelve. Our question should now be: does this correspond with the mind and teachings of the Fathers? I suggest that it does.

St. Ignatius is the first explicit advocate of what has come to be called the 'doctrine of the monarchical episcopate.' Let us only note that Ignatius does not make any connection between Peter (or the Apostles) and the bishop in a 'successive' sense. Origen, on the other hand, makes a clear identification between the Petrine promises of Matthew 16 and the office of bishop. In fact, this identification is not presented as a theological speculation: Origen tells us that it was the standard claim of all bishops to have received the power of the keys:

Consider how great power the rock has upon which the church is built by Christ, and how great power every one has who says, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"... But when those who maintain the function of the episcopate make use of this word as Peter, and, having received the keys of the kingdom of heaven from the Savior, teach that things bound by them, that is to say, condemned, are also bound in heaven, and that those which have obtained remission by them are also loosed in heaven, we must say that they speak wholesomely if they have the way of life on account of which it was said to that Peter, "Thou art Peter..." But if he is tightly bound with the cords of his sins, to no purpose does he bind and loose.¹

It seems that Origen had traveled extensively by the time he wrote his *Second Commentary on Matthew*. As a result, we must assume that he accurately reported what he heard: bishops were quoting Matthew 16 to establish the prerogatives of their office.

With Cyprian, we have a full blown case of Eucharistic ecclesiology combined with the identification Peter = Bishop. In the words of the great African bishop:

Our Lord, whose precepts and admonitions we ought to observe, describing the honor of a bishop and the order of His Church, speaks in the Gospel, and says to Peter: "I say unto thee that you are Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church, etc." And so, through the changes of times and successions, the ordering of bishops and the plan of the Church flow onwards, so that the Church is founded upon the bishops, and every act of the Church is controlled by these same rulers... The Church is

¹ *Second Book of the Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*, Book XII, 14 – quoted in DECB, p. 68

established in the bishop and the clergy, and all who stand fast in the Faith.¹

Notice, again, that this is not speculative theology – it is what Cyprian uses as his basic theological argument to dissuade the lapsed from separating from their bishop. We find the same Petrine arguments expressed in his *Epistle to Florentius*:

Peter answered Him, “You are the Son of the living God.” Peter speaks there, on whom the Church was to be built, teaching and showing in the name of the Church, that although a rebellious and arrogant multitude of those who will not hear and obey may depart, yet the Church does not depart from Christ; and they are the Church who are a people united to the priest², and the flock which adheres to its pastor. And so, you should know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop; and if any one be not with the bishop, that he is not in the Church, and that those flatter themselves in vain who creep in, not having peace with God’s priests, and think that they communicate secretly with some; while the Church, which is catholic and one, is not cut nor divided, but is indeed connected and bound together by the cement of priests who bond with one another.

This is Eucharistic and episcopal ecclesiology *par excellence*. Yet, Cyprian is even more explicit in his famous *Treatise on the unity of the catholic Church*. The source of unity of the catholic Church, he writes, is Peter, that is the episcopate:

There is easy proof for faith in a short summary of the truth. The Lord speaks to Peter, saying, “I say unto thee, that you are Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of *Hades* shall not prevail against it. And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” And again to the same He says, after His resurrection, “Feed my sheep.” And although to all the Apostles, after His resurrection, He gives an equal power, and says, “As the Father has sent me, even so send I you: Receive the Holy Spirit: Whosoever sins you remit, they shall be remitted; and whosoever sins you retain, they shall be retained; yet, that He might set forth unity, He arranged by His authority the origin of that unity, as beginning from one. Assuredly the rest of the Apostles were also the same as was Peter, endowed with a like partnership both of honor and power; but the beginning proceeds from unity... Does he who does not hold this unity of the Church think that he holds the Faith? Does he who strives against and resists the Church trust that he is in the Church?

The episcopate is one, the parts of which are held together by the individual bishops. The Church is one which with increasing fecundity

¹ *Epistle XXVI, to the Lapsed*

² ‘Priest’ (*hierus* or *sacerdotus*) always referred to the bishop, not to the presbyter(s).

extend far and wide into the multitude, just as the rays of the sun are many but the light is one, and the branches of the tree are many but the strength is one founded in its tenacious root, and, when many streams flow from one source, although a multiplicity of waters seems to have been diffused from the abundance of the overflowing supply nevertheless unity is preserved in their origin.¹

There is another version of the same treatise that emphasizes Peter's role with an even stronger language, but the point is the same. The episcopate is the locus of unity of the catholic Church and every bishop sits on Peter's chair. This text is often quoted by Roman Catholic apologists because many think that Cyprian equates Peter's Chair with the See of Rome when he is in fact talking about every bishop.

Cyprian clearly adopts a holographic model in which every bishop is identical to the other because they are all expressions of the one chair. There is no place for another layer of organization which would create the sequence:

BISHOPS > BISHOP OF BISHOPS > CATHOLIC CHURCH
(UNIVERSAL ECCLESIOLOGY)

Cyprian, along with his synod of North African bishops, left no room for doubt:

For neither does any of us set himself up as a bishop of bishops, nor by tyrannical terror does any compel his colleague to the necessity of obedience; since every bishop, according to the allowance of his liberty and power, has his own proper right of judgment, and can no more be judged by another than he himself can judge another.²



Cyprian's view of a Petrine succession in the episcopate is, I believe, the view of pre-Nicene Christianity and that of Byzantine/Orthodox theology. In *The Primacy of Peter*, Fr. John Meyendorff concurs:

On the other hand, a very clear patristic tradition sees the succession of Peter in the episcopal ministry. The doctrine of St Cyprian of Carthage on the "See of Peter" being present in every local Church, and not only in Rome, is well-known. It is also found in the East, among people who certainly never read the *De unitate ecclesiae* of Cyprian, but who share its main idea, thus witnessing to it as part of the catholic tradition of the

¹ *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*

² Acts of the Seventh Council of Carthage under Cyprian, (The Judgment of Eighty-Seven Bishops on the Baptism of Heretics).

Church. St Gregory of Nyssa, for example, affirms that Christ “through Peter gave to the bishops the keys of the heavenly honors,” and the author of the *Areopagitica*, when speaking of the “hierarchs” of the Church, refers immediately to the image of St Peter. A careful analysis of ecclesiastical literature both Eastern and Western, of the first millennium, including such documents as the lives of the saint, would certainly show that this tradition was a persistent one; and indeed it belongs to the essence of Christian ecclesiology to consider any local bishop to be the teacher of his flock and therefore to fulfill sacramentally, through apostolic succession, the office of the first true believer, Peter.¹

As Fr. Meyendorff demonstrates both in *The Primacy of Peter* and *Byzantine Theology*², this identification of Peter with the bishop continued well after the Great Schism. In 1315, Patriarch John of Constantinople explained to the Emperor that he only accepted the episcopal office of the great capital after an apparition of Christ who said “If you love me, Peter, feed my sheep.” Meyendorff’s conclusion is especially significant:

It is therefore comprehensible why, even after the schism between East and West, Orthodox ecclesiastical writers were never ashamed of praising the “coryphaeus,” and of recognizing his pre-eminent function in the very foundation of the Church. They simply did not consider this praise and recognition as relevant in any way to the Papal claims, since any bishop, and not only the pope, derives his ministry from the ministry of Peter.³

Perhaps the most striking example of a bishop being called “another Peter” is found in the writings of St. John Chrysostom, and this is significant because the great preacher had perhaps the most exalted view of Peter to be found in patristic literature.⁴ We read:

In speaking of Peter, the recollection of another Peter (St. Flavian of Antioch) has come to me, our common father and teacher, who has succeeded to the virtue of Peter, and also to his chair. For this is the one great prerogative of our city, that it received the coryphaeus of the Apostles as its teacher in the beginning. For it was right that she who first was adorned with the name of Christians before the whole world, should receive the first of the Apostles as her pastor. But though we received him as teacher, we did not retain him to the end, but gave him up to Royal Rome. Nay, but we did retain him till the end; for we do not retain the

¹ TPOP, p. 71

² BT, pp. 97-99

³ TPOP, pp. 71-72

⁴ Chrysostom also calls Ignatius of Antioch successor of Peter. There is no doubt that his reference to “Peter and his successors” applies to the bishops everywhere, not to the bishops of Rome exclusively. In fact, there is a real possibility that Chrysostom’s perception of Peter’s role stems from his view of the episcopate (not the other way around).

body of Peter but we retain the Faith of Peter as though it were Peter himself; and while we retain the Faith of Peter, we have Peter himself.

Commenting on F.W. Puller's *Primitive Saints and the See of Rome*, Roman Catholic scholar Dom John Chapman writes:

Father Puller's quotation [from Chrysostom] begins after this point: (-)

"Why did He also pour forth His blood? To purchase those sheep whom he committed to Peter and his successors."

Here Father Puller stops, remarking correctly that "his successors" does not mean the popes, but all bishops.

This issue of a universal Petrine succession in all bishops is critical. Case in point, James Likoudis expresses forcefully the common Roman Catholic perspective:

It is simply not true, and has never been, that all Bishops *are equal by divine right as to their authority* and that our Blessed Lord established *a visible Church without a visible head*.¹

As we have seen, the Eastern Orthodox position, on the basis of Eucharistic ecclesiology, is that the visible Church is the catholic Church and that it certainly has a visible head: the bishop². Moreover, if Peter's successors are "all [the] bishops," to use Dom Chapman's admission³, then all are indeed "equal by divine right as to their authority." As St. Jerome puts it:

Wherever there is a bishop, whether at Rome or Gubbio, or Constantinople or Rhegium, or Alexandria or Tanis, his worth is the same, and his priesthood is the same. The power of riches or the lowliness of poverty does not make him a higher or a lower bishop. But all are successors of the Apostles.⁴

Once this fundamental principle of divine and ontological equality of all bishops is established, we can and must discuss the need for conciliarity and primacy among the bishops. But immediately, this discussion leads us to ask another question. If we can agree that all bishops are Peter's

¹ DPBR, p. xiv

² As we shall see, Orthodoxy is not opposed to using the term "head," although cautiously, to refer to other forms of non-Eucharistic primacy (e.g. "the head of the Russian Orthodox Church" which a functional not ontological title).

³ Dom John Chapman (†1933), a Catholic Scholar, is quoted in Giles, p. 169. See our discussion of St. John Chrysostom for more details

⁴ *Epistle 146 to Evangelus*, Migne PL 22:1192, Giles p. 154. Let us note that Jerome sees the bishops as "successors of the Apostles," not of Peter only. The functional differences of jurisdiction are not denied.

successors (Eucharistically speaking) and successors of particular Apostles (historically speaking), are not some bishops more ‘successors of Peter’ than others? To answer this question accurately, we must make a critical distinction between what the Fathers meant when they applied the Petrine texts to the bishop, and references to the historical pedigree of a particular Church. In the Eucharistic sense, there can be no difference between two bishops, regardless of their possible connection with the historical whereabouts of the Twelve. Historically speaking, it might be said that a particular bishop is now presiding over a community where Peter was once physically present. This is the case of a number of cities, including Jerusalem, Antioch and Rome, but this had nothing to do with the divine structure of the Church, and indeed with the Petrine office as understood by the Fathers.



The ecclesiological question, then, becomes very specific: Is there a particular “successor of Peter” who inherits Petrine primacy over his fellow bishops, indeed with ‘ordinary episcopal’ authority over them as bishop of bishops? The Roman Catholic answer, expressed in the framework of universal ecclesiology, is yes: the bishop who presides in the “the See of his martyrdom.” In a document entitled *The Primacy of the Successors of Peter in the Mystery of the Church*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Pope Benedict XVI was then Prefect as Cardinal Ratzinger), we have a classic presentation of the Roman Catholic ecclesiological model:

From the beginning and with increasing clarity, the Church has understood that, just as there is a succession of the Apostles in the ministry of Bishops, so too the ministry of unity entrusted to Peter belongs to the permanent structure of Christ’s Church and that this succession is established in the See of his martyrdom.¹

Hence, where the Orthodox would say “the ministry of unity entrusted to Peter belongs to the permanent structure of Christ’s Church and that this succession is established in every episcopal chair,” Roman Catholics emphasize a very different aspect of what is meant by “this succession.”

This is the ecclesiological root of the current schism: a rift or at least a different emphasis on how to understand the concepts of ‘Church’ and ‘apostolic succession.’

¹ *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 18 November 1998, pp. 5-6

4. *Peter's special successors*

So far, I have argued that within the context of the nature of the Church, the successors of Peter are the bishops. This view rests on solid biblical and patristic foundations. We have also seen that, from an historical or geographical perspective, every bishop could be considered a successor of a particular apostle, though without ontological meaning.

Yet, when anyone mentions 'successors of Peter', an immediate connection is often made with the bishop of Rome. Hence, James Likoudis (RC) contends:

It is an amazing phenomenon (and one easily appreciated by discerning Orthodox) that ecclesiastical tradition knows of only one bishop in the Catholic Church as the successor of an individual Apostle—the Bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter. All other bishops, even those of sees of apostolic origin, have always been considered as having a limited jurisdiction, and as being successors of the apostolic College only in general, and as linked to their head as centre who alone of all bishops of the College was held to possess a truly universal jurisdiction.¹

The foundation of this controversial claim (which seems to ignore any Petrine succession in the episcopate) is that Peter died in Rome and that the bishops of Rome have always claimed a unique authority based on this 'unique succession.' In other words, even though Roman Catholicism might sometimes call ordinary bishops "vicars of Christ" and "successors of Peter" at some level, the real meaning of these words is normally reserved to the Pope.

At this point, we must discuss more specifically two views of apostolic and Petrine succession. If, as we have seen, the successors of Peter are the bishops, does it not follow that that the presbyters are successors of the Apostles? St. Irenaeus comes to mind:

It is necessary to obey the presbyters who are in the Church - those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the Apostles. For those presbyters, together with the succession of the bishops, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father.²

The same idea is also dramatically expressed by St. Ignatius:

¹ *Eastern Orthodoxy: Primacy and Reunion*, James Likoudis (The American Ecclesiastical Review), The Catholic University of America Press, February 1966, pp. 104-116

² *Against Heresies*, IV, 26, 2

The bishop presiding after the likeness of God and the presbyters after the likeness of the council of the Apostles, with the deacons also who are most dear to me, having been entrusted with the diaconate of Jesus Christ.¹

In like manner let all men respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, even as they should respect the bishop as being a type of the Father and the presbyters as the council of God and as the college of Apostles. Apart from these there is not even the name of a church.²

Finally, in the very ancient *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, we read:

Let the presbyters be esteemed by you to represent the apostles, and let them be teachers of divine knowledge.³

It is important to realize that the Roman Catholic view is somewhat different. In *Called to Communion*, Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict) concluded his brief review of Orthodox Eucharistic ecclesiology with these words:

Orthodox theologians have contrasted the Eucharistic ecclesiology of the East, which they hold up as the authentic model of the Church, to the centralistic ecclesiology of Rome. In every local Church, they maintain, the whole mystery of the Church is present when the Eucharist is celebrated... Given this premise, the inference is drawn that the idea of a Petrine office is contradictory...⁴

And yet, 'the idea Petrine office' is very much at the center of Orthodox ecclesiology. A major cause of disagreement and misunderstanding is that Rome's emphasis on Petrine succession is universal and therefore 'one level up.' A few pages later, we read:

The second point follows from what has been said: the bishop is the successor of the Apostles⁵, but only the bishop of Rome is the successor of a particular apostle – of Saint Peter – and thus given responsibility for the whole Church.⁶

On the other hand, the Orthodox service for the reception of converts asks:

Do you renounce the erroneous supposition that the Holy Apostles did not receive from our Lord Jesus Christ equal spiritual powers, but that the

¹ *To the Magnesians*, 6:1

² *To the Trallesians*, 3:1

³ ANF, Volume 7, p. 410

⁴ CTC, pp. 79, 80

⁵ We have already mentioned that this view was expressed by St. Jerome.

⁶ CTC, p. 97. Notice the popular yet non-Scriptural use of 'whole Church' (Romans 16:23; Acts 15:22).

holy Apostle Peter was their Prince¹, and that the Bishop of Rome alone is his successor...²

Because the ideas connected to apostolic (and Petrine) succession are assumed more than researched, few people are aware that the two models are quite different, although to an extent complementary:

EASTERN ORTHODOX:

Church (catholic) > Peter = Bishop > Apostles = Presbyters

ROMAN CATHOLIC:

Church (universal) > Peter = Pope > Apostles = Bishops



Let us now return to our discussion of Petrine succession beyond its expression in the episcopate. The question is rather simple. If we are trying to find a personal successor of Peter in the sense of a unique dynastic, universal and non-Eucharistic succession, what are the credentials of particular bishops, including that of Rome? After all, Peter as ‘the first apostle’ ordained James as ‘the first bishop of the first see’ (Jerusalem). We also have Evodius, ‘first bishop of the city where the disciples were first called Christians’ (Antioch), ordained by Peter long before Linus in Rome. In that sense, the bishop of Rome would seem to be last rather than first (*protos*). But of course, taken in account were the importance of the city, the symbolic importance of having Peter’s relics under the bishop’s altar and the fact that Peter (and Paul) would have personally entrusted the Church of Rome to a ‘successor.’ Because proper theology makes a sharp difference between the missionary ministry of the Twelve and the local ministry of bishops, it is not surprising that the

¹ A possibly unclear translation – “was their ruler” might have been a better way to avoid misunderstandings since various Orthodox hymns and prayers do refer to the Apostle Peter as “foremost” (in the same prayer book) or “prince.” See our discussion of Peter’s primacy below.

² The question actually ends with “and that the Bishop of Rome alone is his successor, and that [the other bishops] are not, equally with the Bishop of Rome, successors of the Apostles.” This is confusing inasmuch as the expected ending should have been “equally with the Bishop of Rome, successors of St. Peter,” and it shows that the theory that bishops (not presbyters) are successors of the Apostles (not Peter) became widely accepted in the East as well. Source: *Book of Needs, Volume 1*, St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, South Canaan, 1998, p. 75

Byzantines later complained that “You (Italians) have made him (Peter) who was teacher of the world bishop of one city.”¹

Indeed, if Petrine connections are to be considered as paramount for universal primacy, four Churches can boast some kind of special status: Jerusalem was the first choice in every way, as earthly Zion, altar of Jesus Christ *par excellence*, and Mother-Church. Jerusalem is also the See of the ‘Brother of the Lord’ who was ordained first bishop by Peter, James and John at the bidding of the Lord himself². But Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 and ‘deactivated’ until the 200s. Antioch was the second ‘Chair of Peter’ if one is to use this expression for a locale where Peter personally proclaimed the Gospel. We have already encountered Chrysostom’s conviction that Flavian of Antioch was “another Peter (-), who has succeeded to the virtue of Peter, and also to his chair.” The third choice was Rome, because both Peter and Paul had honored the great city with their preaching and the blood of their martyrdom. As we shall see in our historical section, Rome had more than one reason to claim special status. The fourth choice was Alexandria whose Church was known as “the See of St. Mark” and whose bishops were first to be called “pope”³. Indeed, if anyone has a convincing case for being Peter’s special dynastic successor, it is no other than the Evangelist Mark. Mark was an eyewitness of the Lord, he was the companion and perhaps secretary of the great Apostle, even writing “Peter’s gospel” and significantly in a context of succession, Peter calls him “my son.”⁴

The Orthodox conviction is that the idea of Peter’s personal dynastic succession is at odds with authentic ecclesiology which is rooted in Peter’s succession in the episcopacy. This does not mean that the Pope is not successor of Peter in a certain sense (as indeed the Bishops of Antioch or Alexandria). Likewise, there is meaning and beauty to the image of St. Andrew as founder of the See of Constantinople. For that reason, the icon of Peter and Andrew can certainly be understood as a symbol our efforts to bring about reconciliation and unity. But ultimately, the dynastic view cannot replace or even eclipse the traditional and theological understanding that every bishop holds “the Chair of Peter.”

¹ TPOP, p. 81

² Eusebius writes: “The lord’s brother, who had been elected by the Apostles to the episcopal throne at Jerusalem...” - HE 2.23. The Syriac Apostolic Constitutions tell us that James was “appointed Bishop of Jerusalem by the Lord Himself” (8.35).

³ HE, p. 255. Cyprian was also called ‘pope’ by his clergy.

⁴ I Peter 5:13



What then can we say about these four Petrine churches? Can it still be said that the bishop of Rome has exclusive dynastic inheritance over the chair and keys of St. Peter if such a concept can be justified? Or could it be that Rome's primacy, which in some form is denied by no one, is a form of primacy that differs in nature from the Eucharistic model?

Certainly, one Church should have a form of primacy (or priority) among all the Churches because in every gathering there is some kind of 'first.' When several Orthodox priests or bishops concelebrate Divine Liturgy, there is an established way to determine a ranking, for the sake of good order (typically years of ordination for priests and ecclesiastical titles for bishops). In short, the essential equality of all bishops as successors of Peter does not necessarily preclude an order of primacy among them, but in Eucharistic ecclesiology it does exclude an episcopal, non-Eucharistic layer at the universal level.

5. Demoted bishops and ordaining presbyters

The question of the relationship between bishop and presbyter is quite important if we accept the idea that the episcopate corresponds to the "Place of Peter" in the Church. But let us start by reaffirming that the structure of the (local) catholic Church cannot exactly be replicated outside its boundaries, i.e. to a 'universal Church,' because the 'universal Church' is not a Eucharistic assembly and therefore not 'a Church.' Rather, it is a structure of communion among Churches. Still, if it can be proven that the bishop is ontologically different from the presbyter and has supremacy over the local Church, it might be tempting to replicate this structure to the so-called 'universal Church' and consider both equally divine in origin.

With this in mind, it is perhaps significant to note that the early Church did not see the office of bishop as something absolutely permanent. If, for some reason, the proto-presbyter was no longer able to function as Eucharistic head of the community, it was possible to 'demote' him to the rank of layman or presbyter. For instance, Bishop Cornelius of Rome informed his colleague Fabian of Antioch that a certain bishop who had agreed to consecrate the schismatic Novatian to the episcopate had been

‘readmitted as a layman.’¹ A hundred years later, the Council of Nicea regulated the reception of former “Cathars” (Novatians) as follows:

Accordingly, where all the ordained in villages or cities have been found to be men of this kind alone, those who are so found will remain in the clergy in the same rank; but when some come over in places where there is a bishop or presbyter belonging to the catholic church, it is evident that the bishop of the church will hold the bishop’s dignity, and that the one given the title and name of bishop among the so-called Cathars will have the rank of presbyter, unless the bishop thinks fit to let him share in the honor of the title. But if this does not meet with his approval, the bishop will provide for him a place as *chorepiscopus* or presbyter, so as to make his ordinary clerical status evident and to prevent having two bishops in the city.²

Another element that seems to support the view that presbyters and bishops are ontologically equal is the possibility that presbyters may have originally had the power to ordain, and that this faculty was later restrained for the sake of ecclesiastical order. As we have seen, this was Jerome’s interpretation. 1 Timothy 4:14 has sometimes been interpreted in this sense:

Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the council of presbyters. (EOB)

There is also some evidence that in the West, abbots may have been allowed to ordain presbyters and deacons – even though they were not officially ‘bishops.’

It seems clear, however, that the roles and privileges of presbyter and bishop are ultimately defined by one’s relationship with the Eucharistic community. The consciousness of the Church could thus affirm the essential importance of the bishop as necessary symbol of unity of the catholic Church while maintaining the understanding that apart from that role, the bishop remains “a fellow presbyter.”³

6. *From catholic Church to Catholic Church*

We have seen that most pre-Nicene writers use ‘catholic Church’ to refer to the local Church. This was the normative usage, along with the

¹ HE, p. 240

² Canon 8. See TCAC, pp. 56, 57.

³ 1 Peter 5:1-4. As John Zizioulas emphasizes, the idea of a bishop ordained and functioning without reference to an actual Eucharistic community is an ecclesiological aberration. The occasional tyrannical and autocratic treatment of presbyters by their bishop is also such an aberration.

plural ‘Churches.’ There were also many instances when ‘catholic Church’ could be used in a ‘generic’ sense, as in the expression “the catholic Church everywhere.” In general, the context indicates that we are not dealing with the local expression but with a class. Although it is undeniable that this usage eventually developed into a ‘space-universal Church’ type of language, this was not the original intent. We could compare this usage to such words as ‘fish’ or ‘deer’ which have an invariable plural form.

In a context where Eucharistic ecclesiology is assumed and understood, the expression ‘Catholic Church’¹ does not imply the existence of a universal Eucharist with a universal bishop. It refers to a class or type of structure without reference to a particular locale. Nevertheless, the temptation to shift from the class meaning to the identity meaning is great and there is no doubt that the generic and convenient expression ‘Catholic Church’ became a cause of ecclesiological confusion, both East and West.

7. *Roman Catholic ecclesiology: who is fully catholic?*

At this point, it is possible to fully understand the divergence between the Roman Catholic understanding of ‘catholic’ and its Eastern Orthodox counterpart.

In Roman Catholic ecclesiology, a local Church must be in communion with the Church of Rome, indeed under the jurisdictional authority of the bishop of that Church, to be fully catholic. The 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, while influenced by Vatican II’s emphasis of some aspects of Eucharistic ecclesiology, affirms that:

Particular Churches are fully catholic² through their communion with one of them, the Church of Rome “which presides in charity.”³

In other words, “the Church of God which is at Ephesus” is not fully catholic apart from the Roman Church. As we shall see, the idea that Rome was the center of the communion does have some patristic support. But the reasons for this position must also be understood in the light of a possible identification of the eschatological Church (ST-U) with the universal Church (S-U). The result is that the local Church is understood as the radiance and manifestation not of the eschatological Church but of

¹ This capitalization is consistent with the shift in meaning. See my Terminology section.

² The Catechism only capitalizes as Catholic Church when the expression is used in a universal (S-U) sense.

³ CCC, 834. This expression “which presides in charity” is from Ignatius’ epistle to the Romans.

the worldwide organism centered in Rome. Hence, the *Catechism* teaches that:

The phrase “particular church,” which is the diocese (or eparchy), refers to a community of the Christian faithful in communion of faith and sacraments with their bishop ordained in apostolic succession.¹

These particular Churches “are constituted after the model of the universal Church; it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists.”²

Orthodox theologians often notice the evolution of terms and concepts associated with this ecclesiology. When the New Testament reads “whole Church” and pre-Nicene Christians say “catholic Church,” the *Catechism* uses “particular Church(es).” Conversely, when the expression “Catholic Church” is used, it seems to refer to the universal Church, as in “it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists.” In the same way, the *motus proprio* of Pope John Paul II on the ordination of women declares:

He [the bishop] does not exercise the supreme power which belongs to the Roman Pontiff and to the College of Bishops as elements proper to the universal Church, elements present within each particular Church, in order that it may fully be Church, that is, a particular presence of the universal Church with all the essential elements pertaining thereto.

This terminology can easily be a cause of confusion. If “universal Church” means ‘eschatological Church,’ then fine – but ultimately this lack of distinction between the two has significant consequences.

If the terminology is intentional, what is conveyed in the *motu proprio* is that the universal-worldwide Church “precedes³” the local Church and that the local Church is a manifestation not of the eschatological (ST-U) Church but of the universal (S-U) ‘Church.’ As a result, the local bishop is a manifestation of the universal bishop (the Pope) and his authority is derived not from his own Petrine office (that is from Peter directly and

¹ This is also the Orthodox view, although the proper wording would be to replace “particular Church” (a recent invention) with “catholic Church.”

² CCC, 833, 834. It seems that the *Catechism* identifies universal Church with eschatological Church, which confirms my point.

³ The same document declares: “Likewise the College of Bishops is not to be understood as the aggregate of the Bishops who govern the particular Churches, nor as the result of their communion; rather, as an essential element of the universal Church, it is a reality which precedes the office of being the head of a particular Church.” This theory of a “universal college of bishops” as an essential element of the universal Church is very important in Roman Catholic thinking.

eschatologically) but from that of the Roman Pontiff. In the framework of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI issued the decree *Dominus Christus* which makes this point very clear:

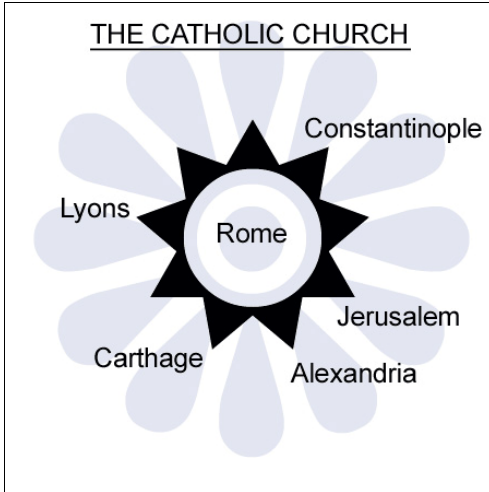


Image 2: The Roman Catholic model: every “particular Church” must be in communion, indeed subject to the Church of Rome and her bishop to be “fully catholic.” The Catholic Church is seen as the sum total of all Christians in visible unity with the visible head: the Pope.

The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the Apostles in teaching and pastoral direction, or rather, in the episcopal order, the apostolic body continues without a break. Together with its head, the Roman pontiff, and never without this head it exists as the subject of supreme, plenary power over the universal Church. But this power cannot be exercised except with the agreement of the Roman pontiff.

Pope Leo XIII had been even more explicit on the issue of the bishop’s derived and conditional authority:

From this it must be clearly understood that bishops are deprived of the right and power of ruling, if they deliberately secede from Peter and his successors; because, by this secession, they are separated from the foundation on which the whole edifice must rest. They are therefore outside the edifice itself; and for this very reason they are separated from the fold, whose leader is the Chief Pastor; they are exiled from that Kingdom, the keys of which were given by Christ to Peter alone... No one, therefore, unless in communion with Peter can share in his authority, since it is absurd to imagine that he who is outside can command in the Church.¹

Clearly, we are dealing with two paradigms, two terminologies and two ecclesiologies. This is the root cause of the different understandings of what Petrine primacy means in both systems.

¹ *Satis Cognitum*, Pope Leo XIII, June 29, 1896, §15

For authentic Eastern Orthodoxy theology, the local Church centered on the bishop is ‘the catholic Church’ and indeed the full manifestation of the Body of Christ. That Church is a relational entity within, and there lies its power to manifest the “whole Church.” At the same time, that Church is in relation with other catholic Churches, not only for practical reasons but also because neighboring bishops have to be involved for the consecration of her bishop. This regional relationship gives rise to a form of primacy that is functional, not Eucharistic. The *primus* or *protos* can be the oldest, the most respected or typically the one who resides in the regional capital. It will be whatever the Churches decide and accept. These relationships can and should ideally develop into larger ‘structures of communion’ which do not create a higher form of ‘Church’ (the universal Church). According to this view, being in communion, or rather in obedience to any other Church (e.g. the Church of Rome) has nothing to do with being ‘a catholic Church.’

For Roman Catholicism, the local Church is “a particular Church” which seems to exist as a manifestation of the universal (worldwide) Church. As a result, the local Church can only be considered ‘catholic’ if it is indeed a member, part or portion of the universal Church, i.e. in communion with Rome. In this model, the universal Church is not so much a “network” as a “star” – with the Church of Rome at the center and the other particular Churches like ‘spokes of a wheel.’ In the end, the identification of ‘Catholic Church’ with ‘universal Church’ leads to the conclusion that there must indeed be “one bishop in the catholic Church,” as St. Cornelius wrote so forcefully. But this is applied to the idea that there should be one universal bishop in the (universal) catholic Church since it is the pattern and the model that precedes the local Church.

8. *The heavenly liturgy*

In the previously quoted article entitled *The Eastern Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, Fr. Ray Ryland makes this accurate remark.

The Eastern Churches have no teaching authority corresponding to the Catholic magisterium. Therefore they have no official catechism or statement of their fundamental beliefs binding on all members of Eastern Churches¹. Their richly elaborate liturgies enshrine key beliefs, but those liturgies do not focus on the issues that divide Easterners from the Catholic Church.

¹ This is a sweeping statement. Orthodox Christians confess their faith in the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople and accept the dogmatic teachings of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. There are several official catechisms. Happily, none of them claim infallibility or inerrancy.

Indeed, the saying¹ *lex orandi, lex credendi* applies perfectly to Eastern Orthodoxy where the liturgical life of the Church is the expression of its beliefs; indeed, it constitutes its very being.

Still, I beg to differ with Fr. Ryland's view that "those liturgies do not focus on the issues that divide Easterners from the Catholic Church"². In fact, a closer look at the great Eastern liturgies will help us address the very question of ecclesiology. If we ask the question: "what precedes the Eucharistic worship of the (local) catholic Church? Is it the space-universal Church (on earth) or the space-time eschatological Church? The answer of the liturgy seems quite clear. The Eucharistic event which manifests the Body and Blood of Christ (and thus the Church) is a manifestation of the pre-eternal *eschaton*. The entrance with the Gospel (and indeed the entire spirit of Eastern worship) is reminiscent of Hebrews 12:18-29:

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched; not one that burned with fire, gloom, darkness, storm... Instead, you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the Church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling which pleads better than Abel's...

Therefore, since we are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be grateful and so worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. (EOB)

As the liturgy ascends and transcends time and space, the priest prays:

O Master Lord our God, You have appointed in heaven the orders and hosts of angels and archangels to serve Your glory; grant that the holy angels may enter with us to serve and glorify Your goodness with us. For to You belong all glory, honor, and worship; to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen. (The priest blesses the entrance saying in a low voice:) Blessed is the entrance of Your saints always, now and forever and to the ages of ages! Amen.³

In the context of Hebrews 12, it might be argued that the catholic Church is an approach to the triumphant Church rather than a manifestation of the eschatological Church. The answer is that it

¹ This latin expression conveys the idea that 'we pray what we believe' and vice-versa.

² Of course, "Easterners" are not "divided from the Catholic Church" – we have seen that every Orthodox bishop is the sign and symbol of the unity of the catholic Church.

³ Prayer at the entrance with the Gospel (Little Entrance), *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*

encompasses both. The rest of the Liturgy leaves no doubt what it is that the catholic Church manifests:

Remembering, therefore, this command of the Savior, and all that has come to pass for our sake, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the enthronement at the right hand of the Father, and the second, glorious coming, We offer to You these gifts from Your own gifts in all and for all.

These texts convey the idea that the Eucharistic liturgy of the Eastern tradition does not aim at manifesting the preceding reality of the worldwide universal Church into a particular city.

Instead, the local Church can be compared to a pinhole that lets the eternal light of God's fulfilled plan of salvation shine into our world. This is why the ancient Eastern liturgies are not cultural expressions, and there can be no such thing as a 'Jazz' or 'Rock' Divine Liturgy.

Eastern Christian worship is about a community ascending in the Spirit to face the throne of God as one. The bishop's altar is a point of contact with "the ideal altar"; it is indeed, the same altar, the same throne, the same eternal sacrifice.

To an extent, contemporary Roman Catholic worship can be understood as the logical consequences of universal ecclesiology. Centered on the local and universal community, it tends to reflect its values, artistic talents and diversity.

9. *What about 'the parish'?*

Before moving 'one layer up' to regional and universal structures of communion, we should perhaps take a closer look at how the 'catholic Church' (the episcopal assembly or diocese) relates to the modern parish¹. In his critique of Eucharistic ecclesiology, Fr. Ryland explains what he thinks is its "fatal flaw":

There is another flaw in Eucharistic ecclesiology. Its advocates assure us that the fullness of Christ is to be found in each local church (diocese), not in some abstraction called "universal Church." The local church cannot be simply "part" of the "Church" - it is "the Church" because Christ's body cannot be divided. Now appears the flaw. What is the relation of each parish to the local church? If each local church cannot be part of a universal Church, how can each parish be part of a diocese? After all, the parish itself, not the diocese, is the Eucharistic community... This is a crucial point because, as Schmemann in effect admits, Eucharistic ecclesiology goes down the tube if it cannot satisfactorily relate the parish

¹ The Greek *parokia* as used by Eusebius means 'diocese,' not 'parish'.

to the diocese in its scheme of things. [The] inability of Eucharistic ecclesiology to relate the individual parish to its diocese is a fatal flaw.

Indeed, the modern parish is how people experience the Eucharistic community. The relationship between the parish (led by the presbyter) and the ‘catholic Church’ (led by the bishop) has been studied in depth by Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon. Suffice it to say that in Orthodox Eucharistic ecclesiology, the parish is not a ‘catholic Church.’ It is, as in the early Church, an extended part of the episcopal Eucharist. The presbyter has been detached in space to extend the one altar as needed, but it is not a separate Eucharist. Zizioulas has shown that the early Churches opted for such a spatial distribution of the *synthronon*¹ because its ecclesiology was solidly established, and because great care was made to connect the presbyter-led parish with its bishop, by means of the *fermentum*², the *antimension*³, the commemoration of the bishop, etc.

I respectfully suggest that Fr. Ryland is mistaken, even from an authentically Roman Catholic perspective, when he says that “the parish, not the diocese, is the Eucharistic community.” It may seem this way, but in fact, the parish is an extension, a part of the full community gathered around the bishop. This is why the presbyter commemorates his bishop⁴ and offers the Eucharist on the bishop’s *antimension*⁵. This is how the parish is a part of the diocese – so that the holographic pattern of the catholic Church can be complete (bishop – presbyters – deacons). It does not follow from this organization that the diocese is properly speaking a part of a ‘universal Church’ (though it may seem this way). It is the ‘whole Church,’ the ‘catholic Church,’ in keeping the principles discussed previously.

¹ In ancient church-buildings, the ‘thrones’ of the presbyters around that of the bishop.

² A fragment of the bishop’s Eucharist that was sent to the parishes during the service. This practice persisted in Rome for a very long time.

³ A rectangular piece of cloth signed by the bishop and upon which the presbyter offers the liturgical sacrifice, as deputy of the distant bishop.

⁴ In the Greek tradition (which is ancient and orthodox), the priest commemorates his bishop only (no metropolitan or patriarch). This Slavic practice was introduced when a form of universal ecclesiology was adopted.

⁵ The *antimension* is a piece of cloth signed by the bishop which extends the episcopal altar and confirms that this Eucharist is authorized by him and performed in his name. For centuries, the Church of Rome used the *fermentum* for the same purpose. See BEC, pp. 222-227

In other words, the “problem” has indeed been resolved and the fatal flaw has proven to be an argument consistent with the Eucharistic ecclesiology of the early centuries.¹

10. The Churches of St. Thomas

Before moving on, I would like to say a word about the full catholicity of Churches that have historically existed beyond the political structures of unity that existed during the times of the Ecumenical Councils. When the Apostle Thomas preached the gospel in India and established Churches according to the commandment of Christ, were ‘his’ Churches fully catholic? How could these Churches possibly lack full catholicity because they were geographically and politically out of reach of the Churches of Rome or Constantinople? It seems to me that the Churches of St. Thomas are a perfect example of the possible usefulness² of superstructures of communion, as well as their optional character in terms of ontology.

11. Where is the catholic Church?

As we noted in our introduction to this section, the reader may perhaps conclude that this section is especially ‘biased,’ i.e. entirely supportive of the Orthodox position. Hopefully, the rest of our study will prove this impression wrong: real concern will be taken to present both perspectives fairly and to show the shortcomings of Orthodoxy’s partial adoption of universal ecclesiology, as well as the universal implications of the Eucharistic-catholic paradigm.

If, as I have contented, Eucharistic ecclesiology is correct, the word ‘catholic Church’ (as the local Church or diocese) becomes very significant. In his catechetical lectures, St. Cyril of Jerusalem warned the newly baptized that:

If you ever are visiting in cities, do not inquire simply where the house of the Lord is — for the others, sects of the impious, attempt to call their dens ‘houses of the Lord’ — nor ask merely where the Church is, but where is the catholic Church. For this is the name peculiar to this holy

¹ Fr. Ryland was correct in noting that Fr. Afanasieff’s identification of the parish with the ‘catholic Church’ was problematic. This was indeed incorrect, as explained in Zizioulas’ *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*.

² The forced latinization of these Churches after their ‘discovery’ by Roman Catholic Portuguese missionaries should also alert us to the potential dangers of a universal and remote center of absolute authority.

Church, the mother of us all, which is the spouse of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God.¹

Likewise St. Augustine:

When a stranger inquires where the catholic Church meets, none of the heretics would dare to point out his own basilica or house.²

Certainly, the name ‘catholic Church’ has taken on a new meaning today, specifically that of ‘universal Church’ or indeed ‘Roman Catholic Church.’ It may be even argued that the name ‘Orthodox Church’ is somewhat better because it does not confuse the original meaning of ‘catholic Church’ (local) with a universalistic replacement. Be that as it may, the warning of St. Cyril echoes to this day: “nor ask merely where the Church is, but where is the catholic Church.” By contrast, Eastern Orthodox Christians now call their assembly ‘Greek Orthodox Church,’ ‘Antiochian Orthodox Church’ or even simply ‘Orthodox Church.’ I am aware of only a handful of Orthodox communities who are called ‘saint (NN.) Orthodox Catholic Church,’ and those are generally former Uniate³ communities who understood the significance of the name ‘catholic.’

If Eastern Orthodoxy has retained, at least in its consciousness and foundations, a deep sense of authentic ecclesiology, why is the name ‘catholic’ – so dear to the Fathers – virtually abandoned when it comes to the self-definition of Orthodox communities?⁴ Upon entering town, would St. Cyril of Jerusalem first visit a Church called “St. Cyril Catholic Church” or “St. Cyril Russian Orthodox Church?” The answers seems quite obvious.

There is no doubt in my mind that Orthodox Christians who have had negative experiences with Roman Catholicism have also acquired a permanent negative association with the word ‘catholic’ and all things ‘Roman,’ forgetting that the Eastern Orthodox patriarchates have always been Roman, as Fr. Romanides rightly insisted.

Perhaps there is a need to remind the Orthodox, as St. Raphael of Brooklyn wrote in 1914, that:

¹ *Catechetical Lectures*, 18.26

² *Against the Letter of Mani called "The Foundation"*, 4:5

³ No disrespect is intended when I use this word. I am aware that has sometimes been used derogatively.

⁴ Of course, the Divine Liturgy still uses the expression ‘catholic Church’ in the litany of the catechumens, the Creed and in the prayer after consecration (the latter being often said silently).

The official name of our Church is 'The Holy Orthodox Catholic apostolic Church.' The Church of the East has never from the first been known by any other name than Catholic, nor has she set aside this title in any official document.¹

My concern is that both 'Roman Catholic Church' and 'Holy Orthodox Catholic apostolic Church'² are correct in the sense of class but problematic if they are understood to define 'Church' in a space-universal sense. As long as we adopt the ecclesiology implied by our language, we run the risk of distorting the apostolic model.³

At the local level, it would be very helpful if all Eastern Orthodox Churches would be called 'saint (NN.) Orthodox Catholic Parish (or Community, not Church!*)' in close correspondence with 'saint (NN.) Roman Catholic Parish.' The deep awareness that both share the name 'catholic' name would do much to recreate a sense of relationship and unity. It would also do much to reduce the ethnic identification of many Orthodox parishes and help them embrace their vocation of universality as 'catholic Churches.'

12. *Is Eucharistic ecclesiology good news?*

I am convinced that Eucharistic ecclesiology is great news for those who have a burning desire to see an authentic restoration of communion between 'East and West.'

If the local Church is 'the catholic Church', it contains in itself the fullness of means of grace, sanctification and salvation, whether or not 'united' into a particular geopolitical superstructure. In other words, Cyprian of Carthage, Stephen of Rome and Firmilian of Caesarea can still be bishops of the catholic Church and saints in spite of their ruptures of communion. The Churches of St. Thomas in India, or those of Ethiopia were always one, holy, catholic and apostolic even when disconnected from Rome or Constantinople. It also means that the saints (of East and West, for instance St. Francis of Assisi and St. Sergius) do not drop in and out of the catholic Church because their patriarchs are quarreling over

¹ Letter to D. M. Canright, 1914. Published in *The Lord's Day*

² Or 'Eastern Orthodox Church'.

³ Such expressions as "the sun is setting" are examples of 'loose language' that should not be identified with the underlying reality.

⁴ Let us remember that the modern-day parish is not, properly speaking, 'a Church'. The diocese is the catholic Church. In ancient Greek usage, e.g. in Eusebius, *parokia* is often synonymous with diocese.

who knows what. Likewise, the idea that salvation is tied to a particular worldwide organism becomes obsolete.

If we add to this ecclesiology the fact that canonized saints (considered as great teachers on both sides) held to differing opinions on the issue of Rome's primacy, we find ourselves encouraged to a new level of tolerance and optimism. I believe that Eucharistic ecclesiology will soon be fully accepted by Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, and that the need for worldwide coordination will result in an acceptable form of universal primacy.

IV. UNITY IN THE 'UNIVERSAL CHURCH'

1. *Unity and forms of primacy*

We have seen that the catholic Church is the fullness of the pre-eternal Church of God manifested in space and time, an undivided whole lacking nothing when it comes to the means of salvation. Thus, St. Ignatius could write to one local Church:

To the Church which is at Ephesus, in Asia deservedly most happy, being blessed in the greatness and fullness of God the Father, and predestinated before the beginning of time, that it should be always for an enduring and unchangeable glory, being united and elected through the true passion by the will of the Father, and Jesus Christ, our God...¹

This is the theological and ontological identity of the Church. But does it mean that this local Church, this "catholic Church", has no structure beyond the local assembly, the deacons, the presbyters and the bishop? How do Churches relate with one another? Isn't there a need for leadership, even headship at every level: local, regional, national and international?

Let us consider the first question: Does the Church have a structure beyond the local assembly presided over by the bishop? Strictly speaking, the answer can only be no. We have already quoted the mind of the early Fathers – there is one bishop in the catholic Church. Beyond that you have Churches in Asia, Churches in Europe, Churches in the Empire, Churches everywhere. By definition, the Eucharistic structure of the local Church cannot extend beyond its boundaries.² The local Church is the whole

¹ *Epistle to the Ephesians*, Introduction

² I note in passing that the creation of very large dioceses is also an aberration. The idea that someone can be bishop of "New York and Washington" or of "Los Angeles and San

Church. What we see (and need) beyond the local Church are structures of common union, communication and harmony. The main point that these structures do not belong to the Eucharistic ontology of the catholic Church. In other words, the Orthodox cannot agree with the Roman Catholic statement that “these particular Churches are constituted after the model of the universal Church.”¹ We have already seen that local Churches are in a relationship of individual wholeness and mutual co-dependency. Further, we have introduced the concept of layers of geographic organization and communication from the very pages of the New Testament (“the Churches in Achaia,” etc.) In this context, every Church is the same catholic Church as every other, and their bishops have full ontological equality. And yet, every gathering, be it a gathering of equals, should have a leader or first for the sake of good order. In practice, various criteria that can be used to facilitate order, such as age, years of service, political importance of one’s Church or unique historical connection with an apostle.

The 34th apostolic canon (already cited) can be considered as the golden rule for such forms of primacies at the service of these geographic structures of communion:

It is the duty of the bishops of every ethnic area to know who among them is the first, and to recognize him as their head, and to refrain from doing anything unnecessary without his advice and approval... But let not [the primate] do anything without the advice and consent and approval of all.

This canon can be understood as a practical application of the words of our Lord to his Apostles:

But Jesus called them together, and said, “You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and great ones make their authority felt. It shall not be so among you! Instead, whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever desires to be first (*protos*) among you shall be your servant, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”²

This is a critical point. We have seen that primacy is essential in the catholic Church – that is the local Eucharistic assembly. To be specific, the primacy of the *protos-presbyteros* is connected with the conciliar nature of the *presbyterium*. In other words, this primacy exists by divine mandate

Francisco” may be temporarily required, but it cannot be a lasting situation. From a practical and biblical perspective, it seems that ten to sixty presbyters per bishop would be an acceptable ratio.

¹ That is, if universal means space-universal (worldwide).

² Mark 10:42-44; Matthew 10:27

because conciliarity also exists by divine mandate, even if the exact prerogatives and powers of the *protos* are perhaps unclear, as we have seen.

Thus, as we go beyond the boundaries of the (local) catholic Church, order is also important, because conciliarity implies primacy. Yet, that level of organization is of a different nature: the type of primacy that exists there is both “analogous” and distinct. It is not an ontological primacy, one that defines the very existence of the catholic Church and the office of president of the Eucharist.

In the catholic Church, a presbyter is elected to be the permanent ‘head of the table,’ historically by the other presbyters and with the assent of the people. There is indeed a special ordination or rather consecration for the one who becomes bishop. When we consider a group of Churches in a particular area, we have a loosely analogous situation, but not an identity of structure. The Church (and bishop) that is first among others is not needed for the Eucharist to be offered or for each Church to be fully catholic. There is no consecration or ordination to the role of regional primate: a particular bishop is recognized as the regional or indeed universal *protos* when he becomes Eucharistic *protos* of the first Church, accepted as such by the other Churches.



This idea that primacy can exist in different ways at different levels of organization is quite simple. A husband is the head of his household in a unique sense that reflects the ontology of the family. Every husband is equal in his primacy. A village may have a leader or head who may hold his office by various means (election, royal succession) and with specific powers. A club or association will also have a president who holds ‘primacy’ among the members. What is clear to all is that the primacy of the husband as head of his family has nothing to do with those other forms of primacies. They are ontologically different and pertain to different types of reality. Primacy in the family is a divine reality, whereas primacy in the village or the club is normally created and regulated by the members. Of course, “God is not a God of confusion,” which means that every form of (legitimate) authority is in some sense divine. As a result, the possibility to speak of a ‘divine primacy’ of the king, or the judge, or indeed of the patriarch or pope can cause grave confusion. Yes, those are ‘divine primacies,’ but the primacy of the husband or bishop exists by the divine ontology of ‘family’ and ‘Church,’ not as options.

It is therefore in an organizational, not ontological sense that Eastern Orthodoxy is comfortable with the idea of ‘primate(s)’ or ‘head(s)’ and should indeed recognize the need for such leadership. Fr. Meyendorff confirms:

There exist, however, another succession, equally recognized by Byzantine theologians, but only on the level of the analogy existing between the apostolic college and the episcopal college, this second succession being determined by the need for ecclesiastical order. Its limits are determined by the Councils, and - in the Byzantine practice - by the “very pious emperors.”¹



In summary, we have two models of universal organization: in the Roman Catholic model, the structure of the particular Church is “constituted after the model of the universal Church.” Hence, the *protos* of the local Church is the bishop and primate, exactly as and derivatively from the *protos* of the universal Church. In this model we have a bishop of bishops, as the wording of Vatican I implies.²

In the authentically scriptural and patristic model, only the local catholic Church (the diocese) has ontological existence. We do not ‘go down’ (or sideways) from a worldwide organism to the local Church. Instead, we see a network of Churches which has a different ontology than the catholic Church. There is a top-down model, but it is that of the eschatological Church intersecting with space and time, not that of the worldwide ‘Church.’ This is how St. Ignatius³ can write that the bishop “is the place of God.”

2. *The Universal Primacy of the Roman Church*

We are now able to understand how the concept of universal primary differs in both ecclesiological systems. The important point to stress is that Eastern Orthodoxy recognizes the existence of organizational primacies within the common union of Churches. What we must reemphasize here is that a service of universal primacy should be acknowledged and indeed desired. In other words, it would be incorrect to

¹ TPOP, p. 89

² This is why medieval and modern Roman Catholic ecclesiology has no real place for regional structures, and why the concept of patriarchate has never found a meaningful place in it. See CTC, p. 98

³ Also, the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, ANF, Volume 7, p. 410

state that ‘the Orthodox reject the universal primacy of the Rome.’¹ What the Orthodox repudiate is a worldwide supremacy that is ontological and absolute. In the Orthodox model, the Petrine connection of the Church of Rome is only one element that the common union of Churches can adopt and accept to constitute structures of communion in line with apostolic Canon 34. In other words, Rome acquired and held a form of primacy in the “universal Church” for reasons connected with practical, even political considerations². And yet, we shall see in our historical study that the primacy of Rome offered everything desirable in one Church: primacy of love, primacy of political importance, primacy of apostolic foundation. After all, if primacy in the catholic Church (the episcopate) is connected with the person of Peter, why not connect worldwide primacy with Peter’s place of eternal rest? If so, we would have a natural “analogous”³ extension of the Petrine structure of the catholic Church to structures of communion needed to express the unity and love of the common union of Churches. Hence, canon 6 of Nicea recognized the existence of regional primacies for three sees that had a Petrine connection.

This approach, combined with the 34th apostolic Canon and the decrees of Sardica, should allow us to formulate a blueprint for universal unity acceptable by both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

3. *Imperial unity and Orthodox universalism*

If Orthodoxy is, (or should be,) as we contend, so deeply attached to Eucharistic ecclesiology, why is it that, in practice, universal ecclesiology seems to be the ‘operative principle’?

Let us first observe that Christianity in general and Eastern Orthodoxy in particular is undeniably connected with the history of the Roman Empire. After all, our Lord was “crucified under Pontius Pilate” – a Roman imperial official. After centuries of persecutions, a Roman emperor finally embraced the Christian faith and embarked upon the perilous task of ‘harmonizing’ Church and State. Even though Eucharistic ecclesiology was solidly embedded in the liturgy and consciousness of the Church, the paramount concern became that of ecumenical unity. Between Nicea (325) and Chalcedon (451), belief in the individual wholeness of each catholic Church was maintained, but minimized. The main concern was

¹ Of course, this primacy is theoretical and would only be effective in case of a return to communion based a comprehensive resolution of all divisive issues.

² This is the thrust of Canon 28 at Chalcedon (451).

³ This very useful adjective comes from Fr. John Meyendorff.

the political and ecclesiastical unity of 'the catholic Churches' as 'one Catholic Church.' Indeed, the Council of Nicea was organized by Constantine for this very reason.

Within years, the catholic Church became the diocese and its boundaries were defined by the existing territorial subdivisions of the imperial administration. This came to be known as 'the principle of accommodation.' Within the confines of the Empire, it was essential to have powerful 'structures of communion' to ensure the stability of the *oecumene*. Already, the Council of Nicea had ratified the regional primacies of Alexandria, Antioch and Rome. Within less than two hundred years, the catholic Churches outside the boundary of the Empire decided to leave the family. I am convinced that the Assyrian bishops who were present at Ephesus (431) realized that for better or worse, imperial Christianity was not something they wanted to be involved with.¹ As a result of this process of separation and restructuration, five patriarchates became responsible for the administration of catholic Churches of the Empire.

Rome, of course, was the center of the universe, at least until Constantinople-New Rome appeared on the scene between 325 and 381. For the Emperor and the bishops of the *oecumene*, the known and civilized world was the Empire. Universal ecclesiology was a matter of practical administration, and Rome was the accepted center of authority. We shall discuss in our historical section the origins of the primacy of the Church of Rome. Suffice it to say that in the context of the Empire, universal ecclesiology became the operative principle, even if Eucharistic ecclesiology was still ontological and dogmatic. The primate of the *oecumene* was the primate of his own regional patriarchate and "the head" of all the Churches according to civil law. The realm of the five patriarchates ('the ecumenical Church') became fully identified with the holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Thus, we find Charles Ajalat (Orthodox) writing that:

In the Great Schism, generally pegged to 1054 A.D., Rome was separated from the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church: that is, the other four Patriarchates.

Having used the expression "one holy, catholic and apostolic Church" in a universal sense, Mr. Ajalat is forced to admit that:

¹ Few Christians realize that the so-called 'Nestorian Church' was perhaps larger in size than the 'ecumenical Church'. Before its devastation by Islam, the 'Church of the East' extended from Syria to India and Tibet.

If the Roman Catholic Church was misled by universal ecclesiology, so in part was the Orthodox Church also misled. To be fair, the Orthodox Church, beginning in the mid-[fourth] century (as a result of the Roman Empire), has not implemented properly the early Church's understanding of there being one episcopate. Further, [the] Orthodox, whether it is consciously admitted or not, often appear to see the Church as a number of isolated Churches, generally along national borders (contrary to the historic ecclesiology of the Church), one in faith and worship, but only a "part" of the universal Church.¹

On the Roman Catholic side, Fr. Ryland makes the same observation:

Afanassieff and his followers admit that universal ecclesiology has been the framework for Eastern canonical practice and doctrine. It certainly has its defenders today in Eastern churches, especially the Greek Church. P. N. Trempelas has written a vigorous refutation of Eucharistic ecclesiology and its presuppositions, (Diakonia, vol. 4, no. 4 [1969]), 341-345.] though from an anti-papal perspective.

The advocates of Eucharistic ecclesiology seem to be in the majority today. Yet they readily grant that universal ecclesiology (non-papal, of course) has dominated Eastern teaching and canonical practice for sixteen or more centuries. So who is right? What is the official position of what we commonly but loosely call "Eastern Orthodoxy?"

These remarks should be taken seriously. How can it be said that Orthodoxy is (or should be) founded on Eucharistic ecclesiology when its practices and documents seem to indicate otherwise? For instance, the *Longer Catechism of St. Philaret of Moscow* teaches:

Q. How does it agree with the unity of the Church, that there are many separate and independent churches, as those of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, Russia?

A. These are particular churches, or parts of the one Catholic Church: the separateness of their visible organization does not hinder them from being all spiritually great members of the one body of the Universal Church², from having one Head, Christ, and one spirit of faith and grace. This unity is expressed outwardly by unity of Creed, and by communion in prayer and Sacraments.³

If "Catholic Church" and "Universal Church" both mean space-universal, then this is a clear-cut expression of what I have called improper terminology and 'Western Universalism,' found in an authoritative document of the Eastern Churches. As a result, anyone

¹ The Word (Magazine), January 1996, pp. 7-11

² Again, we notice the potential confusion / identification between 'universal Church' and eschatological Church'.

³ COC, p. 47

(including myself) who would contend that Eucharistic ecclesiology is authentically orthodox and catholic must admit that Eastern Orthodoxy also embraced a form of functional and dogmatic universalism, although along different lines than Rome and never to the point of forgetting its original ecclesiology.



I am both saddened and comfortable with the idea that doctrinal statements are often poorly phrased and influenced by the political environment. Most Roman Catholics will also agree that many past Papal documents were also poorly worded and the product of a particular context. But this does not mean that we are all crypto-Protestants who are left on our own on every dogmatic issue. On the other hand, it does call for a constant reassessment of our Christian witness in the light of Scripture and apostolic Tradition. In fact, a careful reassessment of the testimony of the early Fathers shows us that Eucharistic ecclesiology and universal unity are not meant to be contradictory and mutually exclusive. The great (pre-Nicene) expositors of Eucharistic ecclesiology were also very concerned with the concord and unity of the “common union.”¹ They all recognized that, if possible, this common union should be universal and that there should be a ‘first’ Church who would “preside in love” with a ‘head’ bishop. Obviously, the Churches that were geographically out of reach could not participate in this structure. But there was no doubt that worldwide harmony required a center of unity. On this point, Orthodox and Roman Catholics agree. The key difference is the ecclesiological model as well as the origin and type of primacy enjoyed by the ‘head’ bishop of the universal common union.

4. *Primacy according to Rome*

We have seen how our understanding of primacy is inseparable from ecclesiology. Hence, the Roman Catholic theology of universal primacy is the consequence and reflection of its universal ecclesiology.

For this presentation, it important to refer only to authoritative Roman Catholic documents, in contrast to recent reformulations of scholars and theologians. For this purpose, we will refer primarily to the recent

¹ The reader should read the entirety of Eusebius' *History of the Church* with this topic in mind.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, to the dogmatic decrees of Vatican I and to various Papal statements.

From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

The episcopal college and its head, the pope

880 When Christ instituted the Twelve, “he constituted [them] in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from among them.” Just as “by the Lord’s institution, St. Peter and the rest of the Apostles constitute a single apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, and the bishops, the successors of the Apostles, are related with and united to one another.”

882 The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter’s successor, “is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the Faithful.” “For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.”

883 “The college or body of bishops has no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, as its head.” As such, this college has “supreme and full authority over the universal Church¹; but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff.”²

We will also quote from the main section of Vatican I, all of them essential to understand what Rome means by primacy:³

We teach and declare that, according to the gospel evidence, a primacy of jurisdiction over the whole Church of God was immediately and directly promised to the blessed apostle Peter and conferred on him by Christ the Lord...

Therefore, if anyone says that blessed Peter the apostle was not appointed by Christ the lord as prince of all the Apostles and visible head of the whole Church militant; or that it was a primacy of honor only and not one of true and proper jurisdiction that he directly and immediately received from our lord Jesus Christ himself: let him be anathema...

To this day and for ever, [St. Peter] lives and presides and exercises judgment in his successors the bishops of the holy Roman See, which he founded and consecrated with his blood. Therefore whoever succeeds to the chair of Peter obtains by the institution of Christ himself, the primacy of Peter over the whole Church. Therefore, if anyone says that it is not by the institution of Christ the Lord himself (that is to say, by divine law) that blessed Peter should have perpetual successors in the primacy over the

¹ Clearly, “whole Church” and “universal Church” must mean worldwide (space-universal), not eschatological (space-time-universal).

² CCC, p.234

³ As always, the underlines are mine, not from the original decrees.

whole Church; or that the Roman pontiff is not the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy: let him be anathema...

Wherefore we teach and declare that, by divine ordinance, the Roman Church possesses a pre-eminence of ordinary power over every other Church, and that this jurisdictional power of the Roman pontiff is both episcopal and immediate. Both clergy and faithful, of whatever rite and dignity, both singly and collectively, are bound to submit to this power by the duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, and this not only in matters concerning faith and morals, but also in those which regard the discipline and government of the Church throughout the world.

In this way, by unity with the Roman pontiff in communion and in profession of the same faith, the Church of Christ becomes one flock under one supreme shepherd.

This is the teaching of the catholic truth, and no one can depart from it without endangering his faith and salvation.

So, then, if anyone says that the Roman pontiff has merely an office of supervision and guidance, and not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church, and this not only in matters of faith and morals, but also in those which concern the discipline and government of the Church dispersed throughout the whole world; or that he has only the principal part, but not the absolute fullness, of this supreme power; or that this power of his is not ordinary and immediate both over all and each of the Churches and over all and each of the pastors and faithful: let him be anathema.

Therefore, we teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman pontiff speaks *Ex-Cathedra*, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals.

Therefore, such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable.

So then, should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition of ours: let him be anathema.¹

It is difficult to summarize the scope of these dogmatic teachings. Let us simply highlight a few points:

(1) This teaching is presented as a divinely revealed dogma, one that “must be believed by all faithful Christians” and “no one can depart from it without endangering his faith and salvation.”

¹ Decrees of Vatican I, bull *Pastor Aeternus*

(2) The biblical arguments are specifically listed: Matthew 16, Luke 22 and John 21.

(3) The Eastern Orthodox view of a worldwide “primacy of honor” or “of supervision and guidance” ascribed to the Bishop of Rome is clearly condemned as heretical and “anathema.” Instead, the titles “true vicar of Christ, head of the whole Church” are dogmatically affirmed.

(4) The Roman Pontiff has “immediate” “episcopal” authority over all, including bishops (and ‘patriarchs’). The use of the word episcopal makes it clear that the pope is indeed the ‘bishop of bishops.’

(5) The idea that an Ecumenical Council can exist without a pope or that such Councils have superior authority over the pope is squarely condemned.

(6) The concept of infallibility is defined and the conditions clearly listed for this dogma to be applicable.

In contrast to the Roman Catholic view, what is the Eastern Orthodox understanding of primacy?

5. *Primacy according to Eastern Orthodoxy*

This is where the reader will understand my decision to summarize my ‘thesis’ in the Introduction, and to consistently clarify my use of ‘Church’ and ‘Churches.’ What I will be discussing here is the concept of primacy among the Churches, or ‘primacy in the universal Church.’ As we have seen, the ‘universal Church’ is a political or functional arrangement, not an ontological reality.

Contrary to the opinion of some, the concept of primacy¹ does exist in the Orthodox Communion. It is not the primacy of Rome that is in question but rather its divine origin, absolute “fullness of power,” ontological reality and unlimited scope. For the Eastern churches, Vatican I describes a universal supremacy of divine right, not what should be properly called ‘primacy.’

The *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs* of 1848 made it clear that:

We (the Orthodox) see that very primacy, for which his Holiness now contends with all his might, as did his predecessors, transformed from a brotherly character and hierarchical privilege into a lordly superiority.

Hence, the Orthodox patriarchs recognized that Rome once possessed the primacy of an ‘elder brother’ to which ‘hierarchical privileges’ were

¹ We are discussing non-Eucharist primacy.

attached. The *tomos* of the Church of Constantinople (1663) indirectly indicates the scope of these privileges:

Q: Can the judgment of other churches be brought to appeal to the throne of Constantinople and can this throne resolve all ecclesiastical cases?

A: This privilege was that of the pope before the tearing asunder of the Church by presumption and wickedness. But since the Church is now torn, all the cases of the other Churches are brought to the throne of Constantinople, which will pronounce the sentence inasmuch as according to the canons, this see has the same primacy as ancient Rome.

In fact, we find the Church of Constantinople claiming rights that go slightly beyond what the canons of Sardica had granted to Rome. This council, held in 343 and confirmed by the East at the council *in Trullo* (692)¹, granted a right of ‘cassatio’ to the bishop of Rome, something much narrower in scope than what Constantinople ‘inherits’ in 1663.

Summarizing the Orthodox position, Timothy Ware² explains:

Orthodox believe that among the five patriarchs a special place belongs to the pope. The Orthodox Church does not accept the doctrine of Papal authority set forth in the decrees of the Vatican Council of 1870, and taught today in the Roman Catholic Church; but at the same time orthodoxy does not deny to the holy and apostolic See of Rome a primacy of honor, together with the right (under certain conditions) to hear appeals from all parts of Christendom. Note that we have used the word ‘primacy,’ not ‘supremacy.’ Orthodox regard the pope as the bishop ‘who presides in love,’ to adopt the phrase of St. Ignatius: Rome’s mistake — so Orthodox believe — has been to turn this primacy or ‘presidency of love’ into a supremacy of external power and jurisdiction... Let us ask in positive terms what the nature of Papal primacy is from an Orthodox viewpoint. Surely we Orthodox should be willing to assign to the pope, in a reunited Christendom, not just an honorary seniority but an all-embracing apostolic care. We should be willing to assign to him the right, not only to accept appeals from the whole Christian world, but even to take the initiative in seeking ways of healing when crisis and conflict arise anywhere among Christians. We envisage that on such occasions the pope would act, not in isolation, but always in close cooperation with his brother bishops. We would wish to see his ministry spelt in a pastoral rather than juridical terms. He would encourage rather than compel, consult rather than coerce.³

¹ Also called Quinisext and often considered as having high authority by virtue of being an extension of the Sixth Council.

² Now Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia

³ TOC, p. 316

Olivier Clement (EO) concurs. His analysis of the relationship between East and West during the first seven Councils leads him to this conclusion:

[The East] has recognized, at the time of the Ecumenical Councils, a real Roman primacy and the Petrine charisma that it implies. And it was indeed something else than the simple 'primacy of honor' of a 'primus inter pares,' in the purely honorary sense of these expressions. What was it? One cannot give an exact answer because any juridical definition of the modern type would seem inadequate.¹



Let us for a moment set aside the question of the universal primacy of Rome to consider the kind of primacy that Orthodox bishops consider acceptable. If we take as an example the 'Russian Orthodox Church' (or more accurately "Moscow Patriarchate"), the official statutes read:

The Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia shall have primacy in honor among the episcopate of the Russian Orthodox Church and shall be accountable to the Local and Bishops' Councils.

The relations between the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and the Holy Synod shall be determined by Canon 34 of the Holy Apostles and Canon 9 of the Council of Antioch in accordance with accepted Orthodox tradition.

As we shall see, this patriarchal "primacy of honor" is much more than an honorary rank. The reference to "Canon 34 of the Holy Apostles" is extremely important. We are now familiar with this ancient ruling:

It is the duty of every nation to know the one among them who is the first, and to recognize him as their head, and to refrain from doing anything unnecessary without his advice and approval; instead, each of them should do only whatever is necessitated by his own district and by the territories under him. But [the head] should not do anything without the advice and consent and approval of all. For only thus there be concord, and will God be glorified through the Lord...²

"Canon 9 of Antioch" is an application of the same principle to the prerogatives of the metropolitan:

The bishops of the province must know that the bishop placed at the head of the metropolis, [the metropolitans, is also entrusted with the care of the

¹ RA, pp. 60-61

² *The Rudder of the Holy Orthodox Christians or All the Sacred and Divine Canons*, D. Cummings, Chicago, 1957

province, it is to the metropolis that all those go who have business to do. In consequence it has been ruled that he will occupy the first place in regard to honors and that the other bishops (in conformity with the ancient canon decreed by our fathers and which is still in force) will not be able to do anything without him, except administer their diocese and the territory adjoining. He must take care of the country districts which are dependent on the episcopal city, ordain for them priests and deacons and do all things with discernment. But, outside of these limits, he may do nothing without the assent of the bishop of the metropolis who, in his turn, may decide nothing without the advice of the other bishops.

Let us first notice that the title “head” is not necessary heretical or a usurpation of Christ’s role in the Church. The fact that the Patriarch of Moscow is the ‘Head of the Russian Orthodox Church’ does not seem to bother anyone. Likewise, it would not be impossible to call the primate of the universal Church ‘Head of the Church’ as long as this is understood in reference to Canon 34, not in an absolute sense.

Of course, my point in this book is that saying “Church” to refer to the ‘universal Church’ is not accurate and leads to distortions. It is very convenient to talk about ‘the Church,’ ‘the Roman Catholic Church,’ the ‘Russian Orthodox Church,’ but I insist that these are functional, political concepts that distract us from authentic ecclesiology. The head of the Church (the body of Christ), is Jesus Christ. The head of the catholic Church (in the other biblical and ontological sense) is the bishop who “stands for Jesus Christ” in a special way. These two senses have theological and ontological meaning. I would prefer that the bishop of Moscow would be called ‘head of the Patriarchate of All Russia’ and the universal primate ‘head of the Orthodox Catholic Communion’ or indeed ‘ecumenical patriarch.’

In the case of the ‘Russian Church,’ we find that the patriarch’s primacy of honor comes with many ‘hierarchical privileges,’ namely (the reader will hopefully forgive this lengthy quotation, necessary to make the point):

6. The Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, together with the Holy Synod shall convene Bishops’ Councils and in exceptional cases the Local Councils and shall preside at them. The Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia shall also convene the sessions of the Holy Synod.

7. In exercising his canonical authority, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia shall: a) be responsible for the implementation of the decisions of the Councils and the Holy Synod; b) submit to the Councils the reports on the situation in the Russian Orthodox Church for the period between the Councils; c) uphold the unity of the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church; d) exercise authoritative supervision over all Synodal departments; e) address the Pleroma of the Russian Orthodox Church with pastoral messages; f) sign the general church documents after their

appropriate approval by the Holy Synod; g) exercise the executive and instructive authority in governing the Moscow Patriarchate; h) communicate with the Primates of the Orthodox Churches in compliance with the decisions of the Councils or the Holy Synod, as well as on his own behalf; i) represent the Russian Orthodox Church in its relations with the highest bodies of the state authority and administration; j) have the duty of petitioning and interceding before the bodies of the state power both on the canonical territory and outside it; k) approve the statutes of the Self-governing Churches, the Exarchates and the Dioceses; l) receive the appeals from the diocesan bishops of the Self-governing Churches; m) issue decrees on the election and appointment of the diocesan bishops, the heads of the Synodal departments, the vicar bishops, the rectors of the Theological schools and other officials appointed by the Holy Synod; n) take care for the timely replacement of the episcopal sees; o) entrust the bishops with temporal administration of the diocese in case the diocesan bishops are ill for a long time, die or stand trial in the ecclesiastical court; p) supervise the exercising by the bishops of their archpastoral duty in taking care for the dioceses; q) have the right to visit in necessary cases all dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church (canon 34 of the Holy Apostles; canon 9 of the Council of Antioch, Council of Carthage 52 (63); r) give fraternal advice to the bishops pertaining both to their personal life and the exercise of their archpastoral duty. In the event they do not heed to his advice, he shall propose the Holy Synod to make an appropriate decision; s) take to consideration the matters pertaining to the disagreements among the bishops, who voluntarily ask for his mediation without formal legal proceedings. The decision of the Patriarch in such cases shall be binding for both parties; t) receive complaints concerning the bishops and set them in appropriate motion; u) allow the bishops leave for more than 14 days; v) award the bishops with the established titles and higher church distinctions; w) award the clergy and laity with church awards; x) approve the awarding of scholarly degrees and ranks; y) take care for the timely production and consecration of the holy myrrh for general church needs.

Obviously, regional, national or universal primacy ‘the Orthodox way’ can mean much more than “being first in line.”

As a result, various forms of primacy do exist in the context of Orthodoxy, both divine-ontological (bishop, husband) or functional (metropolitan, patriarchs, pope). The key here is the word ‘analogous.’ The functional primacies are ‘analogous’ to the ontological primacy, only but they are ultimately relative and man-made. This is why John Meyendorff could conclude:

In the Orthodox perspective, Roman ecclesiology appears therefore to have weighed disproportionately the succession of the Coryphaeus [Peter] in the person of the universal primate at the expense of the succession of Peter in the person of the local bishop.¹

¹ TPOP, p. 90



In summary, the contrast with the Roman Catholic concept of primacy is that Eastern Orthodoxy stresses the following:¹

- There is no ‘assured’ office beyond that of bishop.

The Orthodox tradition only acknowledges the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter (priest) and deacon. A bishop may receive a special title such as metropolitan or patriarch but he is still essentially a bishop among bishops. By contrast, Roman Catholic ecclesiology teaches, that above the rank of bishop (or apostle) is the Petrine office of ‘vicar of Christ’ or ‘prime minister of the King’ with episcopal powers over all bishops (‘a bishop of bishops’).

- Primacy is exercised with the agreement of the bishops.

We have already encountered this idea in canon 34: ‘The bishops of every nation must acknowledge him who is first among them and account him as their head, and do nothing of consequence without his consent... but neither let him (who is first) do anything without the consent of all; for so there will be unanimity...’ This echoes the thought of St. John Chrysostom: “Behold, how Peter does all things by common consent, and decides nothing by his own power or authority.”²

- The ultimate authority of the ‘ecumenical Church’ is the Ecumenical Council.

In Acts 15, there can be discussion as the exact role of Peter as to the Council, but there is no doubt that the decision came from a body, not a person. This point was also articulated by St. Augustine:

As if it might not have been said, and most justly said, to them: ‘Well, let us suppose that those bishops who decided the case at Rome were not good judges; there still remained a plenary Council of the universal Church, in which these judges themselves might be put on their defense; so that, if they were convicted of mistake, their decisions might be reversed’³.

¹ The main source for this section is the article *Principals of Primacy in Eastern Orthodoxy* by Wm. Der-Ghazarian Wolfe. Extensive use of this public domain source is hereby acknowledged.

² *Homily on the Acts of the Apostles*, 8d. Of course, Chrysostom would have applied the Petrine image to the bishops, not to the pope.

³ Letter 43

The Orthodox would also point out that it took a council (Vatican I) to declare that the pope does not in fact need a council to settle dogmatic and moral issues, a result which does not seem entirely consistent¹.

- For Eastern Orthodox Christians, the question of “primacy” is more a matter of canonical procedure and Church administration than a matter of faith.

In contrast, Rome perceives the primacy of its bishop as a fundamental article of faith, indeed a matter of salvation.

- Eastern ecclesiology sees all bishops as holding ‘the place of Peter’ at the head of their Churches.

In the Eastern view, which follows that of Origen, all bishops who have the Faith of Peter are successors of Peter together with the other Apostles. All inherit the same faith and no one bishop could be considered the sole guardian of the Christian tradition. St. Cyprian, after quoting from the Gospels passages where Christ empowers Peter and the other Apostles, states in the well-known passage: ‘That He might set forth unity, He arranged by His authority the origin of that unity as beginning from one. Assuredly the rest of the Apostles were also the same as was Peter endowed with a like partnership both of honor and power, but the beginning proceeds from unity.’²

- St. Peter is first among the twelve, not over them.

Nicholas Koulomzine expresses this very Orthodox conviction in *The Primacy of Peter*:

But we must make clear, yet again, that Peter is first of the Twelve, first among the Twelve. The text of Acts confirms this: Peter never acts or speaks alone, but in company with the Twelve, or sometimes John. Luke, presumed author of the Book of Acts, makes this very clear, perhaps by design, in all the texts concerning Peter in the first five chapters.³

St. Augustine, explains:

Peter had not a primacy over the Apostles, but among the Apostles, and Christ said to them ‘I will build upon Myself, I will not be built upon thee.’⁴

¹ Vatican I was a council, but the decree on Papal Infallibility was proclaimed in the form of a papal bull, not as a conciliar decree. The bull (*Pastor Aeternus*) does mention “the approval of the Sacred Council.”

² *Problems and Exercise of Primacy*, (Armenian Church Historical Studies), Archbp. Tiran Nersoyan, p. 205

³ TPOP, p. 14

⁴ *Sermons*, 118:316

- Peter left 'geographical successors' in Alexandria and Antioch as well as Rome.

We have already seen that in Orthodox ecclesiology, every bishop is the successor of St. Peter. This could be called the ecclesiological-symbolic succession. Of course, a bishop is even more 'strikingly' a successor of Peter if Peter actually presided over the Eucharist in that locale at some point in time. In that sense, the East would insist that the bishops of Antioch, Alexandria and Rome all share the same privilege of 'historical Petrine origin.' But in the Eastern mind, it does not follow that these bishops are more 'successors of Peter' than other bishops – what matters is biblical and patristic ecclesiology, not historical pedigrees.

6. Conclusion

The 'Great Schism' that troubles the universal body of the Faithful is primarily connected with the issue of ecclesiology and authority.

Sharing the story of his conversion to Catholicism in *Crossing the Tiber*, Roman Catholic Stephen Ray mentions a very interesting incident:

I asked, "Paul, why are *you* a Catholic and not an Evangelical? Why aren't you Orthodox?" We talked for a long time; he was very helpful. It is his opinion that anyone really serious about the doctrine of ecclesiology – the Church – would eventually find himself in the Catholic Church.¹

Indeed, the doctrine of ecclesiology is the heart of the issue, although Orthodox theologians obviously disagree with the conclusion presented in this reflection. What is certain is that the reader should indeed consider the question of ecclesiology with great care because everything else (application of Petrine texts, dogmatic authority) ultimately depends on it.

In his *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Pope Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Ratzinger) offers a painfully honest description of the deadlock:

Against this background we can now weigh the possibilities that are open to Christian ecumenism. The maximum demands on which the search for unity must certainly founder are immediately clear. On the part of the West, the maximum demand would be that the East recognize the primacy of the bishop of Rome in the full scope of the definition of 1870 and in so doing submit in practice, to a primacy such as has been accepted by the Uniate churches. On the part of the East, the maximum demand would be that the West declare the 1870 doctrine of primacy erroneous and in so doing submit, in practice, to a primacy such as has been accepted with the removal of the Filioque from the Creed and including the Marian dogmas

¹ *Crossing the Tiber*, Stephen K. Ray, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1982, pp. 78-79

of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries... None of the maximum solutions offers any real hope of unity.¹

This study suggests that the real issue is that East and West were (and still are) working within two different frameworks or paradigms. This assessment is supported by Archbishop Miller's conclusion that "the roots of the present day disagreement about the papacy have their origin in the different ecclesiologies which developed in the early Church"². As we shall see, these two paradigms can be associated to two different interpretations of the word 'catholic.' Is it 'wholeness' or is it 'universality'? Can both visions be reconciled, both theologically and practically?

In order to 'understand and heal,' our task is now to investigate both the historical road of each system and their theological foundations. But what should we start with: theology or history? Is there one aspect that precedes or drives the other? This question is rather difficult to answer. In theory, theology, that is beliefs, should explain the events. In practice, we find that often, it is the practice that comes first, later followed by a theological justification.

With these considerations in mind, I have rather arbitrarily decided to start with a much needed discussion of 'catholic ecclesiology', followed by an examination of the historical process that led to the Great Schism. We shall postpone our presentation and evaluation of the scriptural and patristic arguments (Matthew 16, etc.) to Section IV.

V. CAN "HIS BODY" BE BROKEN?

1. *Heresies, schisms, opinions*

"There must be schisms among you"³. Such is St. Paul's ominous prediction to the Christians at Corinth and by extension to all local Churches. If local communities can be divided, what about the universal body of Christ? Is not the Church the "ground and pillar of Truth"⁴ according to St. Paul? Likewise, when St. James writes about "those conflicts and disputes among you"⁵, is he referring to a situation that could

¹ PCT, pp. 197-198

² TSATR, p. 115

³ 1 Corinthians 11:19

⁴ 1 Timothy 3:15

⁵ James 4:1

compromise the organic unity of the Church understood either as a local or universal organism?

Schisms are nothing new and seem to be almost unavoidable. Everything conspires to destroy the unity of the People of God: the devil, the world and the sinful nature of every human being. The question is this: can there be schisms 'in the Church' or only schisms 'out of the Church'? By definition, a schism creates factions in the assembly, but at what point and under what conditions does a faction become cut off from the Church? Is it possible to establish various levels of schisms and heresies in order to have objective criteria for 'being in the Church'?

First, we must understand the difference between heresy and schism. In 1 Corinthians 11:19, St. Paul used the Greek word *aireseis* (conveying the idea of 'bad choice') which sounds like "heresy" but which is better translated as 'divisions,' 'factions' or even 'sects.' In this famous passage, the Apostle was not necessarily referring to dogmatic disputes. In modern terminology, a heresy is a wrong belief, one that goes against the truth revealed in Christ and by Christ through his Apostles. In another text, St. Paul explicitly refers to such a problem and its gravity when he condemns those who teach that: "the resurrection has already taken place."¹

Secondly, we must also perceive the difference between heresies and opinions. The public teaching of some idea against the consensus of the Churches is not the same as quietly holding to a personal opinion. The Eastern Orthodox tradition has a convenient term for such a concept: *theologoumenon*. These speculations or opinions are acceptable as long as the Churches have not made a final binding decision on the matter. Before the Council of Jerusalem, it was possible for a Jewish Christian to believe that Gentiles should be circumcised upon entering the Church, but after the Council, one could no longer hold to this view and remain in the unity of the Church. In fact, many early opinions have been rejected. Millenarism² is a good example of an early Church opinion, taught by respected early and orthodox Fathers, yet which is no longer taught. For the purpose of this book, it is important to understand that historically, different views have coexisted within the (local) Church and within the communion of Churches. As Justin Martyr (†165) frankly admitted in his debate with Trypho:

¹ 2 Timothy 2:18

² Or 'Chilialism,' the idea that Christ will establish an earthly kingdom that will last one thousand years.

I answered: I am not so miserable a fellow, Trypho, as to say one thing and think another. I admitted to you formerly that I and many others are of this opinion, and [believe] that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but, on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.¹

In the end, the ‘Mind of the Church’ did not receive millenarism as part of the apostolic deposit. We can see why if we apply St. Vincent’s principle: this belief was not accepted everywhere, by all and always. In fact, it is unlikely that it was ever taught by the Apostles themselves² and therefore stands outside of the boundaries of what can be called ‘catholic’ and ‘orthodox.’

St. Justin was also aware of the difference between disputed points and outright heresy. He continues his remark by saying:

Moreover, I pointed out to you that some who are called Christians, but are godless, impious heretics, teach doctrines that are in every way blasphemous, atheistic, and foolish.

As we shall see, several points of contention between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches could be considered ‘acceptable opinions.’ In general, these variations have early roots. From a theological perspective, the history of the Schism is the history of how opinions became crystallized into incompatible systems. On the issue that has preoccupied us the most, we can return to John Michael Miller’s conclusion:

The roots of the present day disagreement about the papacy have their origin in the different ecclesiologies which developed in the early Church.³

Hence, opinions easily become heresies which in turn often lead to schism, as is undoubtedly the case in the case of the now thousand-year long separation between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

2. *Heretics and schismatics...*

In an attempt to be ‘irenic,’ many Roman Catholics maintain that the Orthodox Church is not ‘in heresy’ but only ‘in schism.’ More properly,

¹ *Dialog with Trypho*, 80

² Except possibly by St. John himself (based on the fact that St. Papias and St. Irenaeus both taught this interpretation of Revelation 21). Outside of Asia Minor (notably in Alexandria), the Church never received this doctrine and even doubted the canonicity of the book of Revelation. See HE, pp. 204, 160-161, 271-273. There are also sound scriptural reasons to reject the literal millenarist interpretation.

³ TSATR, p. 115

this could be expressed as ‘the particular Churches of the Orthodox which are not in communion with the Church of Rome are schismatic and not fully catholic (yet not heretical).’ Roman Catholic books tend to refer to the Orthodox as ‘dissidents’ or ‘schismatics’ but more rarely as ‘heretics.’ Unfortunately, this generous view is rather indefensible. Since Vatican I (1870), the Roman Catholic Church holds as a divinely revealed dogma that the Bishop of Rome is the sole successor of St. Peter with episcopal authority over the universal Church. Furthermore, the Council pronounced the anathema on those who reject this view, with a clear reference to the Orthodox interpretation:

So, then, if anyone says that the Roman pontiff has merely an office of supervision and guidance, and not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church, and this not only in matters of faith and morals, but also in those which concern the discipline and government of the Church dispersed throughout the whole world; or that he has only the principal part, but not the absolute fullness, of this supreme power; or that this power of his is not ordinary and immediate both over all and each of the Churches and over all and each of the pastors and faithful: let him be anathema.

So then, should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition of ours (regarding Papal Infallibility): let him be anathema.

It is therefore preferable and more honest to present things as they really are: the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Orthodox Churches are in a state of schism and heresy, under Papal anathema. As the late Fr. John Hardon, S.J, explained quite frankly:

Technically a schismatic differs from a heretic as one who sins against obedience or charity differs from a person who denies the faith. In the strict sense, a schismatic still admits the whole body of revelation but refuses to acknowledge the de facto authority of the Roman Pontiff or to share with the rest of the faithful in their practice of the Catholic religion. Since the Vatican definitions on papal authority, however, it is scarcely possible for a person to be only a schismatic without also being a heretic. And even before the Vatican Council, it was common knowledge that those who originally broke with the Church’s unity for disciplinary reasons, before long ended by questioning certain articles of faith. An outstanding example is the so-called Eastern Orthodox Church...¹

Conversely, there is no doubt that the Orthodox share the reciprocal view, as made clear by the following excerpt from the *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs* (1848):

Of these heresies was formerly Arianism, and at present is the Papacy.

¹ Accessed electronically at http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Church_Dogma/Church_Dogma_028.htm

Since Vatican I, the tone has changed and the mutual excommunications of 1054 have been lifted, but the dogmatic framework is still the same. In fact, it is the opinion of many observers, within both Catholicism and Orthodoxy, that the divide may be widening, not so much theologically as culturally and ‘ontologically.’ In 1997, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople made the following statement:

We confirm not with unexpected astonishment, but neither with indifference, that indeed the divergence between us continually increases and to point to which are courses are taking us, foreseeably, is indeed different... The manner in which we exist has become ontologically different.¹

If our goal is to work towards reconciliation, it is essential to be honest about what has been said in the past and what we believe today. Only then can both sides start anew with a genuine dialogue of ‘truth in love.’

VI. SCHISMS: PAST AND PRESENT

1. Introduction

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi (Law of Prayer, Law of Belief) is a powerful and truthful maxim. We learn a lot about a community’s beliefs and consciousness by studying its prayer life. As we have seen, the Orthodox Churches consider liturgical tradition to be a basic and reliable manifestation of doctrine. With this principle in mind, what the liturgy of St. Basil has to say about the unity of the Church is quite relevant. The passage in question is part of post-epiclesis prayer (therefore a very solemn one):

Cause the schisms in the Church to cease...

If our question is ‘can His Body be broken?’, the answer given by St. Basil seems to be yes². He himself experienced the consequences of the Arian heresy and was the sorrowful witness of many tragic splits. We may therefore say that the (local) Church can go through periods of apparent schism or even heresy when one wonders who the true bishop is and where the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church can be found. Sometimes, the confusion is temporary and does not lead to a lasting schism, both within the catholic Church and in the common union. But

¹ Quoted in TT, p. 12

² As we shall see, St. Basil is almost certainly referring to the local Church and often expressed his distress over the internal schism of the great Church of Antioch.

there are also thresholds and circumstances when the schism becomes organic and permanent.

To elucidate the relationship between schism and ecclesiology from an historical perspective, we shall briefly consider six significant cases.

2. *The schism at Rome*

In the wake of the terrible Decian persecutions of the late 240s, the Church of Rome found herself without a bishop. In 251, Cornelius was elected to the episcopacy by the Roman clergy, but a few days later the controversial presbyter Novatian announced his own claims and managed to get himself consecrated by three distant Italian bishops. Both men sent letters to the other principal Churches (Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage) to secure their recognition. What is interesting here is that a schism in the catholic Church at Rome quickly spread to other provinces. The schism endured for centuries with the presence of ‘alternative bishops’ in many cities, including Rome. The followers of Novatian objected to the pastoral laxity of the catholic bishops and were stricter on some disciplinary issues¹, which is why they came to be known as ‘the Cathari’ or ‘Pure.’ The *Catholic Encyclopedia* notes that:

They [the Novatians] always had a successor of Novatian at Rome, and everywhere they were governed by bishops... Their bishop at Constantinople was invited by Constantine to the Council of Nicea. He approved the decrees, though he would not consent to union. On account of the *homoousion* the Novatians were persecuted like the Catholics by Constantius... The work of Eulogius shows that there were still Novatians in Alexandria about 600.²

Contemporary letters and literature give us a clear sense of the turmoil and confusion caused by the presence of “two bishops in the catholic Church.” We have already encountered the letter of Cornelius to Fabian of Antioch in which the recognized bishop of Rome expressed the universal conviction that “there must be one bishop in the catholic Church.”³ We have also mentioned the canon of Nicea that pertains to the reception of Novationist bishops and presbyters into the catholic Churches with the same concern that ‘there should not be two bishops in the city.’ It is in this context of widespread confusion that St. Cyprian wrote his famous treatise

¹ Novatian had refused absolution to idolaters; his followers extended this doctrine to all “mortal sins” (idolatry, murder, and adultery, or fornication).

² CE, Article “Novatian and Novatianism”

³ HE, p. 240. The letter of Cornelius to Fabian is an invaluable testimony to the ecclesiology of the third century.

On the unity of the catholic Church. St. Ignatius of Antioch had written that ‘no Eucharist can be considered assured (or ‘valid’) which is not celebrated by the bishop or someone authorized by him.’ St. Cyprian may have strengthened the dichotomy by stressing the fact that outside the recognized bishop of the catholic Church, no salvific grace could be found.¹ For this reason, identifying the legitimate bishop of a particular city was extremely important, and the only known mechanism was the recognition of the other bishops of the common union. It is in this context that Cyprian wrote these often-quoted and much misunderstood words to Cornelius and Antonian:

Cyprian to Cornelius, his brother. Greetings. We decided to send and are sending a letter to you from all throughout the province [where I am] so that all our colleagues might give their decided approval and support to you and to your communion, that is, to both the unity and the charity of the catholic Church.²

Cyprian to Antonian, his brother. Greetings. You wrote that I should forward a copy of the same letter to our colleague Cornelius, so that, laying aside all anxiety, he might at once know that you held communion with him, that is, with the catholic Church.³

Notice that as usual in the context of pre-Nicene Christianity, ‘catholic Church’ meant the local Church. But these texts are sometimes read and quoted with a ‘universal’ mindset to suggest that being in communion with the bishop of Rome is being in communion with the Catholic Church. But all that Cyprian is saying is that by being in communion with the legitimate bishop of his one’s (or any city), a Christian is assured to be joined with the catholic Church (in that place).

A few centuries later, struggling with Donatist schism, St. Augustine would approve and absolutize Cyprian’s teachings with these striking words:

No man can find salvation except in the catholic Church. Outside the catholic Church one can have everything except salvation. One can have honor, one can have the sacraments, one can sing alleluia, one can answer amen, one can have faith in the name of the Father and of the Son and of

¹ Although the bishop of Carthage also used the language of assurance versus doubt reminiscent of St. Ignatius: “If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built (i.e. the episcopate of the catholic Church), can he still be confident that he is in the Church?”

² *Letters*, 48:1, 3

³ *Letters*, 55[52]:1

the Holy Ghost, and preach it too, but never can one find salvation except in the catholic Church.¹

This discussion opens the door to a serious and vast topic which exceeds the parameters of this study. What is the nature of salvation? What are the means of salvation? Can one be saved outside the visible manifestation of the Church and without her sacraments? Can the pre-eternal Church be made manifest where there is heresy, schism, corruption and sin? Further, can the pre-eternal Church be made manifest in the same city by means of two competing bishops?

Suffice to say at this point that the Fathers were concerned, as we should be, with giving an accurate witness to divine Truth. This was undoubtedly the mission of the Ecumenical Councils as it was that of the apostolic preaching and Scripture itself. The presence of two (or more) competing Eucharists in a given locale was a betrayal and a false witness to the very nature of the Eucharist which is love and communion. If Christianity can be expressed, in part, in terms of a change in consciousness², then the Church's attempt to cause, strengthen and manifest this 'mind of Christ' is defeated from the start.

Perhaps the keyword here is St. Ignatius' use of *bebaia* ('assured,' sometimes translated 'valid') in reference to the Eucharist of the true bishop and St. Cyprian's rhetorical question on being confident that we are in the Church, not outside. History, beginning with this case, shows us that schismatics and heretics are often stricter, more moral and "pure" than those who remained in the recognized Church. In this example, the overwhelming majority of the world episcopate supported Cornelius, a fact which shows that the (local) catholic Church, although complete in itself like a cell, does not and cannot exist in isolation from its neighbors.

¹ *Sermo ad Caesariensis Ecclesia plebem*

² See my article *Consciousness Theology*, published electronically. Clearly, the mysteries of the Church aim at uniting man with God in Christ. The service of baptism includes the questions "Do you unite yourself with Christ?" and "have you united yourself to Christ?" repeated three times. This *enosis* with Christ is both vertical and horizontal, and it should mark our consciousness with a different identity and sense of responsibility. As Hebrews 1 explains, only Christ endures when the created universe comes to an end, that is Christ and those who are immersed in him as the Hebrews were "baptized in Moses." But if salvation is explained in legal terms (as in the case of one having a valid visa issued by a valid diplomatic representation in order to be admitted into a foreign country), then the issue of finding that "valid representation" became even more pressing.

3. *The schism at Antioch*

In the case of Cornelius and Novatian, it was obvious who the 'real' bishop of Rome was: the one who was recognized by all the other bishops, starting with those who represented the ancient and principal Churches. But what would happen if the episcopate was in fact divided on which bishop to be in communion with? This is what happened to another great Church, that of Antioch.

In 361, the ecumenical catholic Churches were in a sorry state. For various reasons, the Council of Nicea had failed to restore unity of faith and now, the Emperor was backing the cause of Arianism and installing Arian bishops throughout the East. Again, heresy turned into schism with the presence of multiple 'bishops' and Eucharistic communities in each city. In the case of Antioch, the pagans (who were still many) could shake their heads at the spectacle of two 'orthodox-catholic' bishops' contending with each other and with the Arian and Novationist clergy! Where was the Church? How could one tell which one of the orthodox bishops was to be sided with? The *Catholic Encyclopedia* gives us a good summary of the situation:

[St.] Meletius became (361) [catholic bishop of Antioch] after the Arians deposed Eustathius. The Eustathians, however, opposed him for his Arian sponsorship and the Arians, who grew unhappy with him, secured his exile. A party of Meletians arose to defend him. Lucifer of Cagliari deepened the schism by uncanonically consecrating Paulinus from the Eustathian ranks, thereby giving Antioch two Catholic bishops. Meletius returned in 378, but Rome favored Paulinus, and the parties would not unite. Meletius died while presiding at the [Second Ecumenical Council].²

A few years before, Cornelius of Rome had sought the support and recognition of the then bishop of Antioch, but now it was Rome who was trying – unsuccessfully as we shall see – to intervene in the schism at Antioch. The key here is that the bishop of Rome, along with other westerners, did not recognize the episcopate of Meletius and instead tried to promote the recognition of Paulinus as bishop of the catholic Church (of Antioch). In spite of Rome's support, backed by letters of communion, the majority of the Eastern Churches sided with Meletius. In fact, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* conceded that, although out of communion with Rome, Meletius presided over the Second Ecumenical Council and was eventually

¹ Who accepted the teachings of Nicea (orthodox) and were recognized and supported by other major catholic Churches.

² CE, Entry: Meletius

recognized as a saint.¹ The great St. Basil who had initially hoped that the West would come to the rescue of the divided East forcefully expressed his rejection of Rome's decision in this affair:

I accuse no one; I pray that I may be all to all, and "especially unto them who are of the household of faith;" and therefore I congratulate those who have received the letter from Rome. And, although it is a grand testimony in their favor, I only hope it is true and confirmed by facts. But I shall never be able to persuade myself on these grounds to ignore Meletius, or to forget the Church which is under him, or to treat as small, and of little importance to the true religion, the questions which originated the division. I shall never consent to give in, merely because somebody is very much elated at receiving a letter from men. Even if it had come down from heaven itself, but he does not agree with the sound doctrine of the Faith, I cannot look upon him as in communion with the saints.²

For St. Basil, the support of 'the principal Church³' (Rome) to Paulinus was "a grand testimony in their favor," but one that he rejected because the issue was "the sound doctrine of the Faith," "the true religion," and "the questions which originated the division."

Where was the Church truly made manifest in Antioch when multiple bishops co-existed in the same place? With the strict and pure (the Novationists)? With those who went along with the governmental appointees (the Arians)? With those who were in communion with Rome (Paulinus)? Or with those who received support from neighboring bishops (Meletius)? In hindsight, it seems that Meletius can be recognized as the true orthodox and catholic bishop of the Church in Antioch, but does it mean that those who participated in the other Eucharists did not also participate in the invisible and transcendent communion of saints?⁴ Is it personal holiness, orthodoxy of faith, legitimacy of election and consecration or communion with other Churches that determines the true manifestation of Christ's body in a community? These ancient schisms are relevant to today's situation and open the door to profound reflections. On the basis of what we have discussed so far, I would like to suggest the following order of priorities:

- (1) The legitimate succession in the community

¹ Meletius offered that both orthodox communities should come together and that Paulinus and he would function as co-bishops until either one would die. See GILES, pp. 132-141.

² *Letter CCXIV To Count Terentius*

³ Cyprian's expression

⁴ After all, St. Jerome was ordained by Paulinus.

- (2) The recognition of the neighboring bishops and co-consecrators
- (3) The orthodoxy of faith
- (4) Communion with the principal Churches, including that of Rome
- (5) The personal sanctity of the bishop and clergy.

In cases where a schism exists, the concern of the Churches should be, now as before, to achieve unity of faith (as at Nicea) and to find generous and flexible ways to reunite the faithful and clergy of separated communities into one Eucharist and under one bishop, without mention of prior 'loss of salvation' and without imposing re-ordination¹ or severe sanctions (in the spirit of Canon 8 of Nicea).

4. The "rebaptism" controversy

We now return to the days of St. Cyprian of Carthage. The so-called 'rebaptism' controversy opposed the new bishop of Rome, Stephen², to several African and Asiatic bishops. Since these events are discussed in detail in our *Historical section*, suffice it to say that the tone between the parties was not friendly. Witness for example the strident words of Bishop Firmilian of Caesarea regarding Stephen of Rome:

Except that we may in this matter give thanks to Stephen (bishop of Rome), that it has now happened through his unkindness that we receive the proof of your faith and wisdom. But let these things, which were done by Stephen be passed by for the present, lest, while we remember his audacity and pride, we bring a more lasting sadness on ourselves from the things that he has wickedly done. There is no departure at all from the peace and unity of the Catholic Church, such as Stephen has now dared to make, breaking the peace against you. In this respect I am justly indignant at this so open and manifest folly of Stephen. For what strifes and dissensions have you [Stephen] stirred up throughout the Churches of the whole world! Moreover, how great a sin you have heaped up for yourself, when you cut yourself off from so many flocks! For it is yourself [Stephen] that you have cut off! Do not deceive yourself, since he is really the schismatic who has made himself an apostate from the communion of ecclesiastical unity. For while you [Stephen] think that all may be excommunicated by you, you have excommunicated yourself alone from all.

¹ In cases where the existing ordinations meet certain criteria of acceptability.

² Immediate successor of Cornelius with whom Cyprian had maintained very cordial relations.

We shall postpone our discussion of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox reactions to this remarkable letter. What is important to notice is that this time, we are not dealing with a local schism; instead the break of communion is strictly between Churches. In other words, this is not a schism 'in the catholic Church' but 'in the common union' or as many would say 'in the universal Catholic Church.'

Considering the tone of the letter, it is rather amazing is that this heated controversy did not lead to a lasting schism. Firmilian could not deny that Stephen was indeed the catholic and orthodox bishop of Rome, entitled to his opinions and canonical rulings. Conversely, Stephen could only threaten, but without real consequences. Nevertheless, the common union, confirmed and realized by episcopal inter-communion, was temporarily suspended. Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria, writing to Stephen's successor Xystus, finally announced the good news of restored unity:

But know now, my brethren, that all the churches throughout the East and beyond, which formerly were divided, have become united. And all the bishops everywhere are of one mind, and rejoice greatly in the peace which has come beyond expectation.

Interestingly, Dionysius remarks:

He [Stephen] therefore had written previously concerning Helenus and Firmilian, and all those in Cilicia and Cappadocia and Galatia and the neighboring nations, saying that he would not commune with them for this same cause; namely, that they re-baptized heretics. But consider the importance of the matter. For truly in the largest synods of the bishops, as I learn, decrees have been passed on this subject, that those coming over from heresies should be instructed, and then should be washed and cleansed from the filth of the old and impure leaven. And I wrote entreating him concerning all these things.¹

Thus, we find clear evidence that a major 'East-West-North' schism did take place during the second half of the third century. What is significant is that such schisms in the common union, although tragic, were not understood as schisms 'in the catholic Church' and therefore of lesser gravity.

¹ HE, 7.5. This quote is not from Paul Maier's edition.

5. *The schisms of the tenth century*¹

We now look at the tenth century, not long before the so-called 'Great Schism' of 1054. In this case, a controversy over the election of the Patriarch of Constantinople led to yet another break of communion between 'Old Rome' and 'New Rome.' This was first and foremost a political and canonical dispute. After two councils, the matter was finally resolved: communion was restored after several years of bitter disputes.

This case is interesting because this schism was healed even though the liturgical and theological differences had become severe. The parties basically agreed to disagree, a concept that could only work out if the two traditions did not come in contact or attempt to co-exist in the same area. Constantinople obtained the rejection of the *filioque* and the admission that Greek practices were indeed valid, even from a Latin point of view. Conversely, Rome secured recognition of her primacy (along the guidelines approved at Sardica) and Greek acceptance of Latin peculiarities.

The problem is that the council that brought about this restoration of communion was later rejected by the Church of Rome, an admission that the *modus vivendi*² did not reflect a workable reality.³ This case is a reminder that a genuine unity of faith and compatible liturgical systems are required for any restoration of communion to be lasting.

6. *The Bulgarian schism*

This recent schism took place within the Orthodox Communion between 1870 and 1945. This was truly a political schism as no theological or liturgical issues were at stake. In short, the Bulgarian bishops wanted a self-governing 'Church' and the right to appoint Bulgarian bishops instead of being imposed Greek ones.⁴ The Bulgarians broke communion with the

¹ Also called the 'Photian schisms,' which is the usual Western name for this event. It appears to place the blame on St. Photius, which is a debated topic.

² *Modus vivendi* means living together, way of living, implies an accommodation between disputing parties to allow life to go on. It usually describes informal and temporary arrangements in political affairs.

³ The council of 879/880 is sometimes considered as Ecumenical in Orthodox circles. It was accepted in Rome until the Great Schism of 1054, after which the council of 869 was recognized as the Eighth General Council. (See: *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. 44, Nos. 1-4, 1999, pp. 357-369)

⁴ This is a common problem in the Orthodox Communion. The Patriarchate of Antioch was likewise forced to temporarily break communion with the Greek patriarchates in order to obtain an Arab bishop. More recently, the Greek takeover of the (Russian) Orthodox

Patriarchate of Constantinople over this issue.¹ The Ecumenical Patriarchate finally recognized the autocephaly of the 'Bulgarian Church' and the external schism was healed. Again, what we have in this case is a schism in the 'common union,' not the destruction of the ontological unity of the 'catholic Church of the orthodox Faith.'²

7. *The tomos of 1663*³

After the failure of the council of Florence (1439) and the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire (1453), the patriarchate of Constantinople ('New Rome') progressively assumed in the East the ecumenical privileges of the 'Old Rome' whose past prerogatives were indirectly recognized. At the council of Moscow in 1592, the 'apostolic Throne' of Constantinople agreed to the establishment of a patriarchate in Moscow but proclaimed itself "head and primate of the other patriarchates." A few years later, the patriarchal and synodical tomos of 1663 contained the following question and answer:

Q: Can the judgment of other churches be brought to appeal to the throne of Constantinople and can this throne resolve all ecclesiastical cases?

A: This privilege was that of the pope before the tearing asunder of the Church by presumption and wickedness. But since the Church⁴ is now torn, all the cases of the other Churches are brought to the throne of Constantinople, which will pronounce the sentence inasmuch as according to the canons, this see as the same primacy as ancient Rome.

We can only notice the frank admission of this important document: the (ecumenical) Church is torn apart. Understandably, the language (and perhaps even the ecclesiology) has become universal because we are here dealing with the mechanisms of the common union and the role of its primate. What was true in 1663 is, sadly, still true today.

communities of South Korea has resulted in a poorly received 'hellenization' of liturgical practices (I would agree that Greek practices are often more ancient and preferable, as in the case of the commemoration of the bishop exclusively. It is in the musical and cultural realm that enforced hellenization is often disastrous).

¹ The 'Church of Bulgaria' remained in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate and other autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

² This is the most accurate expression. Historically, the Church is catholic and the Faith is orthodox, although reversing the adjectives is also possible and meaningful.

³ The information for this section is taken from *Rome, Autrement* by Olivier Clement, p. 80. This excellent book is now available from New City Press under the title *You are Peter*.

⁴ Again, it is obvious that "Church" should have been 'common union'. On the other hand, we can say that the eschatological Church is divided in its temporal manifestations.

8. *Imperfect Unity?*

As we look back on two thousand years of unity and schism among Churches, what is remarkable is the level of mutual tolerance and recognition. Let us now consider modern assessments of the thousand year old schism from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox perspectives.

On the Roman Catholic side, a recent and authoritative document is *Dominus Iesus* published by Cardinal Ratzinger when he was still Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Dominus Iesus* was ratified and confirmed by the Pope John Paul II “with sure knowledge and by his apostolic authority.” The fact that Cardinal Ratzinger later became Pope of Rome only adds to its importance. It reads:

Therefore, there exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him. The Churches which, while not existing in perfect communion with the Catholic Church, remain united to her by means of the closest bonds, that is, by apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist [=the Orthodox Churches], are true particular Churches. Therefore, the Church of Christ is present and operative also in these Churches, even though they lack full communion with the Catholic Church, since they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Primacy, which, according to the will of God, the Bishop of Rome objectively has and exercises over the entire Church.

The Christian faithful are therefore not permitted to imagine that the Church of Christ is nothing more than a collection — divided, yet in some way one — of Churches and ecclesial communities...¹

This text clearly admits that local Orthodox Eucharistic assemblies (i.e. ‘the catholic Church of the orthodox’ in proper Orthodox ecclesiology) are in fact “true particular Churches” where the “Church of Christ is present and operative,” in spite of a difference of view on the nature of Rome’s primacy. By contrast, one only has to recall the medieval bull *Unam Sanctam*:

Therefore, if the Greeks [i.e. Orthodox] or others should say that they are not confided to Peter and to his successors, they must confess not being the sheep of Christ.

(Pope Boniface VIII, 1302)

Dominus Iesus also revises earlier Papal statements which implied that the Orthodox episcopate, although technically valid, was in fact incapable of bestowing salvation.¹

¹ *Dominus Iesus*, 2000

This is a remarkable progress from the views expressed before Vatican II, as well as an attempt to wrestle with the issue of universal versus local ecclesiology.

My view is that *Dominus Iesus* is a good first step. The underlying ecclesiology is not 'Eucharistic-catholic' (in my humble assessment) and results in more confusion. Instead of the underlined conclusion, I would propose the following wording: "The Church of Christ is first and foremost and eternal, divine and human organism – the Body of Christ, a unity of many that transcends space and time. The Church of Christ, like the Eucharist (which is also the Body of Christ), is manifested by the Holy Spirit in space and time. It intersects with our reality and is revealed in the catholic Church. The catholic Church, the "whole Church," is the local Eucharist assembly, presided over by its bishop who is the icon of the Father, steward of Christ, and as St. Peter, primate of the assembly and symbol of unity. This simultaneous manifestation of the catholic Church in many places at the same time calls for a manifestation of identity and communion between all the catholic Churches. This so-called 'universal Church' (or 'Catholic Church' or 'common union'), inasmuch as the political realities of our world permit its manifestation, should express the unity of the common union of Churches. This unity is made possible by the existence of a primate as visible symbol of unity, not unlike to bishop of the (local) catholic Church, but functionally, not ontologically." This lengthy summary forms the basis of my proposal to end the ecclesiological roots of the Great Schism.



Can it be said that the Eastern Orthodox return the favor? Yes and no. Let us consider this question from several angles.

One, the Orthodox, by *economia*², generally accept non-Orthodox baptisms. In that sense, they share the view expressed by *Dominus Iesus* regarding "the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate" (Protestants).

The next question would be 'does Orthodoxy recognize the episcopate of the Roman Catholic Church, and therefore the episcopate of the pope?' Again, the answer to this question is a mixed yes and no, often to the

¹ See for instance my examination of the Unia of Brest-Litov, based on WAAB.

² *Economia* means that for various pastoral reasons, a strict application of the canons is not required.

dismay of those who would like to see a position more consistent with the realities outlined above. We find evidence of this recognition in several documents and practices. Regarding the pope's episcopate, the *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarch* reads:

But lately, Pius IX., becoming Bishop of Rome and proclaimed Pope in 1847... Each one of our brethren and sons in Christ who have been piously brought up and instructed, wisely regarding the wisdom given him from God, will decide that the words of the present Bishop of Rome, like those of his schismatic predecessors, are not words of peace, as he affirms (p. 7,1.8), and of benevolence, but words of deceit and guile, tending to self-aggrandizement, agreeably to the practice of his anti-synodical predecessors.¹

Certainly, the Eastern Patriarchs did consider the pope to be in some way "Bishop of Rome". And yet, they realized that the bishops of the West were not orthodox bishops of the catholic Church in the strict sense. The *Encyclical* continues:

And surely we have a right to expect a work which will unite the Churches of the West to the holy Catholic Church (i.e. the Eastern Orthodox Communion in this context), in which the canonical chief seat of his Holiness, and the seats of all the Bishops of the West remain empty and ready to be occupied.

Amazingly, we would find the same 'double language' on the Roman Catholic side, as Pope Leo XIII clearly stated that:

From this it must be clearly understood that Bishops are deprived of the right and power of ruling, if they deliberately secede from Peter and his successors; because, by this secession, they are separated from the foundation on which the whole edifice must rest. They are therefore outside the edifice itself; and for this very reason they are separated from the fold, whose leader is the Chief Pastor; they are exiled from that Kingdom, the keys of which were given by Christ to Peter alone... No one, therefore, unless in communion with Peter can share in his authority, since it is absurd to imagine that he who is outside can command in the Church.²

But in practice, the Orthodox have never installed an 'Orthodox Bishop of Rome' in replacement of the official Pope of Rome. Certainly there are Orthodox bishops caring for the Orthodox faithful who live in Rome but there is no claim to reestablish the old Pentarchy in such a way. In other words, the pope is understood 'de-facto' as the catholic but unorthodox and schismatic³ bishop of Rome.

¹ *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs*, 1848

² *Satis Cognitum*, Pope Leo XIII, §15

³ Schismatic in reference to the common union, not the local catholic Church.

On this last point, it should frankly be said that the Roman Catholic Church has not returned the favor when it created 'Eastern Catholic Patriarchates' (and 'Latin Patriarchates') in competition with the Orthodox Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.¹

Still, the encyclical of 1848, written in a climate of intense tensions, leaves the door open for an immediate return of the pope of Rome to his ancient primacy within the orthodox episcopacy of a restored 'undivided Church.'

Therefore let his Holiness be assured, that if, even now, he will write us such things as two hundred fathers on investigation and inquiry shall find consonant and agreeing with the said former Councils, then, we say, he shall hear from us sinners today, not only, "Peter has so spoken," or anything of like honor, but this also, "Let the holy hand be kissed which has wiped away the tears of the Catholic Church".

Finally, we could point out that the majority of the Orthodox world does not re-ordains Roman Catholic clergy seeking to enter Orthodoxy, in sharp contrast with ministers from Protestant denominations.²

9. Conclusion

Almost against their will, our two Church communions have been forced to rediscover each other and to enter into a relationship of genuine dialogue and mutual recognition. This does not mean that the divisive issues have been dealt with and agreed upon. Rome has not revised its list of Ecumenical councils and the Orthodox are still 'in schism' and 'under anathema' (from a Roman perspective). And yet, in spite of frequent

¹ The Orthodox have not installed an alternative 'orthodox catholic' bishop of Rome for symbolic and practical reasons. In general, the canonical territories are respected, e.g. there are Orthodox bishops in Paris but they do not use the title 'Bishop of Paris'. The Russian Orthodox Church tried, without success, to prevent the creation of a local Roman Catholic diocesan structure within its canonical territory. In the new lands (America, Australia), there is no such concern and we find Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic bishops officially installed in the same city.

² From the Office of External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate (1997): "Despite serious fundamental differences on a number of doctrinal and spiritual issues between the two Churches, Roman Catholicism in the Orthodox mind and Tradition is viewed as a Christian community in schism with the Orthodox Church which nevertheless has preserved apostolic succession. (-) Roman Catholic clergymen are accepted in their existing orders to which they had been ordained by the Roman Catholic Church." The practice of the various Orthodox Churches is not uniform and depends on local pastoral considerations. As we have seen, the ancient tradition did not think of ordination as 'an indelible mark' (at least not functionally) as bishops and presbyters could be received as clergy or laymen.

setbacks, the tone is changing and there seems to be a genuine willingness to discuss the real issues (primacy, *filioque*, etc.) Moreover, both Churches have rediscovered Eucharistic ecclesiology and are becoming increasingly aware that they need each other: Rome needs Orthodoxy to reform itself liturgically and theologically while the East could use Rome's sense of organization and universality to combat proselytism by means of an authentic spiritual and liturgical renewal.¹

Let us always pray and hope that it is the right Spirit that is guiding our hierarchs onto a path of unity in Truth and Love.

¹ Most American converts to Orthodoxy have no idea of the actual state of the Orthodox Churches in 'the old countries'.

SECTION III: HISTORY

SECTION III: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

I. GROWTH & UNITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

1. The end of the Judeo-Christian Church

The Gentiles who became Christians did not have to adopt the Mosaic Law, but they had to embrace the Jewish background of their new faith, including its sacred books and liturgical consciousness. Obviously, Jews and Gentiles were to be found in varying proportions in each local Church, but the ideal of one Eucharistic assembly meant that they had to come together, hopefully in harmony. Paul's epistle to the Romans stands as a monument to this theological and pastoral attempt to unify very different cultures and identities.

During this era of intense missionary work and growth, every local Church was the "whole Church" by itself¹ and yet, there could be no doubt that Jerusalem was the mother-Church. The gathering of the Apostles and presbyters at Jerusalem in 49 resulted in decisions that were binding everywhere. Soon after this Council, Tradition tells us that the apostolic College of the Twelve in Jerusalem came to an end as the Apostles began their own missionary work.

Scholars agree that Jerusalem was the model and archetype of the so-called 'monarchical episcopate.' James ("the Lord's brother") was appointed bishop of the 'mother Church' while the Faith was now spreading throughout the Empire (and beyond) in spite of intense persecutions. Around the year 66, James died a martyr and the ancient Judeo-Christian community left Jerusalem. By then, the Church of Jerusalem was no longer very important: the Apostles and James were either dead or somewhere else, and most of the Churches had integrated a majority of Gentile Christians. These communities were very different than the dying Mother-Church of Jerusalem: their eyes were already on Rome 'from

¹ Romans 16:23 and 1 Corinthians 14:23

whence all authority comes' and who had received both the last teachings and the sanctified bodies of the 'chief Apostles.'

2. *The Primacy goes to Rome*

In the wake of Jerusalem's destruction in 70, the Roman Church was barely recovering from Nero's attempt to destroy her. In spite of this hostile environment, the Church of Rome was already 'the great Church,' both in size and in zeal for the new Faith. Rome was a caring and generous Church, whose custom it became to send gifts to suffering communities. Rome was also unique in other ways. First, it was the capital of the Empire, the city from which authority naturally flowed. Secondly, it had a unique apostolic foundation because both Peter and Paul had preached and received martyrdom in its walls. Finally, being the capital also meant that people from all over the Empire (and beyond) came to Rome for business, and it was in Rome that ideas could be exchanged and compared. Orthodox scholar Fr. Nicholas Afanassieff concludes:

We know that the Church of Rome took over the position of "Church-with-priority" at the end of the first century.¹

The reasons for this shift from Jerusalem to Rome are still at the center of the Eastern Orthodox-Roman Catholic debate. For the Roman Church, her presidency is jurisdictional and according to the divine plan because it was there and nowhere else that Peter, the Prince of the Apostles established his true Chair and perpetuated his office. For Roman Catholicism, all other considerations are secondary.

From the perspective of Orthodox Christianity, the primacy of Rome is essentially a politico-historical event. This does not mean that Peter and Paul's presence and martyrdom at Rome is irrelevant for it is also in this sense that Rome is honored and sanctified. But it is the idea of a divine and universal supremacy linked to a perpetual office of (worldwide) 'Vicar of Christ' that is rejected.

3. *The Primacy of the Roman Church*

Let us go further in our discussion of how the Church of Rome became the "Church who presides in love."²

Even when Jerusalem was still standing, Rome already had a special place among the other local Churches. Long before 70, St. Paul had

¹ *The Church which presides in love*, in TPOP, p. 124

² *To the Romans*, Introduction

written to the Romans: “your faith is proclaimed throughout the world”¹. It is in Rome that the first great persecution took place under Nero and it is to Rome that all roads led for those who were condemned: St. Paul and later on St. Ignatius. In every way, Rome was the unavoidable center of gravity of the known world. ‘Everyone must go to Rome because of its preeminence’ to paraphrase the famous and controversial statement of St. Irenaeus of Lyons. When Rome became the place of ministry and martyrdom of the ‘Chief-Apostles’ Peter and Paul, the political importance of the great city was crowned with a unique spiritual dimension.

4. *A primacy of love*

Like every capital, Rome was a thriving center of business with an extraordinary accumulation of wealth. Not surprisingly, the Roman Church became known for its generosity. Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* contains a clear witness to this important fact:

There is extant also another epistle written by Dionysius [bishop of Alexandria] to the Romans, and addressed to Soter, who was bishop [of Rome] at that time [circa 170]... His words are as follows:

For from the beginning it has been your practice to do good to all the brethren in various ways, and to send contributions to many Churches in every city. Thus relieving the want of the needy, and making provision for the brethren in the mines by the gifts which you have sent from the beginning, you Romans keep up the hereditary customs of the Romans, which your blessed bishop Soter has not only maintained, but also added to, furnishing an abundance of supplies to the saints, and encouraging the brethren from abroad with blessed words, as a loving father his children.²

This background information is essential to understand what St. Ignatius of Antioch may have meant when he addressed the Church of Rome with these famous words:

Ignatius... to the Church which presides in the place of the region of the Romans, and which is worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of the highest happiness, worthy of praise, worthy of credit, worthy of being deemed holy, and which presides in love...³

Here, Ignatius uses the memorable expression “which presides in love.” These words can be understood in a strong sense (implying authority) or in a weak sense (in the sense of being first, of showing the way). While the

¹ Romans 1:8

² HE, p. 159

³ *Epistle to the Romans*, (ANF 1:73)

exact intent of this title remains debatable, Ignatius was aware that Rome was a special Church. His style of writing is almost deferential:

I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you. They were Apostles of Jesus Christ, but I am the very least [of believers]...

The question that will forever haunt Christianity is this: why is Rome special? Is it because she is generous? Is it because she has heard the preaching of Peter and Paul? Or is it because she is the imperial city? Is it only with the consent of the other bishops? These would be the reasons emphasized by the Orthodox who would also say that even a Petrine “primacy of love” does not have to be a supremacy of power.

Could it also be that the bishop of Rome sits in the Chair of Peter and holds his keys as divinely appointed head of all the Churches? Will the Roman Church forever be ‘sanctified and enlightened by the will of God,’ to use Ignatius’ expression? Is it not clear that “the presidency of love” is a form of episcopal primacy that implies universal authority over all the Churches? This will be the Roman interpretation which will culminate in the Vatican I dogma of 1870.

5. *A regional primacy*

With Ignatius, we have clear reference to the two-fold primacy of the Roman Church. Locally, the Church of Rome holds regional primacy over the “region of the Romans.” This status was to be recognized at the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea (325) and used as a precedent to confirm other regional primacies, in particular Antioch and Alexandria.

Let the ancient custom be preserved, that exists in Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis, that the Bishop of Alexandria have authority in all these countries, since that has also passed into a custom for the Bishop of Rome. Let the Churches at Antioch and in the other provinces preserve also their privileges.¹

This regional primacy was universally acknowledged and widely referred to in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*.

6. *A primacy of witness*

As we have seen, the fact that Rome was the capital led to everything else: Rome was where the great martyrs came to die, the natural place of authority. The Roman Church was larger, more diverse, wealthier and more generous. In their struggle against all sorts of heretics who claimed

¹ Council of Nicea, Canon 6

‘secret apostolic traditions,’ the defenders of orthodoxy could always point to the Faith of the Roman Church as a sure authority. Both Peter and Paul had preached there and together, they had entrusted the leadership of the Church to trustworthy men. Moreover, Christians from other apostolic Churches often went to Rome for business and as a result, the Faith was kept pure by a constant exchange of information. Irenaeus expressed this idea in these much-debated words:

Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we shall put to confusion all those who... assemble in unauthorized meetings; [we do this, I say,] by indicating that tradition derived from the Apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the Faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should convene with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, because the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.¹

This passage is controversial because we only possess a Latin translation and there is always suspicion of tampering. Scholars also debate the original meaning and underlying Greek for *convenire*: is it to ‘go to,’ to ‘resort to’ or to ‘agree with’?² Either way, it seems rather futile to either minimize or exaggerate the strength of this passage because Irenaeus’ intention is rather straightforward. He is affirming the importance of assured apostolic Tradition at a time when heretics were introducing new doctrines that were totally at odds with the Faith preserved and taught in the Churches of apostolic origin. If Polycarp of Smyrna or Clement of Rome did not teach something, it is because they had not heard it from the Apostles. St. Irenaeus expresses this idea repeatedly: finding the truth is easy: one only has to see what the successors of the Apostles are teaching. In the West (Irenaeus is writing from Gaul, mainly for Westerners), the place to go is Rome. Rome has the most powerful apostolic foundation any Church can boast and it is known for its faithfulness. Therefore, Rome is a reliable witness to truth and one can conform to its teaching with assurance. Again, we must be careful not to make too much or too little of this text. Irenaeus does not say that Rome will always be faithful and he does not mention any special charisma or office held by the Bishop of Rome. He certainly considers Rome ‘first class’ but not ‘only in class.’ At the same time, it would be disingenuous to

¹ *Against Heresies*, 3:3:2 in ANF,I:1415-416

² See our more detailed discussion in the Theological section.

ignore the potential implications of what Irenaeus is saying. If Rome is the witness of reference when there is doubt, what about Rome's own claim to supremacy? Should "the faithful everywhere" agree with the Roman Church on this point too?

7. *A primacy of power?*

There is good evidence that, when Irenaeus wrote these words, the bishop of Rome, Victor, was already claiming for himself a primacy of jurisdiction over other Churches. Our question, then, is this: does Rome's apostolic deposit (obviously endorsed by Irenaeus) include a clear teaching on a unique Petrine supremacy and succession attached to that episcopal throne? After all, modern Roman Catholics still 'go with Rome' against the East and often mention the authority of Irenaeus' word. Hence, this is a critical examination that should not be postponed or brushed aside.



We do not know if Irenaeus wrote this text before or after the controversy between Victor and the Churches of Asia Minor.¹ What we do know is that we are dealing with a conflict of tradition on two points: (1) the proper date to celebrate Pascha and (2) the authority of the Roman bishop.

Today, everybody seems to agree that both dates were acceptable and apostolic. About fifty years before, Anicet (the bishop of Rome) and Polycarp (bishop of Smyrna) had agreed to disagree on the same issue. In fact, East and West continue to have different dates for Easter (Pascha): there are even Orthodox Churches that celebrate the resurrection with the West² and (Eastern) Catholic Churches that still use the Julian (Orthodox) calendar. This lack of harmony is not ideal, but salvation is not at stake. On this painful subject, the words of St. John Chrysostom remain as compelling as ever:

Even if the Church made a mistake, exactness in the observance of times would not be as important as the offense caused by divisions and schisms³.

The other conflict of tradition, the one that still preoccupies us today, involved the authority of the bishop of Rome. Clearly, Victor felt

¹ Please refer to this Section, II/4 for a detailed discussion of this controversy.

² Finland, Mexico

³ TCAC, p. 99

empowered to impose his tradition on the East and to excommunicate¹ in case of refusal.

This is the Roman Catholic claim to universal supremacy, already expressed in 180, less than a hundred years after the death of St. John. On the other side, we have the other apostolic Churches, in fact those very Churches mentioned by Irenaeus as accurate authorities right after Rome (Ephesus, Smyrna). Yet these Churches rejected Rome's authority and with it, the tradition or ecclesiology that would have justified it. Is that as minor as the date of Easter? Who is right when apostolic Churches disagree? This is where Irenaeus' system seems to fail. We can follow his logic and decide to agree with Rome 'because of her more powerful origin' or disagree with Rome because when it comes to this claim of authority, there is no consensus among the very apostolic Churches that Irenaeus is pointing to. The most likely explanation is that St. Irenaeus would not have considered the Roman idea divine of Petrine supremacy to be part of the 'rule of faith,' his expression for the core apostolic deposit common to all the Churches.

8. *An emerging problem*

We have seen that beyond the local Church whose structure is regarded as divinely instituted by the Apostles, there is another layer of reality that cannot be ignored: other local Churches, near and far, sharing the same apostolic seed of teaching and organization. By desire or necessity, bishops met in local councils or formed permanent synods to deal with common problems. Because every group must have some sort of leadership, one bishop emerged as the leader or primate, typically the bishop of the largest city in the area. We have already encountered this ancient idea in what is now known as the 34th apostolic canon. But if we move beyond regional matters, what about issues that concerned the universal common union? Especially at the time of the Arian crisis, the need for some kind of universal primacy became obvious. It is how the 'natural' or 'obvious' primacy of Rome came into play.



We have already established that the office of bishop and the gathering of councils were according to the will and mind of Christ, but what about the universal primacy? This idea of a gradual manifestation because of

¹ In this case, to cut off from his communion.

necessity is at the center of Cardinal Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*:

While Apostles were on earth, there was the display neither of Bishop nor Pope; their power had no prominence, as being exercised by Apostles. In course of time, first the power of the Bishop displayed itself, and then the power of the pope...

No doctrine is defined till it is violated...

The Creed, the Canon, the Papacy, Ecumenical Councils, all began to form, as soon as the Empire relaxed its tyrannous oppression of the Church... When the power of the Holy See began to exert itself, disturbance and collision would be the necessary consequence... as St. Paul had to plead, nay, to strive for his apostolic authority, and enjoined St. Timothy, as Bishop of Ephesus, to let no man despise him: so Popes too have not therefore been ambitious because they did not establish their authority without a struggle.¹

The real issue is not that universal primacy is needed in the common union – we have already established that Eastern Orthodoxy does not deny this point in spite of its current failure to fully implement apostolic Canon 34 at the universal level. The 'struggle of authority' mentioned by Cardinal Newman is a struggle over the origin and scope of this primacy. It is 'ecclesiastical and limited' or 'divine and absolute'?

Cardinal Newman is certainly correct on his final point: the popes did not "establish their authority without a struggle." Let us now examine how the common union wrestled with this idea of universal primacy from its earliest days.

II. EARLY TENSIONS

1. "A struggle"

For the purpose of this study, it is essential to discuss how Rome sought to establish its primacy of jurisdiction and how the other Churches reacted during these years of growth and persecutions. To use Cardinal Newman's expression, let us review what kind of "struggle" took place during these early centuries.

As we have seen in our study of ecclesiology, a difference must be made between disagreements 'in the catholic Church' (e.g. Cornelius, Meletius),

¹ *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Henry Cardinal Newman, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1989, pp. 148-155

‘in the common union’ (e.g. Polycrates, Cyprian) and opposition from without (e.g. Tertullian after his apostasy). The latter kind is of little interest even though heretics can also provide us with interesting testimonies. Our attention in this section is focused on those instances when the Bishop of Rome claimed or tried to exercise authority beyond his usual realm of influence. As we shall see, Christian love did indeed grow dim during those years, and we can already perceive two ecclesiastical orientations.

2. St. Clement of Rome (80-100)

Clement’s letter to the Corinthians, written around the year 90 on behalf of the Church of Rome, is unquestionably a remarkable document. The epistle presents itself as an official (although unsigned) communication from the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth. It seems that some of the Corinthian clergy had been removed and had appealed to Rome for vindication. Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, in a letter addressed to Bishop Soter of Rome (c. 170), speaks of the epistle as written by Clement “on behalf of the Roman Church,” and adds that it was often read aloud in his congregation.¹ Clement of Alexandria held it in great esteem and often quoted it as Scripture. The controversy that surrounds this letter is simple: is this the earliest example of a Papal directive or is it merely another case of one Church (or bishop) urging another to do the right thing? In other words, is this document evidence that Clement was indeed ‘the third Pope’?

Defending the traditional Roman Catholic presentation of 1 Clement, the *Catholic Information Network home study course* explains:

Among the oldest documents is a letter of St. Clement to the Corinthians. Clement, bishop of Rome from 88 to 97 A. D. is the third successor in St. Peter’s see. His letter speaks with real authority enjoining on the Faithful the obligation of obeying their priests and putting an end to the schism that was dividing the church. Besides the authoritative tone of the letter, two additional points are worthy of note. One is that the letter was respectfully received, obeyed and preserved. The other point is that when Clement wrote the letter and issued the orders, St. John the Apostle was still alive and active in the Church. Beloved as the Apostle was, he was not judged to be Peter’s successor. Clement’s authority was unchallenged.²

¹ HE, p. 159

² Catholic Information Network, Course K11-3

The first item of this argumentation is taken for granted: “Clement is the third successor in St. Peter’s see.” We have already discussed this issue at length in our section on Ecclesiology.

We can indeed assume that Rome, from the very beginning, was organized like every other apostolic Church, with the threefold order of bishop-presbyter-deacon. In short, Irenaeus was historically and theologically accurate when he wrote:

When the blessed Apostles had founded and built the Church [of Rome], they conferred the episcopal office on Linus. Anacletus succeeded him and Clement after him, in the third place from the Apostles.¹

Yet, the conviction that Clement was indeed the ‘monarchical’ bishop of Rome does not eliminate the fact that his epistle was written on behalf of the Church of Rome, not from personal authority. This is another puzzle that has led to countless arguments: does the authority of the Roman Church reside in the faith, love and prestige of the community, or is it in the special Petrine connection of her bishop? Roman Catholic theologian John Michael Miller observes:

The earliest witnesses imply that during the Church’s first two centuries, it was the Roman church which enjoyed primacy in the universal communion. Until the end of the second century, Rome’s religious prestige “seems to have been attached to the Church as a whole and to have been based on its primitive connection with both Peter and Paul and its legacy of double apostolic tradition.” Only in the third, and especially in the fourth century did justifications for the primacy shift from the privileges of the Roman Church to those of its bishop.²

At the same time, we know how Ignatius and Cyprian emphasized that ‘where the bishop is there is the Church.’ In summary, the distinction between Roman Church and Roman Bishop is a subtle nuance that should neither be ignored nor overplayed.

As the *Catholic Information Network* course explains, the letter of Clement is important for two reasons. (1) It was almost certainly written before 98, when the Apostle John was still alive in Ephesus or Patmos. Yet, the disgruntled Corinthian clergy appealed to Rome, not to John, to be restored. (2) The tone of the letter is “strong,” even “papal”:

¹ HE, p. 181

² TSATR, p. 80

If anyone disobeys the things which have been said by Him through us, let them know that they will involve themselves in transgression and in no small danger.¹

Regarding this second point, I believe the argument should be noted but that it is objectively weak. We find other bishops writing strong reprimands to other Churches. Bishop Dionysius of Corinth wrote to the Athenians “censuring them” and to Bishop Palmas of Amastris he “directs” a policy on repentance². We should also mention the many bishops who “sharply rebuked” Bishop Victor of Rome in the affair of the Asiatic Churches³. The relationship between Rome and Corinth was that of capital and colony. As a result, the Roman Church could certainly write that refusal to reinstate the legitimate clergy was a serious offence. In short, a comparison of Clement’s letter with similar correspondence yields nothing in favor of ‘an early Papal decretal.’

The issue of St. John still being alive is hardly worth mentioning. John may have been out of reach in his Patmos exile and the relationship between Rome and Corinth was already established. The CIN affirmation that John the Apostle was somehow inferior in authority to ‘Clement the successor of Peter’ is, as we shall see later, both amazing and problematic. As the final scene of John’s gospel clearly shows, the work and destiny of the beloved Apostle is not Peter’s business:

Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved... When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!”⁴

In summary, 1 Clement is a precious document, but as far as ‘early papalism’ is concerned, it is ‘much of ado about nothing.’

3. *Polycarp and Anicet (110-130)*

Around the year 120, a visible tension was appearing within the Roman Church. Rome was the place where the whole world met, where ideas were exchanged and dispersed to the four winds of the Empire. It is likely that Christians from Asia Minor, either visiting or established in Rome, were causing discord by affirming their right and tradition to celebrate ‘the

¹ *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:59:1

² HE, p. 159

³ HE, p. 198

⁴ John 21:20-22

Feast¹ on the 14th of Nisan², not on the nearest Sunday as was the custom in Rome (and throughout most of the world). Eusebius writes:

Though not observing it [the Sunday rule], they were nonetheless at peace with those who came to them from the parishes in which it was observed; although this observance was more opposed to those who did not observe it. But none were ever cast out on account of this form; but the presbyters before thee who did not observe it, sent the Eucharist to those of other parishes who observed it.³

It is in this context of growing tensions that Polycarp, the aging bishop of Smyrna visited his colleague Anicet in Rome. Eusebius gives us the details of this moving episode:

When the blessed Polycarp was at Rome in the time of Anicet, and they disagreed a little about certain other things, they immediately made peace with one another, not caring to quarrel over this matter. For neither could Anicet persuade Polycarp not to observe what he had always observed with John the disciple of our Lord, and the other Apostles with whom he had associated; neither could Polycarp persuade Anicet to observe it as he said that he ought to follow the customs of the presbyters that had preceded him. But though matters were in this shape, they communed together, and Anicet conceded the administration of the Eucharist in the Church to Polycarp, manifestly as a mark of respect.⁴ And they parted from each other in peace, both those who observed, and those who did not, maintaining the peace of the whole Church.

The two great bishops could not persuade each other to change their practices because both had apostolic origins. Clearly, Anicet was unable to impose his view on Polycarp and we can surmise that Anicet would have had too much respect for the great disciple of the Beloved Apostle to force the issue. As we shall see, the spirit of early Christianity was soon to change. Only sixty years later, the first Latin bishop of Rome would not have the same mind.

Orthodox theologians often point to this encounter between Polycarp and Anicet to illustrate two points.

First, Rome became prominent and the center of the common union not because of Peter's throne but because of imperial realities (migrations, centralization, etc). Second, that Polycarp had no idea that he was supposed to obey the bishop of Rome as 'bishop of bishops' and successor

¹ Pascha or 'Easter'

² Regardless of the day of the week.

³ HE p. 196-198

⁴ If needed, this episode confirms that there was indeed a presiding presbyter or bishop in Rome as early as 110-120, within twenty years of the writing of 1 Clement.

of Peter. Why could Anicet not persuade Polycarp? Maybe he did not want to give a direct order... or was it because the only criterion of truth acceptable to Polycarp was apostolic Tradition, which, as far as he was concerned, the Bishop of Rome had no authority to overrule?

4. *Polycrates and Victor (180)*

This is the first instance of an open conflict of authority between East and West. As early as 180, a period when the persecutions were still a real concern, we see a bishop of Rome attempting to exercise his authority outside his usual sphere of influence. Let us first read Eusebius' detailed account:¹

A question of no small importance arose at that time. For the parishes of all Asia, as from an older tradition, held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should be observed as the feast of the Savior's Passover. It was therefore necessary to end their fast on that day, whatever day of the week it should happen to be. But it was not the custom of the Churches in the rest of the world to end it at this time, as they observed the practice which, from apostolic tradition, has prevailed to the present time, of terminating the fast on no other day than on that of the resurrection of our Savior.

Synods and assemblies of bishops were held on this account, and all, with one consent, through mutual correspondence drew up an ecclesiastical decree, that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be celebrated on no other but the Lord's day, and that we should observe the close of the paschal fast on this day only.

This first section makes it clear that the Churches followed the usual method of problem resolution: synods and councils of bishops. It is also noteworthy that except for Asia Minor, there was universal agreement that Pascha should be celebrated on Sunday. Eusebius continues:

There is still extant a writing of those who were then assembled in Palestine, over whom Theophilus, bishop of Caesarea, and Narcissus, bishop of Jerusalem, presided. And there is also another writing extant of those who were assembled at Rome to consider the same question, which bears the name of Bishop Victor; also of the bishops in Pontus over whom Palmas, as the oldest, presided²; and of the parishes in Gaul of which Irenaeus was bishop, and of those in Osroene and the cities there; and a personal letter of Bacchylus, bishop of the Church at Corinth, and of a great many others, who uttered the same opinion and judgment, and cast

¹ See HE, p. 195-199

² Note here that primacy or presidency could be granted to a bishop for more than one reason: political importance of the city, apostolic prestige of the see, or personal attribute like seniority.

the same vote. And that which has been given above was their unanimous decision.

In this account, Victor of Rome is listed as 'just another bishop' presiding over 'just another synod.' Since the bishops had reached a unanimous decision, it was probably hoped that the Asiatic bishops would agree to abandon their unique practice. Eusebius continues:

But the bishops of Asia¹, led by Polycrates, decided to hold to the old custom handed down to them. He himself, in a letter which he addressed to Victor and the Church of Rome, set forth in the following words the tradition which had come down to him: "We observe the exact day; neither adding, nor taking away... All [our founders including St. John, Philip, Polycarp, etc.] observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith. And I also, Polycrates, the least of you all, do according to the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have closely followed. For seven of my relatives were bishops; and I am the eighth. And my relatives always observed the day when the people put away the leaven. I am not afraid of [your] terrifying words, [Victor] for I have lived sixty-five years in the Lord, and have met with the brethren throughout the world, and have gone through every Holy Scripture. And those greater than I have said 'We ought to obey God rather than man.'"

Polycrates' words to Victor are striking. As far as he is concerned, the higher authority is God, not the bishop of Rome. Polycrates is especially aware of his connection to the teachings of the Apostles and the testimony of the great bishops who had come before him.

This is where Orthodox theologians ask the obvious question: How could the bishops of Asia Minor, who had heard the teachings of John and Philip not know that Peter's successor and the Lord's vicar was the bishop of Rome? After all, John would have lived twenty years after the death of Peter under the authority of Peter's successors in Rome. Or could it be that neither John nor Philip had ever conceived of such an idea, which meant that as far as the Asiatic bishops were concerned, it had no apostolic grounds? We are here at the nexus of the Eastern Orthodox concern with Roman Catholic ecclesiology: is it something the Apostles would have had any idea about? Is it a primacy of service or a primacy of lordship? If not, primacy can still be established on the basis of synodical canons but this is not what Rome understands. For Rome, this universal episcopal primacy is divine, established by the Lord's commission to Peter, whereas the East sees universal primacy only as an ecclesiastical privilege granted for the sake of good order.

¹ Asia-Minor, modern-day Turkey.

Returning to the dispute between Rome and the East, we find that Polycrates' letter was not a one-man stunt but truly reflected the mind of the Asiatic Churches:

He [Polycarp] then writes of all the bishops who were present with him and thought as he did. His words are as follows: "I could mention the bishops who were present, whom I summoned at your desire; whose names, should I write them, would constitute a great multitude. And they, beholding my littleness, gave their consent to the letter, knowing that I did not bear my gray hairs in vain, but had always governed my life by the Lord Jesus."

Let us also observe that Polycrates had no objection convening a synod at Victor's request. Victor's reaction to this letter is recorded by Eusebius as follows:

Thereupon Victor, who presided over the Church at Rome, immediately attempted to cut off from the common unity the parishes¹ of all Asia, with the Churches that agreed with them, as heterodox; and he wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicate.

Obviously, Victor felt that it was in his power to do such a thing. And yet it failed for two reasons. First, the Asiatic Churches did not care, as is obvious in the letter of Polycrates and a hundred year later in the letter of Firmilian of Caesarea who remarked about Pope Stephen: "[he has] cut himself off from the unity of love, and [made] himself a stranger in all respects from his brethren." For these Eastern bishops, communion with Rome was desirable but not ontologically necessary. If Rome decided to excommunicate, so be it. It only meant that sacramental communion between Rome and the Asiatic Churches would cease. For Polycrates and the East, Rome could only excommunicate from an organizational relationship, not from the unity of the catholic Church.

This remains the position of the Eastern Orthodox Churches to this day. Communion with Rome is desirable and valuable. However, if it cannot be a bond of peace, unity of faith, ecclesiastical privilege and mutual respect, then it is better to ignore even "the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul²."

The second reason why Victor's attempt failed (even though it seems that the Roman bishop actually wrote letters of excommunication) is that

¹ The original Greek really means diocese, not parish.

² This is Irenaeus' famous expression

many Western bishops did not support him in this course of action. In Eusebius' words:

But this did not please all the bishops. And they besought him to consider the things of peace, and of neighborly unity and love. Words of theirs are extant, sharply rebuking Victor. Among them was Irenaeus, who, sending letters in the name of the brethren in Gaul over whom he presided, maintained that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be observed only on the Lord's Day. He fittingly admonishes Victor that he should not cut off whole Churches of God which observed the tradition of an ancient custom...

Thus Irenaeus, who truly was well named, became a peacemaker in this matter, exhorting and negotiating in this way in behalf of the peace of the Churches. And he conferred by letter about this mooted question, not only with Victor, but also with most of the other rulers of the Churches.¹

Here we see a joint effort of the others bishops to salvage the situation. Irenaeus knew Asia well enough to realize that Polycrates' synod would not accept Victor's order. Eusebius uses the words "sharply rebukes" to show the freedom of expression of the Western bishops. Among them, Irenaeus was a great admirer of the Church of Rome and it is debatable whether he considered it Rome's legitimate prerogative to "cut off whole Churches of God." In the end, Victor had to relent and we see that Eusebius never grants him presidency over anything else than his own Church, his own synod. He simply considers Victor one of the "rulers of the Churches," not the ruler of a yet unknown or unformed 'universal Church.'



Many Roman Catholic apologists mention this incident as an example of Papal authority and primacy in the early Church. They especially note "that no one challenged Victor's authority to cut the Asian Churches from the common unity"². The argument is that the other bishops pleaded with Victor but did not dispute Rome's right to excommunicate. And indeed, this event is significant inasmuch as it demonstrates the early divergence between Rome's path and that of the East.

Victor obviously claimed superior authority, probably from St. Peter, and decided – or at least "attempted" to excommunicate a whole group of Churches because they followed a different tradition and refused to

¹ "Many other heads of Churches" (HE, p. 200)

² UTR, p. 162, footnote 29

conform. One could therefore argue that the Great Schism started with Victor, continued with Stephen and remained underground until the ninth century! But the question is this: even if Victor was not acting wisely, did he not have the power to “cut off whole Churches?” This is what Roman Catholics argue with the implication that such an excommunication would be ontologically meaningful and put someone ‘outside the Catholic Church.’¹ Yet, we do not see bishops ‘pleading’ but indeed “sharply rebuking” and “admonishing” Victor. Ultimately, this is why his letters of excommunication came to no effect. Nevertheless, it is possible to read in Eusebius’ account the possibility that St. Irenaeus recognized that Victor could indeed “cut off whole Churches” and that such excommunication would have been ontologically meaningful. To adopt Augustine’s words: “Let the reader be the judge of what opinion is most probable.”²



As a final note, it is interesting to notice how the Paschal controversy came to be settled. The Asian Churches kept their Tradition until the Council of Nicea at which time a common date was agreed upon. By then, the Judeo-Christian character of these Churches had subsided while the desire to conform to the universal practice had steadily increased. In the end, it took some patience and an Ecumenical Council to accomplish what Victor could not achieve by his threat to excommunicate.

5. *Cyprian and Stephen (254-258)*

Within a hundred years of the ‘Victorian schism’ of 180, we find another bishop of Rome at odds with other Churches on the same basic issues: differences in ecclesiastical practices and Rome’s claim of authority to impose a common rule. This time, the conflict flared up between St. Stephen of Rome and St. Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, around the year 256. The question was more complex than it may seem. Is the baptism of heretics a valid baptism? Should the Church (re-) baptize those who wish to enter the Church from heretical sects? Stephen of Rome was of the opinion that Rome’s ancient practice should be followed: not to baptize those baptized outside of the Church but to receive them through the laying on of hands by the bishop. Cyprian and the North African bishops felt otherwise. One of their concerns was the amount of heresy present in such groups, and therefore the type of baptism conferred. Cyprian also

¹ In the universal sense, always assumed in the Roman Catholic framework.

² *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Prolegomena

believed that one could not give what one did not have. For him, these heretical groups were not the Church and had therefore no power to bring anyone into the Church by 'baptism.' For the interest of this study, this particular issue is somewhat irrelevant. On the other hand, it is interesting to consider what Cyprian and the bishops who agreed with him believed about the role and authority of the bishop of Rome.

St. Cyprian, being the bishop of Carthage, was by his position and personality primate of the North African Churches. His relationship with the bishops of Rome had always been cordial, even though he always called the Roman bishop 'brother,' not 'father'¹. In fact, Cyprian had a tremendous respect for the Roman Church. Roman Catholic patrologist Fr. Johannes Quasten explains:

[Cyprian] gives the highest praise to the Church of Rome on account of its importance for ecclesiastical unity and faith, when he complains of heretics 'who dare to set sail and carry letters from schismatic and blasphemous persons to the See of Peter and the leading Church, whence the unity of the priesthood took its rise, not realizing that the Romans, whose faith was proclaimed and praised by the apostle, are men into whose company no perversion of faith can enter.'²

Yet, Cyprian's relations with Rome became tense when the new bishop, Stephen, decided to forbid the rebaptism of heretics and demanded that this practice be universally binding. At a general council held in September 256, the North African bishops refused to accept Stephen's decision. The council upheld the African practice against that of Rome and declared, in an implicit reference to Stephen:

No one among us sets himself up as a bishop of bishops, or by tyranny and terror forces his colleagues to compulsory obedience, seeing that every bishop in the freedom of his liberty and power possesses the right to his own mind and can no more be judged by another than he himself can judge another. We must all await the judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ, who singly and alone has power both to appoint us to the government of his Church and to judge our acts therein.³

On theological and historical grounds, St. Cyprian must be counted among those who rejected Rome's primacy of jurisdiction. Fr. Quasten's

¹ Roman Catholic apologists sometimes make this point. Yet Dionysius of Alexandria did just the same (to Xystus of Rome): "Brother, I need your advice..." (HE, p.256). In truth, any Christian should still be able to write "dear brother" to any other, regardless of ecclesiastical ministries.

² *Patrology*, Johannes Quasten, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1983, Volume II, pp. 374-378

³ Canons of the council of Carthage

assessment, coming from such an eminent Roman Catholic scholar, is hard to refute:

However, even in this letter [Cyprian] makes it quite clear that he does not concede to Rome any higher right to legislate for other sees because he expects her not to interfere in his own diocese 'since to each separate shepherd has been assigned one portion of the flock to direct and govern and render hereafter an account of his ministry to the Lord' (Ep. 59, 14)... If he refuses to the bishop of Rome any higher power to maintain by legislation the solidarity of which he is the centre, it must be because he regards the primacy as one of honor and the bishop of Rome as *primus inter pares*.¹

Furthermore, Cyprian had been in touch with Eastern bishops who shared his opinion, both on Stephen's position on rebaptism and, more significantly, on Stephen's authority to enforce it. Nevertheless, the Orthodox reader should note that Cyprian did recognize in Rome a Petrine primacy which was symbolic and honorary in nature but which made the great Church the center and root of the common union.

Before drawing any conclusions, let us now mention the role played by a leading Eastern bishop in this controversy.

6. *Firmilian and the Mind of the East (258-268)*

Interestingly, Cyprian consulted with the remote Firmilian of Caesarea and obtained his full support. St. Firmilian² was more than a remote bishop from backwater Cappadocia. Eusebius considers him one of the greatest Eastern bishops. Firmilian had presided over various synods and was well acquainted with ecclesiastical matters. For more information on this outstanding personality of the early Church, I refer the reader to Paul Maier's excellent edition of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.

Scholars agree that Firmilian was as much the heir of Polycrates as Stephen was of Victor. For the sake of accuracy, it is necessary to quote significant excerpts of Firmilian's letter to Cyprian, written in 256, at the climax of the dispute:

But that they who are at Rome do not observe those things in all cases, which are handed down from the beginning, and vainly claim the authority of the Apostles. Any one may know also from the fact, that concerning the celebration of Easter, and concerning many other sacraments of divine matters, he may see that there are some diversities among them, and that all things are not observed among them alike, which are observed at

¹ Opus citem, pp. 374-378

² Firmilian is a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Jerusalem... And yet on this account there is no departure at all from the peace and unity of the catholic Church, such as Stephen has now dared to make, breaking the peace against you, which his predecessors have always kept with you in mutual love and honor, even herein defaming Peter and Paul the blessed Apostles...

In this respect I am justly indignant at this so open and manifest folly of Stephen, that he who so boasts of the place of his episcopate, and contends that he holds the succession from Peter, on whom the foundations of the Church were laid, should introduce many other rocks and establish new buildings of many Churches; maintaining that there is baptism in them by his authority. Stephen, who announces that he holds by succession the throne of Peter, is stirred with no zeal against heretics, when he concedes to them, not a moderate, but the very greatest power of grace...

For what strifes and dissensions have you [Stephen] stirred up throughout the Churches of the whole world! Moreover, how great sin have you heaped up for yourself, when you cut yourself off from so many flocks! For it is yourself that you have cut off. Do not deceive yourself, since he is really the schismatic who has made himself an apostate from the communion of ecclesiastical unity. For while you think that all may be excommunicated by you, you have excommunicated yourself alone from all... For what is more lowly or meek than to have disagreed with so many bishops throughout the whole world, breaking peace with each one of them in various kinds of discord: at one time with the eastern Churches, as we are sure you know; at another time with yon who are in the south, from whom he received bishops as messengers sufficiently patiently and meekly not to receive them even to the speech of an ordinary conference; and even more, so mindful of love and charity as to command the entire fraternity, that no one should receive them into his house, so that not only peace and communion, but also a shelter and entertainment, were denied to them when they came! This is to have kept the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, to cut himself off from the unity of love, and to make himself a stranger in all respects from his brethren, and to rebel against the sacrament and the Faith with the madness of contumacious discord! With such a man can there be one Spirit and one body, in whom perchance there is not even one mind, so slippery, and shifting, and uncertain is it?

But as far as he is concerned, let us leave him... We all bid you, for all our sakes, with all the bishops who are in Africa, and all the clergy, and all the brotherhood, farewell; that, constantly of one mind, and thinking the same thing, we may find you united with us even though afar off.¹

Hopefully the reader will understand the need to present a rather lengthy selection from this remarkable document. This letter clearly establishes the foundation of Stephen's claim: 'succession [on] the throne of Peter.' This is the first documented use of Matthew 16:18 by a bishop of Rome in an attempt to exercise universal jurisdiction. A fair reading of

¹ *Epistle of Firmilian to Cyprian*

this letter yields the conclusion that whether or not Firmilian recognized Stephen as holder of Peter's throne is irrelevant. For him, Stephen was wrong in his decision and even more blamable for his breaking of the bond of love and concord. Firmilian's words are striking:

For while you [Stephen] think that all may be excommunicated by you, you have excommunicated yourself alone from all!

For anyone who has read the entire letter, it is astonishing to see Firmilian quoted in support of Rome's supremacy, as in *Jesus, Peter and the Keys*:

While disagreeing and denying the validity of baptism by heretics, Firmilian still upheld the authority of Pope Stephen.¹

The reader will judge whether "Firmilian still upheld the authority of Pope Stephen" or not.

The reader may have noticed that Firmilian is much more forceful than Cyprian. The probable cause is that Cyprian was much closer to Rome's sphere of influence. In his mind, the See of Rome had a strong primacy of honor and communion. The idea of breaking communion with Rome, something that Firmilian considers unavoidable and insignificant because of Stephen's attitude, would have been of more concern for Cyprian.

Commenting on the record of this era, Roman Catholic apologist Stephen Ray concludes:

Many of the Fathers were in theological or disciplinary disagreement with Rome (for example Cyprian and Irenaeus), yet they never denied Rome's primacy. They may have debated what that primacy meant², or how it was to work out in the universal Church, but they never denied the primacy. No one ever stood out and said, "No, you have no authority. Who are you to order us, to teach us, to require obedience from us, to excommunicate us?"³

Having read the primacy sources, the reader is now in a position to make a distinction between primacy and supremacy so as to evaluate the merits of this assessment.



¹ JPK, p. 223

² Indeed, no one denied (or denies) that Rome had a form of primacy. The question pertains to the origin and scope of this primacy.

³ UTR, p. 13, italics are in the original

These incidents clearly attest to the primordial understanding of the Roman Church and this is what Roman Catholic apologists focus on. The Church praised by all for its purity of faith is also the Church that steps forward to claim final authority over the catholic Communion. The bishops of Rome have never changed their story and how could they? This claim or sense of self-identity is embedded in the very fabric of the Roman Church. One theory (the Roman) has fewer witnesses, but powerful ones. The other (the Eastern) has many voices in many places, but they may seem less impressive.

In his booklet *Orthodox and Catholicism*, Fr. Theodore Pulcini (EO) wrote that:

The Roman doctrine of Papal primacy was an invention that had no precedent in early Christianity; it was rather formulated as a 'theological justification' for the political power which historical circumstances had conferred on the Roman Church.¹

This statement, we have discovered from the primary sources, does not tell the whole story. Papal primacy certainly has a precedent – if a controversial one – in the earliest days of the Church. As we conclude our review of the pre-Nicene era, these sad episodes of early Church history are absolutely essential to understand the roots of the current schism between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. As early as 256, we find Rome invoking Peter's succession to claim a primacy of jurisdiction over the 'universal Church.' Conversely, we find North African and Eastern bishops absolutely unwilling to accept it. Nothing has changed!

And yet, these ancient schisms give us hope. In fact, there was no lasting schism. Bishops disagreed, unkind words were exchanged, communion was temporarily broken then restored for centuries, often with a genuine sense of peace and unity². But the underlying issue was never quite resolved. Even today, it is unlikely that East and West will ever agree on the nature of Rome's primacy, because their 'ecclesiological and theological DNA' is different on this issue.

For now, our main point has been demonstrated: the roots of the schism lay very deep in Church history, not in medieval forgeries or Byzantine palaces.

¹ Quoted in DPBR, p. 4. Fr. Pulcini is correct in the sense that the Roman Church did receive political powers through historical circumstances, but the foundational and preceding claim was always that of Petrine authority.

² See for instance the correspondence of Pope Gregory the Dialogist with the Patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria

III. NICEA – A NEW ERA FOR CHRISTIANITY

After the center of Christianity moved from Jerusalem to Rome, the influx of non-Jewish converts made Christianity a truly universal faith. These first three hundred years were also marked by a constant struggle with heretical groups and successive waves of horrendous persecutions. In spite of all this, Christianity was irresistibly spreading throughout the Empire, both geographically and socially, all the way into the imperial household.

It was Constantine who first ‘authorized’ Christianity in 313, and it eventually became the official faith of the Empire under Theodosius in 380. Constantine himself only received baptism on his deathbed, a clear indication that his initial conversion was at best incomplete. Historians agree that the Great Emperor had a lucid awareness that the old pagan state religion was moribund and unable to sustain the Empire or infuse stabilizing values in people’s lives. Constantine saw the power of the Christian faith and felt that a better, stronger empire could be built around it. To his great dismay, he quickly realized that the Churches were torn by schism and dissent. At that time, the turmoil was related to the Arian controversy.

Arius, a presbyter from Alexandria, was actively promoting the teaching that Jesus Christ was in fact a creature, not a truly divine person. For Arius, “there was time when He (Jesus) was not,” which meant that the Logos had been ‘produced’ from the Father in time, not outside time. For Arius, Christ was called *theos* (‘God’ or divine) by courtesy and by merit, not by nature. This theology spread very quickly, to the point of threatening the stability of the catholic¹ Church in Alexandria and beyond. In an attempt to settle the matter once and for all, Constantine invited as many bishops as possible to hold a great Council at Nicea (Asia Minor) in 325. Many of these bishops had suffered terrible tortures at the hands of the Roman persecutors, and now, they were not only granted free use of imperial mail and means of transportation but even ushered in as dignitaries in the presence of the Emperor himself. Rufinus of Aquileia tells us that in a touching gesture, St. Constantine kissed the empty eye-socket of Paphnutius, a venerable bishop who had been terribly tortured during the last wave of persecutions. The Council did produce a condemnation of Arius and expressed the orthodox faith about Christ with

¹ By then, the expression ‘catholic Church’ was widely used to distinguish the apostolic Church from various heretical groups.

the famous formula “begotten of the Father before all ages, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, *homoousios*¹ with the Father.”

Clearly, Nicea marked the beginning of a new era for the Christianity and for the Churches located within the boundaries of the great empire.

First, bishops were now men of power, almost imperial dignitaries. The Emperor himself desired to assume a certain role of authority in the Church. In fact, all subsequent Ecumenical Councils were summoned by the civil authorities. This perilous ideal of ‘symphony’ between Church and State became the model in the East and often led to a passive submission of the bishops to civil power. Many centuries after Nicea, the Russian Orthodox Church was prompt to accept the Synodal system which proclaimed the “most Holy Tsar” as “supreme judge” of the episcopal assembly. This is worse than Vatican I: caesaro-papism became as much a potentiality as romano-papism.

Secondly, councils and synods became the normative method of problem resolution, in keeping with the apostolic model of Jerusalem and pre-Nicene practice. As we shall see, the Council also became an arena of ‘creative tensions’ between Rome and the East.

Thirdly, Nicea brought about a new reality: it was now socially advantageous to be ‘a Christian.’ Throngs of half-hearted pagans poured into the Church, especially after 380, and in spite of appearances, most of them never embraced ‘the Way’². For the Apostles and the early Church, ‘the Way’ was a way of life, a faith that transformed and sanctified every relationship. After Nicea, being a Christian meant being legally, intellectually ‘orthodox’; holding to the right set of beliefs and creeds. Those who sincerely wanted to actualize the Gospel soon became aware of this disturbing new reality. They went on to establish monastic communities where the primitive Christian ideals of communal living and ‘dry martyrdom’ could be fulfilled.

Fourthly and perhaps more critically for our study, the Churches started to conform their organizational structure to that of the Empire. The existing boundaries of imperial provinces were adopted, giving birth to the concept of ‘diocese,’ ‘eparchy’ and ‘exarchate.’ The dominant paradigm for the word ‘Church’ became that of the ecumenical (imperial) body. Likewise, “catholic” (or better “Catholic”) came to be understood in

¹ “of one essence” (sometimes translated, more problematically, “of one being”)

² Acts 9:2

terms of geographical universalism instead of ontological wholeness. In other words, the ‘catholic Church’ was now the diocese (an administrative unit) and what I have called after Eusebius ‘the common union of Churches’ became an imperial matter. Eucharistic ecclesiology was not theologically abandoned, but ‘Catholic universalism’ emerged as the operative principle of Christendom.

In addition to dealing with the Arian controversy, the Council of Nicea also adopted a number of ‘canons’ pertaining to ecclesiastical rules and structures. One of these canons (canon 6) is relevant to this study:

Let the ancient custom be preserved, that exists in Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis, that the Bishop of Alexandria have authority in all these countries, since that has also passed into a custom for the Bishop of Rome. Let the Churches at Antioch and in the other provinces preserve also their privileges.

Hence, Nicea is both a witness and agent of a certain transformation of the episcopate, along with the establishment (or confirmation) of local primacies for the sake of order and unity.



Did Nicea accomplish the main goal for which it was convoked? Surprisingly, it did not. The Council enjoyed tremendous prestige but that was not enough to overcome the deep roots of the Arian crisis. For more than fifty years, the East would be in continuous turmoil with an Arian emperor in Constantinople and Arian bishops occupying the majority of the Eastern sees.

On a side note, Protestant apologist James White emphasizes that the very existence of these councils shows that no one had the idea to refer the matter to the bishop of Rome as the infallible teacher of the ‘universal Church.’ Yet, we shall see that this idea of an ‘appeal to Rome’ would soon come to the fore as exiled pro-Nicene bishops sought refuge in the ancient capital.

IV. THE ARIAN CRISIS AND ROMAN ORTHODOXY

While the East was in turmoil, Rome remained a rock of orthodoxy and stability. Indeed, every other ancient Church, including Ephesus,

Alexandria and Antioch had fallen, at least temporarily, under the effective rule of an Arian bishop. St. Jerome (†420) left an important testimony to this growing awareness of Rome as ‘Rock of Faith:’

Since the East, shattered as it is by the long-standing feuds... and since among the broken cisterns that hold no water it is hard to discover the sealed fountain and the garden enclosed, I think it my duty to consult the chair of Peter, and to turn to a Church [Rome] whose faith has been praised by Paul.¹

For the same reason, Theodoret of Cyrrus (†460), an Easterner, was led to write:

For that Holy See has precedence of all churches in the world for many reasons; and above all for this, that it is free of all taint of heresy, and that no bishop of false opinions has ever sat upon its throne, but it has kept the grace of the Apostles undefiled.²

Even the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs attested to this pristine record in their encyclical of 1848:

Who denies that the ancient Roman Church was apostolic and Orthodox? None of us will question that it was a model of orthodoxy.

In the wake of Nicea, many ancient sees were in disarray or schism over the theological issues of the day. As we have already discussed, even Antioch, that other ‘see of Peter’ did not escape the madness. Bishop Meletius was challenged and a competing bishop (Paulinus) installed with Rome’s support. The great St. Basil, who was the successor of Firmilian on the See of Caesarea, did not share Jerome’s exalted view of Rome’s role and theological acumen. We have already quoted his bitter assessment of Rome’s support to Paulinus:

I congratulate those who have received the letter from Rome. And, although it is a grand testimony in their favor, I only hope it is true and confirmed by facts. But I shall never be able to persuade myself on these grounds to ignore Meletius, or to forget the Church which is under him, or to treat as small, and of little importance to the true religion, the questions which originated the division. I shall never consent to give in, merely because somebody is very much elated at receiving a letter from men. Even if it had come down from heaven itself, but he does not agree with the sound doctrine of the Faith, I cannot look upon him as in communion with the saints.³

¹ Quotations in UTP, p.213

² *Epistle 116 to Renatus*

³ *Letter CCXIV To Count Terentius*

With the possible exception of Pope Liberius who signed an Arian creed under duress, the Roman Church itself remained firm. In fact, it could be argued that Rome was never tempted to embrace Arianism because it had always been leaning towards the reverse side of the coin, a heresy known as 'modal monarchianism' or 'sabellianism.' Hippolytus of Rome, a third century 'anti-pope' who was later on reconciled to the Church and died as a saint, tells us that:

Callistus [the bishop of Rome] alleges that the Logos himself is both the Son and also the Father himself. Callistus says that although called by a different title, in reality He is the one indivisible spirit¹. He says that the Father is not one person and the Son another, but that they are one and the same Person.²

Whether true or false, this report confirms the overall impression that Rome did not have to struggle much to ward off a heresy which had little local appeal. Be that as it may, when the Arian crisis was finally over (after the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople of 381), Rome emerged vindicated in her ancient claim to be Peter's immovable Chair.

Historian Jaroslav Pelikan is undoubtedly correct when he observes:

Rome had been on the side that emerged victorious from one controversy after another, and eventually, it became clear that the side which Rome chose was the one that would emerge victorious. In the two dogmatic issues [of] the person of Christ and the question of images in the Church, the orthodoxy of Rome was a prominent element, in the first of these perhaps a dominant element, so that when the relation of East and West itself became a matter of debate, the Latin case could draw support from the record established not only in the early centuries but in the immediate past. Those who argued against the Latin case were not entirely bereft of documentation for their counterclaim that Rome had not absolutely been right every single time, but the weight of the evidence for the astonishingly high average accumulated by the See of Peter sometimes proved to be all but overwhelming.³

As we can see, 'the Church' was now perceived as a universal-imperial organism and the Bishop of Rome obtained civil status and quasi-exclusive use of the title 'Chair of Peter.' The other Ecumenical Councils will now be considered to explore the evolving ecclesiology of post-Nicene Christianity and the strange dynamics between East and West.

¹ Rome was the center of the so-called 'Spirit Christology,' in contrast with the Alexandrian 'Logos Christology'.

² Quoted in DECB, p. 457

³ *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, Chicago University Press, 1974

V. COUNCILS AND SCHISMS

1. *Overview*

Even more than the apostolic Council of Jerusalem, Nicea became the model and reference for all future councils. We have seen that Nicea was a short-term failure but a long-term success. Other controversies would soon follow, and the hope was that general councils would be a universal remedy against all heresies and schisms. Unfortunately, this was not to be.

This section is an unavoidably brief and incomplete attempt to summarize the history of the so-called Seven Ecumenical Councils with a special focus on the relationship between Rome and the East.

This is an extremely complex issue which could certainly call for a separate study. For this reason, I would like to start with a summary of what can be discerned by historians on the subject of the Roman primacy during the era of the ‘undivided Church.’

~ The Councils were not summoned or ratified by the Bishop of Rome. However, he was not bound to accept their decisions. In the mind of the East, the Roman See represented the ‘Patriarchate of the West’ and functioned as the ‘head’ of the common union according to apostolic Canon 34 and to civil law. As a result, Rome’s consent was needed for any decision to be universally binding.

~ The very existence of the council as an institution indicates that in case of controversy, just asking Rome for right answer was not a common idea. As Dr. Pelikan observed, it is only after noticing that Rome was consistently on the right side of dogmatic disputes that the possibility of using Rome as an immediate touchstone of orthodoxy developed.

~ The Church of Rome enjoyed a form of primacy that entitled her bishop (or its legates) to preside over the sessions if he so desired.

~ Whenever possible, the Roman legates openly expressed their views on Papal supremacy, without documented resistance or refutation from the Council (see our discussion of the Council of Ephesus).

~ While keeping silent during these speeches, the Eastern bishops quietly passed the controversial canon 28 of Chalcedon (451) which was in fact a clear rejection of Rome’s ecclesiology:

For the Fathers rightly granted privileges to the throne of old Rome, because it was the royal city. And the 150 most religious Bishops, actuated by the same consideration, gave equal privileges to the most holy throne of

New Rome, justly judging that the city which is honored with the Sovereignty and the Senate, and enjoys equal privileges with the old imperial Rome, should in ecclesiastical matters also be magnified as she is, and rank next after her...¹

With this canon, the Eastern bishops clearly challenged the divine primacy of the Roman See, affirming that Rome's primacy was basically a political and functional reality. Not surprisingly, Pope Leo the Great rejected this canon, mainly on the grounds that no one should ever overturn the rankings defined at Nicea (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch). Pope Leo believed that the three Petrine sees (including his own) owed their authority to their apostolic pedigree, not to the political importance of the city.

Chalcedon gives us a clear indication that East and West, or at least Constantinople and Rome, were both embracing some kind universal ecclesiology, but in a different way. For the Byzantines, universal primacy was a political reality, just as universal ecclesiology is a political reality. As a result, universal primacy was limited in scope according to the agreement of the bishops and patriarchs. For Rome, the emphasis was on apostolicity, especially Petrine apostolicity: universal primacy was a divine and apostolic order. In this model, universal Catholic unity must necessarily flow from the one and only See of Peter: Rome, and its primacy must be one of absolute authority.

Yet, if we look back from Chalcedon on the first four hundred years of Christianity, it should be observed that no canon had ever confirmed or granted any kind of supremacy to the Church of Rome on account of Petrine succession. As we shall see, the closest thing would be Sardica (343) which had granted Rome a right of appeal, a decision recognized in the East.

~ While addressing the popes with the extravagantly reverential language of the times ("most holy head," etc.), the Councils felt free to judge the Bishop of Rome, even resorting to excommunication (Vigilius (†555) at the Fifth Ecumenical Council) and anathema (Honorius (†638) at the Sixth Ecumenical Council).



¹ TCAC, p. 99

In his remarkable *You are Peter*, Olivier Clément suggests the intriguing idea that ‘the Church’ used three antennas to discern truth: the consent of the people, the authority of the Councils and the voice of the Bishop of Rome. The latter was sometimes received with the acclamation “Peter has spoken through [the pope].” Indeed, there was a clear and embarrassing awareness that the East was often unable to settle its issues without recourse to Rome. In return, Rome respected the authority of the Council and the canonical limits of its jurisdiction. Clément concludes that this delicate balance of tension and complementarity between the pope and the Council was both necessary and constructive.

2. *Sardica: Rome’s right to receive appeals (342/343)*

In addition to its theological work, the Council of Nicea also addressed various issues pertaining to ecclesiastical organization. It seems that the sixth canon did not grant new rights to anyone; it simply confirmed the validity of the customary jurisdiction of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch.

The problem is that in Rome, an ‘alternative’ version of the Nicene canons was circulated that gave additional authority to the Bishop of Rome. It is possible that Pope Julius (†352) was referring to such a canon when he declared:

Supposing, as you assert, that some offence rested upon those persons, the case ought to have been conducted against them, not after this manner, but according to the rule (canon) of the Church. Word should have been written of it to us all, that so a just sentence might proceed from all. For the sufferers were bishops, and Churches of no ordinary note, but those which the Apostles themselves had governed in their own persons. And why was nothing said to us concerning the Church of the Alexandrians in particular? Are you ignorant that the custom has been for word to be written first to us, and then for a just decision to be passed from this place [Rome]? If then any such suspicion rested upon the bishop there, notice thereof ought to have been sent to the Church of this place; whereas, after neglecting to inform us, and proceeding on their own authority as they pleased, now they desire to obtain our concurrence in their decisions, though we never condemned him. Not so have the constitutions of Paul, not so have the traditions of the Fathers directed; this is another form of procedure, a novel practice. I beseech you, readily bear with me: what I write is for the common good. For what we have received from the blessed Apostle Peter, that I signify to you; and I should not have written this, as deeming that these things were manifest unto all men, had not these proceedings so disturbed us.¹

¹ *Letter of Pope Julius to the Eusebians, Defense Against the Arians*, 35

Here, Pope Julius appeals both to the “rule (canon) of the Church” and to “custom.” Julius may have been referring to a version of the canons of Nicea to which were appended (as ecumenical) the canons of Sardica. The issue of Rome’s merger of Nicea and Sardica came back to the fore during the council of Carthage (North Africa, 419). The great historian Sozomen tells us that:

St. Augustine of Hippo was in attendance. Pope Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, presided. As the proceedings began, a certain Faustinus, legate of the Roman church, asked that the council acknowledge the right of deposed bishops to appeal to Rome. Faustinus claimed that this right had been granted by the council of Nicea. Pope Aurelius sent to Constantinople for copies of the acts of the council of Nicea, and found no such canon. Subsequently, he wrote a letter to Pope Celestine of Rome (“our most honorable brother”) explaining that the African church was not obliged to allow disputed cases to be referred to Rome. In addition, he warned Celestine against hearing such cases - “how shall we be able to rely on a sentence passed beyond the sea, since it will not be possible to send thither the necessary witnesses?” - and against receiving those who had been excommunicated in Africa into communion in Rome.

Hence, starting with the very first Ecumenical Council, we find the Churches dealing with the problem of authenticity and forgeries. This issue would seriously affect the relationship between East and West and, to a certain extent, contribute to the breakdown of 1054.

In point of fact, Rome’s reference to her status as court of appeal was not incorrect. It was certainly erroneous to claim that Nicea had recognized this authority to the Roman See, but if the canons of Nicea and Sardica had been ‘mistakenly’ joined in the Roman collections, the assertion was understandable¹. Moreover, we have already established that Rome had claimed supreme authority since Victor, not on the ground of any conciliar decision but by virtue of “what we have received from the blessed Apostle Peter,” to quote Pope Julius. Still, the fact that Churches could appeal to the ecumenical canons to reject Rome’s intervention meant that Rome had to establish her authority within the framework of the Council. This may in part explain the strong statements made by the Roman legates and found in the acts of all subsequent Councils, as well as various attempts to alter the canons of Nicea. But Rome would also find that there was as much to gain as to lose when dealing with ‘the Easterners’ in the conciliar arena...

¹ Rome may also have considered Sardica to be an extension of Nicea, as many Orthodox consider Trullo to be the extension of the Sixth Council.



Let us now return to the origins of the ‘appeal to Rome’ issue, which brings us back to the mid-300s. In the wake of the Arian watershed that overtook the East, the great Athanasius of Alexandria was among the many bishops forced out of their sees. It is in this context of episcopal miseries that the council¹ of Sardica (modern day Sofia, Bulgaria, 342/343) approved canons whose purpose was to put an end to these erratic depositions of bishops by the imperial government. As a remedy, the council granted a special right to *cassatio* to the bishop of Rome:

If any bishop loses the judgment in some case [decided by his fellow bishops] and still believes that he has not a bad but a good case, in order that the case may be judged anew . . . let us honor the memory of the apostle Peter by having those who have given the judgment write to Julius, bishop of Rome, so that if it seem proper he may himself send arbiters and the judgment may be made again by the bishops of a neighboring province (canon 3).²

Sardica recognized the need for a primacy of appeal in the universal common union, and either granted or recognized this privilege to the bishop of Rome. Notice that the language was wonderfully synthetic of what both East and West want to express: “let us (the Eastern focus on the conciliar and voluntary decision of the bishops) honor the memory of the apostle Peter” (the Western focus on the Petrine origin of the Roman Church, not its political importance).

It seems that Sardica was widely received in both East and West. Milton Anastos (EO) confirms that:

[The] canons of the Council of Sardica (modern Sofia in Bulgaria) of 343, three of which (nos. 3-5 or 3, 4, and 7 in the usual enumeration) grant the bishop of Rome appellate jurisdiction in certain cases, were incorporated by Johannes Scholasticus, who was patriarch of Constantinople from 565 to 577, into his Collection of fifty titles (a digest of ecclesiastical law), and were endorsed both by the Byzantine Council in Trullo (692) and by the Byzantine canonists of the twelfth (Balsamon, Zonaras, and Arsitenus) and fourteenth (Matthew Blastares) centuries.

¹ I will not capitalize ‘council’ in this case as Sardica was never recognized as Ecumenical, though it could be argued that its decisions were indeed accepted by the ecumenical Church.

² This right is more properly called *cassatio* than appeal. In the case of *cassatio*, the judge can decide to have a judgment revised, but he is not himself the judge at the second trial.

From a Roman Catholic perspective, both Nicea and Sardica are somewhat problematic, as the real point of contention is the origin (and therefore scope of authority) of the Roman primacy. Undoubtedly, the bishops of Rome always contended for a supreme and divine primacy derived for Christ's promise to Peter. We shall now see if this claim was ignored, accepted or indeed refuted in the context of the subsequent Councils.

3. *Constantinople (381) and the Patriarchates*

The Second Ecumenical Council was called by the Emperor Theodosius to put an end to the lingering effects of the Arian crisis in the East. Held in the year 381, it convened under the presidency of Meletius of Antioch, a rather amazing fact when one considers that at the time, Meletius was not in direct communion with Rome. As far as we can tell, no delegates from Rome or the West were in attendance. In spite of this limitation, the Council of Constantinople marked the end of the half-century long dispute with Arian theology and effectively brought that heresy to an end. Relying on the theology of St. Basil, the Council Fathers expanded the Nicene Creed to clarify the Church's faith in the deity of the Holy Spirit.

The Council and its expanded Creed were eventually accepted in Rome, but the third canon was controversial:

The bishop of Constantinople, however, shall have the primacy (or prerogative of honor) after the bishop of Rome; because Constantinople is the New Rome.¹

Fifty years after Nicea, we have confirmation that the East had accepted the necessity of a functional universal ecclesiology, at least within the boundaries of the Empire, but the resulting concept of primacy is clearly political or 'economical,' in line with the 34th apostolic canon. Yet, this canon was never formally recognized by Rome. At the Lateran council of 1215, this second place was finally acknowledged, in part because Constantinople was then under Latin rule with a Latin patriarch. The obvious reason why Rome rejected this canon is that its ecclesiology was universal by accommodation to political realities, not a reflection of the degree of 'apostolicity of various cities.' Canon 3 upset the order defined at Nicea (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch) and bestowed upon Constantinople (who was neither Petrine nor even clearly apostolic in origin) the 'prerogative of honor' after the bishop of Rome! A year later, a

¹ Mansi, Concilia 3, 560 CD

regional council held under Pope Damasus (†384) made it clear that Rome would not accept any conciliar revision of what was thought to be ‘the apostolic order’ of the three principal Churches”:

We have thought necessary to say what, although the universal catholic church diffused throughout the world is the single bride of Christ, however the holy Roman church is given first place by the rest of the churches without [the need for] a synodical decision, but from the voice of the Lord our savior in the gospel obtained primacy: ‘You are Peter,’ he said, ‘and upon this rock I shall build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; and to you I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you shall bind upon Earth shall be bound also in heaven and whatever you release upon Earth shall also be released in heaven.’

2. In addition there is also the presence of the blessed apostle Paul, ‘the chosen vessel,’ who not in opposition, as the heresies jabber, but on the same date and the same day was crowned in glorious death with Peter in the city of Rome suffering under Nero Caesar; and equally they made the above-mentioned holy Roman church special in Christ the Lord and gave preference in their presence and veneration-worthy triumph before all other cities in the whole world.

3. Therefore first is the seat at the Roman church of the apostle Peter ‘having no spot or wrinkle or any other [defect].’

However the second place was given in the name of blessed Peter to Mark his disciple and gospel-writer at Alexandria, and who himself wrote down the word of truth directed by Peter the apostle in Egypt and gloriously consummated [his life] in martyrdom.

Indeed the third place is held at Antioch of the most blessed and honorable apostle Peter, who lived there before he came to Rome and where first the name of the new race of the Christians was heard.¹

This view was later championed by Pope Leo the Great and the idea that Peter’s see was in fact a See of three was again expressed by Pope Gregory the Great as late as the 600s:

Although there are many Apostles, yet with regard to the principality itself the See of the Prince of the Apostles alone has grown strong in authority, which in three places is the See of one. For Peter exalted the See in which he deigned even to rest and end the present life (Rome). He himself adorned the See to which he sent his disciple as evangelist (Alexandria). He himself established the See in which, though he was to leave it, he sat for seven years (Antioch). Since then it is the See of one, and one See, over which by Divine authority three bishops now preside..²

¹ Also quoted in DPBR, p. 73

² *Epistle XL of Gregory to Eulogius, Bishop of Alexandria*

For Rome, who was now on the defensive, and to a certain extent for Alexandria, it was Peter's legacy that mattered, not the growing prestige of the 'New Rome.' As a result, the Eastern perspective on 'practical ecumenical primacies' was clearly at odds with Rome's universal-Petrine ecclesiology.¹

It seems almost certain, however, that in spite of occasional disputations², the third canon of Constantinople was eventually accepted in the West, as attested by its presence in the *Decretum* of Gratian.³

4. *Ephesus (431): Philip, Nestorius*

With the Arian crisis barely over, other controversies were about to break out, especially in the East. Fortunately, Arianism did not cause any permanent schism in the 'universal Church.' This was to happen with the next controversy.

It all started with a debate over the expression *theotokos*⁴ (bearer of the divine), a title popularly given to the Virgin Mary. Nestorius, the Archbishop of Constantinople, wanted the title proscribed and *christotokos* used instead. It is not clear whether Nestorius' reasons were pastoral (a concern with possible excesses of Marian devotion) or truly heretical. Behind the doctrinal importance of this debate, something more worldly was at stake. The growing theological and political tensions between Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch were calling for a showdown.

¹ Of course, universal-Petrine ecclesiology leads to the conclusion that there should be only one 'See of Peter' (not three), which is why the two other 'Petrine Sees' have no importance whatsoever in the modern Roman Catholic Church, even though there are Roman Catholic prelates who bear the somewhat honorary titles of 'Patriarch of Antioch' and 'Patriarch of Alexandria'.

² For instance, Pope Leo's argument that the canon was not approved by Rome.

³ M. Anastos writes in *Aspects* (6), "Patriarch Photius (858-67, 877-86) alleges that Pope Damasus (366-84) approved the results of the Second Oecumenical Council. Although this allegation, which is attested also by the later Latin tradition, is not verifiable from sources of the fourth century, Pope Vigilius (537-55) says that he and his Church endorsed all four of the Oecumenical Councils which had been held before his own day in all things, and the third canon of Constantinople was confirmed by the weightiest Latin authorities, including the great Latin canonist Gratian (ca. 1150) in his *Decretum*."

⁴ 'Mother of God' is actually a mistranslation which, not unlike the problematic 'and the Word was God,' gives the impression that 'God' is the person (the Father), not the uncreated nature of the Logos. It seems better to retain the Greek word *theotokos* (bearer of the divine).

In 431, a Council held at Ephesus condemned Nestorius and upheld the orthodoxy of the title *theotokos*. Even though Pope Celestine of Rome did not personally attend the Council, he was represented by legates and his influence was significant. The deposition of the Archbishop of Constantinople was more than a theological victory: it was moment of triumph for the Alexandrians and, to an extent, for Rome: that upstart and boastful Church of Constantinople was finally exposed as a 'spring of heresy' and 'put into place.'

The Council of Ephesus was also a perfect opportunity for Rome to publicly reaffirm her version of Petrine succession. At the third session, Philip, a presbyter and legate of the Roman See declared:

There is no doubt, and in fact it has been known in all ages, that the holy and most blessed Peter, prince and head of the Apostles, pillar of faith, and foundation of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the kingdom from our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the human race, and that to him was given the power of loosing and binding sins: who down even to to-day and forever, lives and judges in his successors. The holy and most blessed Pope Celestine, according to due order, is his successor and holds his place...¹

If we understand Eastern ecclesiology, there is nothing really objectionable in Philip's statement: every bishop is rightly Peter's "successor and holds his place." At the same time, Philip's speech comes close to saying that the bishop of Rome is in fact the only one who is "his successor and holds his place." We know that this is indeed what Rome had in mind: that the Catholic Church is a universal body, and that St. Peter has only one successor: the bishop of Rome. Hence, we have the foundation of Roman Catholic ecclesiology expressed at the very beginning of the 'age of the Councils.' It is the same concept that underpinned the actions of the Victor in 180 and Stephen in 256, now expressed in an Ecumenical Council with no objections on record.

We should note that 431 can be considered the first instance of a true schism in the common-union of the catholic and apostolic Churches. When Nestorius was condemned, most of the ancient 'Churches of the East' (Persia, Assyria) followed his teachings or rather rejected what they had seen of Imperial Christianity. The so-called 'Nestorian Church' still exists

¹ Council of Ephesus, Session III, (in NPNF, XIV: 223)

today, though only as the shadow of what it used to be at its historical peak.¹

5. *Tensions between Antioch and Alexandria (431-451)*

By strongly emphasizing Christ's divinity from the womb, Ephesus opened the door to more controversies regarding the nature of Christ. This time, theological and political tensions flared between Antioch and Alexandria. Where the Antiochian school tended to focus on Christ's humanity, the Alexandrians first affirmed his divinity and stressed the "one nature of the Incarnate Word." Again, it is difficult to tell what may have been the political motivations behind this debate.

The answer was to call another Council to settle a controversy that was threatening the unity of the Eastern patriarchates. A first council was held at Ephesus in 449 which supported the Alexandrian 'monophysite' views². M. Anastos offers a concise summary of the events:

Then, in 449, Bishop Dioscorus of Alexandria presided over what had been intended as another Ecumenical Council at Ephesus, and humiliated Constantinople once more in the person of the Bishop of that city, Flavian by name (447-49), whom he caused to be deposed, and who died shortly afterwards as a result of injuries said by some sources of dubious lineage to have been inflicted upon him by his theological opponents. The proceedings of this Ephesian synod were so irregular and attended by so much disorder that it is known in history as the Robber Council (*synodos lestrike, latrocinium*). This time Alexandria again defied Rome, which had supported Flavian.³

Only two years later, Emperor Marcian summoned a new gathering of bishops to Chalcedon. For the Eastern bishops, faithfulness to Cyril and to his Formula of Union with John of Antioch was of paramount importance. Yet, the determining factor at Chalcedon ended up being the famous Tome of Pope Leo of Rome.

At the second session of the Council, the Creeds of Nicea and Constantinople were read, together with Cyril's letters to Nestorius and John of Antioch. Finally the Tome of Leo was read. After much discussion, this admirable Christological synthesis was acclaimed with the words:

¹ The 'Church of the East' once extended all the way into China. It was wiped out between the 7th and 9th century. Its patriarch now resides in Chicago, but a return to Iraq is possible.

² The Alexandrians claimed faithfulness to the teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria. The problem was, in part, that Cyril's terminology was rather flexible and unsettled.

³ Aspects, 6

This is the Faith of the Fathers and of the Apostles!. This we all believe! Peter has spoken through Leo; thus Cyril taught; Leo and Cyril teach the same! Anathema to whoever teaches otherwise. This is the true faith; the orthodox hold this; it is the Faith of the Fathers!

Chalcedon was certainly a triumph for Rome's orthodoxy. Rome's status as superior doctrinal witness, an idea already expressed by St. Irenaeus, was publicly vindicated. On the other hand, it is Rome's apostolic primacy that came under attack in the very same Council.



Let us again turn our attention to Alexandria. Clearly, the See of Athanasius and Cyril was defeated on several counts. First, the 'monophysite' tendencies of the Alexandrian school were unmistakably condemned. Secondly, as in retaliation for 431 and 449, the Council confirmed Constantinople as second see in Christendom. Chalcedon's canon 28 is as much a downgrading of Alexandria and Antioch as it is of Rome's apostolic charter:

Following in all things the decisions of the holy Fathers, and acknowledging the canon [3 of Constantinople], we also do enact and decree the same things concerning the privileges of the most holy Church of Constantinople, which is New Rome. Indeed, the Fathers rightly granted privileges to the throne of old Rome, because it was the royal city, and the 150 most religious Bishops, actuated by the same consideration, gave equal privileges (*isa presbeia*) to the most holy throne of New Rome, justly judging that the city which is honored with the Sovereignty and the Senate, and enjoys equal privileges with the old imperial Rome, should in ecclesiastical matters also be magnified as she is, and rank next after her.¹

Much has been written on this remarkable text. Was it really approved by the Council or was it stealthily passed by a small group of Eastern bishops after the closure of the last official session? Does this canon represent in any shape or form the mind of the Christian East? Finally, for what reasons did Pope Leo refuse to accept this canon?

The reader will understand that a comprehensive review of the primary and secondary sources pertaining to this topic is beyond the scope of our study. Suffice it to say that the bishops assembled at Chalcedon did approve the canon, a 'tour de force' made possible by the absence (or episcopal vacancies) of potential rivals. Alexandria was defeated, Antioch's patriarch was friendly to Constantinople, Ephesus was vacant, and the

¹ *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, (edited by E. Schwartz), ACO II, Vol. 1, Pt. 3, 88-9

Roman legates were 'on a break.' When they finally inquired into the matter, they had to admit that the bishops had indeed freely approved the canon, and that they had no specific directives from Rome on the matter. It is in this context that the bishops requested Leo's approval with the words "we therefore beg you to honor our judgment by your own decrees." The interpretation of this procedure is open: taking into account the primacy of the Bishop of Rome as expressed in the 34th apostolic canon, the Eastern bishops realized that their re-ordering of the principal sees would have to be received in Rome to acquire universal canonical acceptance. No one should deny the fact that Rome, as apostolic See of the West and primatial 'Church in priority,' should be referred to in the matter. Fr. Vladimir Guetté writes justly:

[It] is more just to see in this but an act of great propriety inspired by the love of peace and harmony. The council would of course desire that the West should be in concord with the East. The Bishop of Rome represented the West in the council, being the only bishop in the West possessing an apostolic see; again, his see was the first in honor in the universal Church, and evidently it was proper to entreat him to acquiesce in the decision of the council. He was not asked to confirm it, but by his own decrees to honor the judgment which had been rendered.¹

In fact, Pope Leo rejected the canon in no uncertain words: "This decree shall never obtain our consent." In his letter to the Empress Pulcheria, St. Leo further declared that he had "annulled the decree of Chalcedon by the authority of the blessed Apostle St. Peter," because "if anywhere men venture upon what is contrary to [the decrees of Nicea], it is *ipso facto* null and void."²

However, in spite of Pope Leo's rejection, the contentious canon became effective in both ecclesiastical and civil matters.³

It is important to understand the reasons why St. Leo objected to canon 28:

First of all, he recognizes no basis for the honor and dignity of a church except the apostolicity of its foundation, and accordingly rejects the principle that there should be a correlation between the rank of a city in the civil administration and its place in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Thus, according to his strictly non-political scheme of computation, Rome had the primacy in the Church solely because of its Petrine origin; Alexandria held second place because it was founded by Peter's disciple, John Mark; and the third place was assigned to Antioch because of Peter's association

¹ TP, p. 38

² *Epistle CVI to Anatolius of Constantinople*

³ In 545, Justinian incorporated it into the *Corpus iuris civilis* (Novel 131.1)

therewith and because the name of Christian arose there. But he deems Byzantium to be of no account in this select company, because it was not founded by an apostle.

Secondly, he repudiates the twenty-eighth canon altogether because it was in conflict with the sixth canon of the Council of Nicea (325), which established the only regulations concerning the privileges of the churches that he would accept. This Nicene ordinance was frequently cited by the popes against Constantinopolitan claims, because it does not mention Constantinople at all (which was, of course, not established as the capital of the Byzantine Empire until May 11, 330), and deals only with the jurisdiction of the sees of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch.

Thirdly, he sweeps aside the third canon of 381, which the bishops of Chalcedon had cited as their primary authority, because it had never been confirmed by the Roman See...¹

Undoubtedly, Pope Leo's reaction to the events of Chalcedon was a clear sign that East and West had developed different understandings of the origin and nature of 'primacy' and 'primacies.' For Rome, geographical apostolicity – Petrine apostolicity – was the key, and it was applied at three levels: in the episcopate², in the three historic 'Petrine' sees, and most powerfully, in the bishop of Rome. In the East, ontological ecclesiology, with its theme of every bishop as Peter, remained fundamental, while the organizational concern for order and unity focused on the practical realities of the Empire, not on apostolic pedigrees. With this in mind, we can say with most historians that under Pope Leo, the Roman Catholic concept of universal Petrine primacy became fully expressed and soon became the operative principle of Latin Christianity.

6. *The Loss of Antioch and Alexandria*

Chalcedon was not the political success that the Empire had been hoping for. In fact, 451 can be considered the official date of the second schism in the universal common union. The Empire had lost Persia and the East in 431, and now it was Alexandria (and to an extent Antioch) who decided to abandon the framework of imperial-ecumenical communion. The monophysites never accepted the Chalcedonian

¹ Aspects, 6

² In his famous Sermon 3, Pope Leo strongly emphasizes the primacy of Peter and writes "For therefore this is entrusted to Peter singularly, because all the rulers of the Church are invested with the figure of Peter." (in DPBR, pp. 76-77) It seems likely that St. Leo was referring to the bishops as "rulers of the Church" and "invested with the figure of Peter," although it is possible that he only had in mind an application to the bishop of Rome.

formulations and soon appointed their own Patriarch of Alexandria¹. It was as much a rejection of the dogma of Chalcedon as of imperial orthodoxy whose leader was undoubtedly Pope Leo of Rome. It was also a return to the ethno-cultural conflicts that had threatened the unity of the earliest Christian assemblies. This time it was the Greek/Roman leadership against the Coptic/Syriac/Arab population. This problem continued to affect the Greek Orthodox (Chalcedonian) Patriarchate of Antioch until the late 1800s, and still prevails in Jerusalem and Alexandria.



If we reflect on the meaning of Chalcedon from the perspective of this study, we must conclude that, right or wrong, the monophysites had never made the equation Peter = Bishop of Rome and had no concept of Papal supremacy or infallibility. Sadly, in spite of extensive efforts on the part of subsequent emperors and councils, the schism was never healed. Today, the Coptic Church of Egypt, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the “Jacobite” Syriac Church of Antioch and the Armenian apostolic Church all belong to the so-called ‘Oriental Orthodox’ communion.

Bishop Kallistos (Ware) offers a similar assessment:

Ephesus and Chalcedon were a rock of Orthodoxy, but they were also a terrible rock of offence... To this day there exist Nestorian Christians who cannot accept the decisions of Ephesus, and Monophysites who cannot accept those of Chalcedon... Large numbers of Monophysites, particularly in Egypt and Syria, were subjects of the Emperor, and repeated though unsuccessful efforts were made to bring them back into communion with the Byzantine Church. As so often, theological differences were made more bitter by cultural and national tension. Egypt and Syria, both predominantly non-Greek in language and background, resented the power of Greek Constantinople, alike in religious and in political matters. Thus ecclesiastical schism was reinforced by political separatism. Had it not been for these non-theological factors, the two sides might perhaps have reached a theological understanding after Chalcedon. Many modern scholars are inclined to think that the difference was basically one of terminology, not of theology...²

The partial loss of Antioch and Alexandria had lasting consequences. From that point on, the importance of Constantinople was unchallenged.

¹ To this day, the non-Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria and all Egypt is the spiritual head of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

² TOC, Ch. 2

There were, of course, 'orthodox-catholic-Chalcedonian' patriarchs in Antioch and Alexandria, but their importance and the size of their communities was forever diminished.

7. *The Acacian Schism and the Fifth Council (451-553)*

It would be impossible to offer in this study a detailed analysis of the relationship between Rome and the other Churches in the context of the Council as an institution of the *oecumene*. Still, two eras can be distinguished. The first era starts with Chalcedon in 451 and ends with the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem in 638. This was a period of theological and ecclesiological damage-control for the Empire. We must also remember that with the fall of the Western Roman empire in 476, the popes of Rome were forced to assume a new and dangerous political role. From that point on, the dynamics between East and West were transformed, and the gradual emergence of a new Franco-German 'Roman Empire' in the West would lead to the formation of two *oecumene*, two worlds, two communions.

We can look at the Fifth and Sixth Ecumenical Councils as the by-products of the Empire's effort to reunite the non-Chalcedonians. Seen from the imperial and patriarchal palaces of Constantinople, Rome was sometimes very useful, sometimes an obstacle to be crushed. The Fifth Ecumenical Council gives us good example of these unhealthy dynamics. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* offers an excellent overview:¹

This council was held at Constantinople (553), having been called by Emperor Justinian. It was attended mostly by Oriental bishops; only six Western (African) bishops were present. Pope Vigilius was forcibly detained in the royal city; he had originally refused to participate in the condemnation of the Three Chapters². Later, Vigilius condemned the Three Chapters (the doctrine in question being really censurable), but he expressly maintained the authority of the Council of Chalcedon (451) where Theodoret and Ibas had been restored to their places...

For his dignified protest, Vigilius thereupon suffered various personal indignities at the hands of the civil authority and nearly lost his life. He finally retired to Chalcedon, in the very church of St. Euphemia where the great council had been held, whence he informed the Christian world of the state of affairs. Soon the Oriental bishops sought reconciliation with him, induced him to return to the city, and withdrew all that had hitherto been done against the Three Chapters. Vigilius was willing, but proposed that it should be held either in Italy or in Sicily, in order to secure the attendance

¹ The reader will hopefully forgive this somewhat lengthy quotation.

² A statement of anathema upon Theodore of Mopsuestia and his writings, upon Theodoret of Cyrus and his writings, and upon a letter written by Ibas of Edessa.

of Western bishops. To this Justinian would not agree, but proposed, instead, a kind of commission made up of delegates from each of the great patriarchates; Vigilius suggested that an equal number be chosen from the East and the West; but this was not acceptable to the Emperor, who thereupon opened the council by his own authority on the date and in the manner mentioned above. Vigilius refused to participate, not only on account of the overwhelming proportion of Oriental bishops, but also from fear of violence. Moreover, none of his predecessors had ever taken part personally in an Oriental council. To this decision he was faithful, though he expressed his willingness to give an independent judgment on the matters at issue. Eight sessions were held, the result of which was the final condemnation of the Three Chapters by the 165 bishops present at the last session (2 June, 553)...

Vigilius, together with other opponents of the imperial will (-), seems to have been banished... Justinian caused the name of Vigilius to be stricken from the diptychs, without prejudice; however, it was said, to communion with the apostolic See. Soon the Roman clergy and people, requested the Emperor to permit the return of the pope, which Justinian agreed to on condition that Vigilius would recognize the late council. This Vigilius finally agreed to do, and in two documents¹ condemned, at last, the Three Chapters, independently, however, and without mention of the council...

Thus at the end of a sorrowful residence of eight years at Constantinople, the pope was able, after coming to an understanding with the Emperor, to start on his return to Rome in the spring of 555. While on the journey he died at Syracuse. His body was brought to Rome and buried in the Basilica of Sylvester...

Even though the dogmatic teachings of this Council were eventually accepted by the Imperial East and the Roman See, the spirit of the proceedings is far from inspiring. In fact, the Fifth Council showed how fast the winds could turn for both Rome and Constantinople.

Forty years before, the Easterners had been forced to appeal to Rome to put an end to the disastrous Acacian schism². The formula of reunion (called *Formula Hormisdæ*), signed by the Eastern Emperor Justin I, Patriarch John of Constantinople and 250 Eastern bishops, had been an overwhelming victory for Rome's claim to universal supremacy. In order to achieve unity, the Eastern Roman representatives signed a document that stated:

¹ *Letter to Eutychius of Constantinople*, 8 Dec., 553, and a second "Constitutum" of 23 Feb., 554, probably addressed to the Western episcopate.

² Lasting schism (484-519) between the patriarchate of Constantinople and the Roman See, caused by an edict by patriarch Acacius (the *henotikon* or union with the non-Chalcedonians) which was deemed inadmissible by Pope Felix III.

The first means of safety is to guard the rule of strict faith and to deviate in no way from those things that have been laid down by the Fathers. And indeed the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ: "Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church," cannot be disregarded; these things which were spoken are demonstrated by the results, for the Catholic religion has been preserved ever immaculate in the apostolic See [Rome].¹

Following, as we have said before, the apostolic See in all things and proclaiming all its decisions, we endorse and approve all the letters which Pope St Leo wrote concerning the Christian religion. And so I hope I may deserve to be associated with you in the one communion which the apostolic See proclaims, in which the whole, true, and perfect security of the Christian religion resides.

I promise that from now on, those who are separated from the communion of the Catholic Church, that is, who are not in agreement with the apostolic See, will not have their names read during the sacred mysteries. But if I attempt even the least deviation from my profession, I admit that, according to my own declaration, I am an accomplice to those whom I have condemned. I have signed this, my profession, with my own hand, and I have directed it to you, Hormisdas, the holy and venerable Pope of Rome.²

In order to minimize the impact of the documents while securing peace, the Patriarch of Constantinople had signed with the following disclaimer:

Agreeing in the truth with thee, I too, loving peace, renounce all the heretics repudiated by thee for I hold the most holy churches of the elder and of the new Rome to be one; I define that See of the apostle Peter and this of the imperial city to be one see.³

Whether signed under imperial pressure or not, the *Formula Hormisdas* was a triumph of Roman ecclesiology and a welcome re-affirmation of Rome's perennial Christological orthodoxy. With such a favorable background, Pope Vigilius' treatment came as a tremendous shock. Emperor Justinian had first approached the pope with great respect:

Yielding honor to the apostolic See and to Your Holiness, and honoring your Holiness, as one ought to honor a father, we have hastened to subject all the priests of the whole Eastern district, and to unite them to the See of your Holiness, for we do not allow of any point, however manifest and indisputable it be, which relates to the state of the Churches, not being

1 CE, Entry: Pope St. Hormisdas

2 Quoted in *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*, Kenneth D. Whitehead, Ignatius Press, 2000, pp. 286-287

3 Quoted in *Roman Catholic Patrology*, Dr Bardenhewer, Catholic University of America, 1908, Entry: Hormisdas (8), par. 3-5.

brought to the cognizance of your Holiness, since you are the head of all the holy Churches.¹

In spite of this auspicious beginning, the Second Council of Constantinople (“the Fifth Ecumenical Council”) ended up as a disaster for Rome. The Council bullied, anathematized and even excommunicated the pope, and yet the Council was eventually recognized as Ecumenical in Rome itself.

At one point, the Council Fathers wrote the following admonition to Pope Vigilius:

If your blessedness is willing to meet together with us and the most holy Patriarchs, and the most religious bishops, and to treat of the Three Chapters and to give, in unison with us all, a suitable form of the orthodox faith, as the Holy Apostles and the holy Fathers and the four Councils have done, we will hold thee as our head and primate... If you have condemned them [the Three Chapters], in accordance with those things which you did before, we have already many such statements and need no more; but if you have written now something contrary to these things which were done by you before, you have condemned yourself by your own writing, since you have departed from orthodox doctrine and have defended impiety. And how can you expect us to receive such a document from you?²

In imitation of Emperor Justinian, the Eastern bishops played the card of Byzantine diplomacy and conditional exaltation: ‘if you agree with us, we will honor you as head, but if you do not, we will crush you.’

The next Council would confirm the same schizophrenic pattern of Roman adulation and humiliation.

8. *The “Ecumenical Patriarch” Controversy (590s)*

We now turn our attention to a famous incident that took place between the Fifth and Sixth Council. Perhaps even more than the Council, this story will help us understand the tensions between what could be called ancient catholic ecclesiology, political universalism and Roman Petrine Catholicism.

It is somewhat amusing to observe that as the Byzantine Empire shrank in size, the titles used by Imperial officials enlarged in proportion. Because Constantinople was the ‘ecumenical city,’ imperial officials sometimes received the title ‘ecumenical,’ as in the case of the ‘ecumenical librarian.’ It is in this context of pride and paranoia caused by the Islamic invasions that

¹ *Letter to Virgilius*

² NPNF, Volume 14, p. 304

Emperor Maurice (†602) either granted the title 'ecumenical' to Patriarch John of Constantinople (called 'the Faster') or allowed its use to become more prominent. Some historians also consider it a possibility that John himself transformed this Byzantine title of courtesy into a something more formal.

In 593, this affair took a new turn:

It should be noticed that [Pope] Gregory was still old-fashioned enough to cling to the theory of three patriarchates only, although officially he accepted the five (Fortescue, "Orthodox Eastern Church," p. 44). He was therefore not well disposed towards Constantinople as a patriarchate at all. That it should claim to be the universal one seemed to him unheard-of insolence. John had cruelly scourged two priests accused of heresy. They appealed to the pope. In the correspondence that ensued John assumed this title of Ecumenical Patriarch "in almost every line" of his letter.¹

In Rome, Gregory's reaction was one of disbelief, shock and measured anger. The saintly Pope wrote to Emperor Maurice, John himself and to the Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch in an attempt to remove this title from the 'universal Church.' To no avail: the expression continued to be used and to this day remains the primary title of the Patriarch of Constantinople, along with the rather excessive Byzantine heading of *panagiotatos* ('His All Holiness').²

The circumstances and motivations behind this new title remain uncertain, but it is clear is that Pope Gregory understood 'Ecumenical Patriarch' to mean 'universal pontiff' or 'bishop of the universal Church.' This misunderstanding may have been due to a faulty Greek-Latin translation or to a more profound difference in ecclesiology. In a remarkable letter to Patriarch John, Pope Gregory strongly objected to what this title implied:

§1: I have taken care to address your Fraternity, not indeed in writing, but by word of mouth, desiring you to restrain yourself from such presumption. And, in case of your refusing to amend, I forbade [my deacon from] celebrating the solemnities of mass with you; that so I might first appeal to your Holiness through a certain sense of shame, to the end that, if the execrable and profane assumption could not be corrected through shame, strict canonical measures might be then resorted to. And, since sores that are to be cut away should first be stroked with a gentle hand, I beg you, I beseech you, and with all the sweetness in my power demand of you, that your Fraternity oppose all who flatter you and offer you this name of error, nor foolishly consent to be called by the proud title...

¹ Idem

² Interestingly, the title does not occur on the lead seals affixed to patriarchal documents before the time of the Patriarch Michael I Cerularius (1043-58). It was first incorporated into the patriarchal signature by the Patriarch Manuel I (1217-22).

§2: Consider, I pray you, that in this rash presumption the peace of the whole Church is disturbed, and that it is in contradiction to the grace that is poured out on all in common... If then he [St. Paul] shunned the subjecting of the members of Christ partially to certain heads, as if beside Christ, though this were to the Apostles themselves, what will you say to Christ, who is the Head of the universal Church, in the scrutiny of the last judgment, having attempted to put all his members under yourself by the appellation of Universal?

§3: Certainly Peter, the first of the Apostles, himself a member of the holy and universal Church, Paul, Andrew, John, what were they but heads of particular communities? And yet all were members under one Head (Christ). And (to bind all together in a short girth of speech) the saints before the law, the saints under the law, the saints under grace, all these making up the Lord's Body, were constituted as members of the Church, and not one of them has wished himself to be called 'Universal.'¹

These words of St. Gregory are extremely important and often misinterpreted. As we can see, Gregory was aware of this own role and position within what I call 'the common union,' especially in relation to the See of Constantinople. Like Pope Leo before him, Gregory rejected canon 28 of Chalcedon and considered Constantinople's non-apostolic claims of honor or independence to be null and void². Pope Gregory was aware of three ways by which he could deal with John:

(1) By his own (obviously disputed) authority:

Now eight years ago, in the time of [Pope Pelagius], our brother and fellow-bishop John in the city of Constantinople, held a synod in which he attempted to call himself Universal Bishop. As soon as my said predecessor learned about this, he dispatched letters annulling by the authority of the holy apostle Peter the acts of the said synod; of which letters I have taken care to send copies to your Holiness.³

Who doubts that the Church of Constantinople is subject to the apostolic See? I know of no bishop who is not subject to the apostolic See.⁴

(2) By recourse to the authority of the 'universal Church:'

[After quoting Matt. 18:15] I therefore have once and again through my representatives taken care to reprove in humble words this sin against the

¹ *Epistle XVIII to John of Constantinople*

² It is only much later that the connection of St. Andrew with ancient Byzantium was 'discovered' and emphasized. Ancient Syriac documents mention a connection with St. Luke, not St. Andrew. This attempt to compete with Rome on ecclesiological grounds ultimately foreign to Orthodoxy shows that the fascinating and unbiblical idea of 'dynastic apostolic successors' had gained much ground in the East.

³ *Epistle XLIII*

⁴ *Epistle IX, XII*

whole Church; and now I write myself. Whatever it was my duty to do in the way of humility I have not omitted. But, if I am despised in my reproof, it remains that I must have recourse to the Church.¹

(3) By suspending concelebration:

And, in case of your refusing to amend, I forbade his celebrating the solemnities of mass with you; that so I might first appeal to your Holiness through a certain sense of shame, to the end that, if the execrable and profane assumption could not be corrected through shame, strict canonical measures might be then resorted to.²

The main reason for Gregory's rejection of the title 'universal bishop' (for himself or anyone) is enlightening:

If one, as he supposes, is 'universal bishop,' it remains that you are not bishops.³

But in Gregory's mind, there could be no such thing as a Universal Pontiff in relation to whom all other bishops would only be vicars or presbyters. In his letter to John (§3), St. Gregory expressed a very Orthodox view of primacy and headship in the universal Church.

Like most Fathers, Pope Gregory strongly emphasized Peter's primacy:

For to all who know the Gospel it is apparent that by the Lord's voice the care of the whole Church was committed to the holy Apostle and Prince of all the Apostles, Peter... The care and principality of the whole Church is committed to him, and yet he is not called the universal apostle; while the most holy man, my fellow-priest John, attempts to be called universal bishop. I am compelled to cry out and say, *O tempora, O mores!*⁴

Yet surprisingly, Gregory did not make the application of Peter's primacy to himself. Indeed, Gregory reaffirmed St. Leo's view that Peter's see and authority was found not only in Rome but also in Alexandria and Antioch. In a beautiful letter written to the Patriarch of Alexandria, the pope tried to arouse a reaction of support:

Your most sweet Holiness has spoken much in your letter to me about the chair of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, saying that Peter himself now sits on it in the persons of his successors. And indeed I acknowledge myself to be unworthy, not only in the dignity of such as preside, but even in the number of such as stand. But I gladly accepted all that has been said,

¹ Matthew 18:15 seems to refer to the local Church. Again, it is interesting to note the transition of 'Church' and 'whole Church' from local to universal.

² *Epistle XVIII*

³ *Epistle LXVIII*

⁴ *Epistle to Mauricius Augustus, Emperor*

in that he has spoken to me about one who occupies Peter's chair. And, though special honor to myself in no wise delights me, yet I greatly rejoiced because you, most holy ones, have given to yourselves what you have bestowed upon me... Therefore though there are many Apostles, yet with regard to the principality itself the See of the Prince of the Apostles alone has grown strong in authority, which in three places is the See of one. For he himself exalted the See in which he deemed even to rest and end the present life (Rome). He himself adorned the See to which he sent his disciple as evangelist (Alexandria). He himself established the See in which, though he was to leave it, he sat for seven years (Antioch). Since then it is the See of one, and one See, over which by Divine authority three bishops now preside, whatever good I hear of you, this I impute to myself. If you believe anything good of me, impute this to your merits, since we are one in Him Who says, That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee that they also may be one in us.¹

Like Pope Leo before him, Gregory believed that the ancient sees of Alexandria and Antioch were ranked after Rome on account on their Petrine origin. Leo had refused to recognize the validity of Chalcedon's 28th canon for this very reason. Writing a letter of rebuke to Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople who had promoted the controversial canon, the bishop of Rome had been very clear:

These holy and venerable fathers who in the city of Nicea laid down a code of canons for the Church to last till the end of the world, survive not only with us but with the whole of mankind in their constitutions; and, if anywhere men venture upon what is contrary to their decrees, it is ipso facto null and void... The See of Alexandria may not lose any of that dignity which it merited through S. Mark, the evangelist and disciple of the blessed Peter, nor may the splendor of so great a church be obscured by another's clouds... The church of Antioch too, in which first at the preaching of the blessed Apostle Peter the Christian name arose, must continue in the position assigned it by the Fathers, and being set in the third place must never be lowered.²

In this case, Pope Leo proved to be wrong: practically speaking, Constantinople did ascend to second place after Rome, and the patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria or Jerusalem never embraced Leo's emphasis on the necessity to depend on apostolic origins. This difference of perception of how the 'universal Church' should function is extremely important. Indeed, it is impossible to understand the gradual separation between Roman and the East without this key.

¹ Epistle LX, Gregory to Eulogius, Bishop of Alexandria

² Epistle CVI to Anatolius of Constantinople



In spite of Leo's belief that the order of Nicea would "last till the end of the world" and Gregory's pleas to whoever would listen, the new title was not relinquished and the second place of Constantinople remained fully operative. In fact, properly understood, the title 'Ecumenical Patriarch' was a rather good summary of the Eastern Roman version of universal ecclesiology. If there was one functional *oecumene*, the good order of the Churches called for one bishop to hold a certain primacy or headship, and that bishop could properly be called 'Ecumenical Patriarch.' But on this basis, it was the Bishop of Rome who should have been honored with this title, if it wasn't for the fact that old Rome was now outside the realm of the imperial *ecumene*.

Certainly, the title 'Ecumenical Patriarch' never meant and still does not mean that the Bishop of Constantinople claims to be the absolute, ontological 'head¹ of the Church,' bishop of bishops, etc. This is why it has never really bothered the other Orthodox patriarchs. Still, by affirming the 'ecumenical centrality' of Constantinople and upsetting the order of Nicea, it led Rome to strongly reassert its own apostolic claim to authority. Significantly, it is only after Pope Leo IX (1049-54) that the bishops of Rome finally adopted for themselves what Gregory has called an "execrable title of pride." In 1053, one year before the traditional date of the Great Schism, Pope Leo IX had written to Patriarch Michael Cerularius:

How lamentable and detestable is the sacrilegious usurpation by which you everywhere boast yourself to be the Universal Patriarch.²

As we sincerely seek to heal and understand the schism between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, Gregory's warning should still challenge today:

Now I confidently say that whosoever calls himself, or desires to be called, Universal Priest, is in his elation the precursor of Antichrist, because he proudly puts himself above all others.

If then any one in that Church takes to himself that name, whereby he makes himself the head of all the good, it follows that the Universal

¹ In the spirit of the 34th apostolic canon, the title 'head' is acceptable, but 'head of Church' would be the bishop's title, whereas 'head of the Churches' might be used for the regional or universal primate.

² Quoted in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'John the Faster'

Church falls from its standing (which God forbid), when he who is called Universal falls.¹

This sad controversy illustrates well the disintegration of old Christendom as many dangers loom: unresolved theological differences, the Barbarian invasions in the West, the birth of Islam in the East and ongoing dogmatic and ecclesiological feuds in declining Constantinople.



Let us conclude with a few thoughts on the use and abuse of Gregory's writings in modern apologetics.

Pope Gregory is a good reflection of his place and era. Only the most dishonest Orthodox apologist would claim that Gregory had no sense of his own primacy and authority. To be sure, St. Gregory says many things that sound very Eastern Orthodox and these statements are significant. Further, Gregory's views on the title and meaning of 'Universal Bishop' are a problem for Rome's emphasis on an ontological form of universal ecclesiology and Papal infallibility. For Gregory, it seems that every bishop is in a sense subject to a patriarchal see according the canon 6 of Nicea, a canon that ratified the Petrine authority of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch. Still, it is difficult to reconcile Gregory's statements into a harmonious synthesis, a fact that may confirm the coexistence of incompatible ecclesiologies during millennium.

Regarding the modern use of the title 'Ecumenical Patriarch,' we have mentioned that it is still used by Constantinople – despite the obvious loss of the underlying political framework – in the context of universal Orthodox ecclesiology². Considering Gregory's negative reaction, it is surprising that the popes of Rome themselves have also assumed the title³ and one wonders if they have not done so in the very way that St. Gregory had feared. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1910 attempted this clarification:

All bishops are not apostolic vicars of the pope. Nor has any Pope ever assumed the title "universal bishop," though occasionally they have been so called in complimentary addresses from other persons. The accusation,

¹ Epistle XXXIII: *Gregory to Mauricius Augustus, Emperor*

² For this reason, there are occasional discussions of moving the Patriarchate to a most suitable historical location, such as Thessalonica or Mount Athos. The Patriarchate of Antioch has already been relocated to Damascus.

³ The Eastern Catholic Liturgy commemorates the pope as "our Holy Universal Pontiff"

then, that Gregory's successors have usurped the title that he so resented is false.

Yes, the facts seem to challenge this reassuring statement. Pope Gregory had expressed four specific problems with the title:

- (1) It makes one bishop the head of the whole Church in an ontological sense.
- (2) It means that only one is really a bishop, or at least a 'bishop of bishops,' while all others are in fact his vicars or his 'presbyters.'
- (3) It destroys the balance of the patriarchates, either three (according to Nicea) or five (after Chalcedon).
- (4) It weakens the credibility of the Faith if "the one who is called Universal falls."

It is certain that the development of the Papal office culminating with the dogma of 1870 led to such a situation where bishops became *de-facto* 'vicars' of the pope: if bishops are appointed or transferred by the pope and are subject to his 'immediate, ordinary and episcopal' jurisdiction, then indeed bishops are in fact presbyters or vicars. Even more symbolically, the fact that Rome imposed the commemoration of the pope as 'Universal Pontiff' in the liturgy of the Byzantine Catholic rites speaks for itself in a tragic way². For the sake of peace, it would perhaps be better to set aside these old titles and choose a more ecclesologically accurate title, such as 'first bishop of the Orthodox Communion' (or 'first bishop of the Catholic Communion').

9. Constantinople (681): The "One Will" controversy

The Fifth Ecumenical Council was not the final spasm of the post-Chalcedonian controversy. If it could not be said that Christ had 'one nature' (the monophysite terminology), it might perhaps be argued, as a middle ground, that Christ had one will. From an ecumenical perspective, the 'monothelite (one will) formula' had been quite successful in Alexandria. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* notes:

In 630 Cyrus had become Patriarch of Alexandria. He found Egypt almost entirely Monophysite, as it had been since the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Cyrus, by the use of the expression for which Sergius had been able to produce such good authority, had formulated a series of propositions,

¹ These are the adjectives used by Vatican I.

² For instance, www.byzantines.net/liturgy/liturgy.htm, accessed electronically November 2006. See also the Dictatus Papae of 1075: "the Roman pontiff alone can with right be called universal."

which most of the Monophysites were willing to accept, and they were by this means reunited in large numbers to the Catholic Church, “so that those who formerly would not speak of the divine Leo and the great Council of Chalcedon now commemorated both with a loud voice in the holy mysteries.”

Apart from the effort to articulate the implications of the Chalcedonian doctrine and to reconcile the monophysites to ecumenical unity, the underlying issue was extremely complex, perhaps beyond the reach of human language.¹

Is the will an attribute of the person or of the nature? This was the question of the day. Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople soon became involved in the controversy, and he wisely decided to ask Pope Honorius of Rome for his position on the matter. In his letter, the pope declared:

Therefore, we acknowledge one will of our Lord Jesus Christ, for evidently it was our nature and not the sin in it which was assumed by the Godhead, that is to say, the nature which was created before sin, not the nature which was vitiated by sin.²

In Constantinople, this letter was received at face value: the Church of Rome had endorsed monothelitism. Forty years latter, the situation had completely changed. Both East and West finally agreed to reject the ‘one will’ doctrine and a Council was gathered at Constantinople under the presidency of the Roman legates. Again, the proceedings of the Council revealed how ambivalent the Eastern Churches could be in their relationship with the See of Rome. On the one hand, the letter and teachings of Pope Agatho were acclaimed with acclamation that “Peter has spoken through Agatho!” On the other hand, the late Pope Honorius was vehemently condemned and anathematized as no less than a heretic. At the thirteenth session, the Council declared:

Those whose impious dogmas we execrate, we judge that their names also shall be cast out of the holy Church of God,” that is, Sergius, Cyrus, Pyrrhus, Peter, Paul, Theodore, all which names were mentioned by the holy Pope Agatho in his letter to the pious and great emperor, “and were cast out by him, as holding views contrary to our orthodox faith; and these we define to be subject to anathema. And in addition to these we decide that Honorius also, who was Pope of elder Rome, be with them cast out of the holy Church of God, and be anathematized with them, because we have found by his letter to Sergius that he followed his opinion in all things, and confirmed his wicked dogmas.

¹ See my article *Things not lawful for men to utter*, at www.orthodox-church.info/hbb

² CE, Entry: Agatho

Amazingly, the Roman legates did not object. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* notes:

The solemn dogmatic decree, signed by the legates, all the bishops, and the Emperor, condemns the heretics mentioned by St. Agatho¹ “and also Honorius who was Pope of elder Rome“, while it enthusiastically accepts the letter of St. Agatho.²

A few months earlier, Pope Agatho had reaffirmed Rome’s traditional claim to Petrine infallibility in his letter to the Council:

This apostolic Church of [Peter] has never turned away from the path of truth in any direction of error, whose authority, as that of the Prince of all the Apostles, the whole Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Synods have faithfully embraced...³

But Pope Agatho died before the end of the proceedings. His successor, Leo II accepted its outcome, including the condemnation of Pope Honorius, with these words:

We anathematize the inventors of the new error, that is, Theodore, Sergius and also Honorius, who did not attempt to sanctify this apostolic Church with the teaching of apostolic tradition, but by profane treachery permitted its purity to be polluted.

Perhaps for the first time in history, a Pope had been formally condemned for heresy (albeit a very obscure one) and found guilty of ‘allowing the purity of the Church of Rome to be polluted.’ Strong words indeed.

Again, the conciliar institution had proved extremely unpredictable for the Roman See. The Bishop of Rome was clearly acknowledged as “bishop of the first See of the Universal Church.” Indeed, his letter to the Emperor had been received as “divinely written as by the Chief of the Apostles.” However, as in the case of Leo at Chalcedon, the Papal letter was not automatically received as orthodox because of its source. The Council acclaimed Agatho’s letter after careful examination and on merit, and accepted “the orthodox compositions sent by you [Pope Agatho] to the most pious emperor as in all respects agreeable to the teaching of the approved Fathers and of the God-instructed Fathers, and of the holy five Ecumenical Councils.”⁴

¹ Pope Agatho is also a saint in the Orthodox Church.

² CE, Entry: Agatho

³ NPNF2, Volume 14, pp. 328-339

⁴ NPNF2, Volume 14, pp. 349-50



Hence, as we approach the last recognized Council of the so-called ‘undivided Church,’ the same pattern emerges: Councils can be quoted to support Rome’s Petrine primacy as much as to show its boundaries and limitations.

The fall of Pope Honorius was certainly a stain on Rome’s pristine record – yet far from enough to destroy her “most powerful authority”¹, even in the East. Still, Honorius’ condemnation ended being a thorn in the side of the Papal office, especially as the concept of Papal Infallibility gained popularity and momentum in the 19th century. In the 18th century, the breviary lesson for the feast of St. Leo II which included the condemnation of Pope Honorius was amended, to the dismay of the French and Gallican bishop Bossuet who jeered:

They suppress as far as they can, [even in] the *Liber Diurnus*: they have erased this from the Roman Breviary... Truth breaks out from all sides, and these things become so much the more evident, as they are the more studiously put out of sight.²

During the eleventh century, the Papal oath had also been purged from all trace of Honorius’ anathema. Still, the case of Honorius was considered as one of the major obstacle to the proclamation of the dogma of Papal Infallibility in 1870.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* offers a comprehensive analysis of various attempts to harmonize Honorius’ condemnation with the proposed dogma. In the end, the Sixth Ecumenical Council offers nothing new. It can certainly be argued that Honorius never made any Ex-Cathedra pronouncement in the matter. Roman Catholic apologist Robert Sungenis, a staunch defender of Papal Infallibility within the framework of Vatican I, is not troubled by Honorius’ error. He comments:

I used the example of Honorius only to show that a Pope can err in matters of the Faith, but not lose his office because of it...

So how could Pope Agatho, on the one hand, condemn Honorius as a heretic, but on the other hand, say the See of Peter was preserved without error? Because Agatho separated Honorius’ non-infallible “personal”

¹ Irenaeus’ expression.

² Bossuet. Def. Cleri Gal., Lib. 7, cap. 26

opinion from the infallible “office” of the papacy. Without that crucial distinction, there indeed would have been ‘error’ in the See of Peter”¹.

In other words, Rome can use the case of Honorius to show that Papal Infallibility only works when certain conditions are met, and that Honorius’ letter to Sergius never qualified as Ex-Cathedra. Other Roman Catholic apologists would disagree with Sungenis’ frank admission that Honorius had really taught erroneous doctrine. They argue that this ‘monothelite’ terminology was only intended to convey the unity of Christ’s will, not to express an ontological truth². But by doing so, they also have to reject the judgment of the Council on this point.

My personal opinion would be to focus on the overall spirit of the Council: its abiding respect of the Roman See, both in terms of ecclesiastical status and doctrinal purity, yet balanced by a sense of great freedom and autonomy in approving Agatho’s letter or condemning Honorius as heretic.

10. The Voice of St. Maximus the Confessor

Let us now return to the climax of the monothelite controversy (635-681).

St. Maximus the Confessor (†662) is a highly respected saint in both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. At a time when the entire *oecumene* had embraced monothelitism, Maximus stood alone against the world, and wrote a striking testimony to his exalted views of the Roman See.

The extremities of the earth, and everyone in every part of it who purely and rightly confess the Lord, look directly towards the Most Holy Roman Church and her confession and faith, as to a sun of unfailing light awaiting from her the brilliant radiance of the sacred dogmas of our Fathers, according to that which the inspired and holy Councils have stainlessly and piously decreed. For, from the descent of the Incarnate Word amongst us, all the churches in every part of the world have held the greatest Church alone to be their base and foundation, seeing that, according to the promise of Christ Our Savior, the gates of hell will never prevail against her, that she has the keys of the orthodox confession and right faith in

¹ Electronic document, published at www.cai.org

² I do not think that Honorius was an ontological monothelite. His letter is very reminiscent of the language of St. Gregory of Nazianzen “the Theologian,” although very unwise and unguarded in the context of the seventh century. In 641, Pope John IV attempted to explain Honorius’ teaching by stressing that “when he confessed one will of our Lord, only meant to deny that Christ had a will of the flesh, of concupiscence, since he was conceived and born without stain of sin.”

Him, that she opens the true and exclusive religion to such men as approach with piety, and she shuts up and locks every heretical mouth which speaks against the Most High.¹

Maximus clearly placed his hope in the eternal orthodoxy and superior authority of the See of Rome:

Let him hasten before all things to satisfy the Roman See, for if it is satisfied, all will agree in calling him pious and orthodox. For he only speaks in vain who thinks he ought to persuade or entrap persons like myself, and does not satisfy and implore the blessed Pope of the most holy Catholic Church of the Romans, that is, the apostolic See, which is from the incarnate of the Son of God Himself, and also all the holy synods, according to the holy canons and definitions has received universal and supreme dominion, authority, and power of binding and loosing over all the holy churches of God throughout the whole world.²

It should be admitted that the above passage only exists in a problematic Latin translation. Orthodox apologist Michael Whelton, while questioning the authenticity of this passage, offers an in-depth discussion of what Maximus is actually saying. If the saint is saying that Rome has received “universal and supreme dominion, authority, and power of binding and loosing over all the holy churches of God throughout the whole world” according to “all the holy synods, according to the holy canons and definitions,” the question is: what synods, what canons? As we have seen, apart from the right of *cassatio* granted at Sardica, no such canons exist³. Considering the fact that Maximus had spent several years in Rome, it is very possible that he had been exposed to Latin ‘versions’ of canonical collections, which were always problematic.

Be that as it may, with Honorius’ endorsement of the monothelite terminology and clear support to Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople, Maximus’ unconditional faith in the Roman Church might have been shaken.

During the first imprisonment of the saint, messengers from the Ecumenical Patriarch asked him:

To which church do you belong? To that of Byzantium, of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, or Jerusalem? For all these churches, together with the provinces in subjection to them, are in unity. Therefore, if you also belong to the Catholic Church, enter into communion with us at once, lest

¹ *Opuscula theologica et polemica*, PG 90

² *Letter to Peter*, Mansi X, 692

³ Maximus may also have referred to the *Formula Hormisdæ*.

fashioning for yourself some new and strange pathway, you fall into that which you do not even expect!

To this the righteous man wisely replied, "Christ the Lord called that Church the Catholic Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the Faith. It was for this confession that He called Peter blessed, and He declared that He would found His Church upon this confession. However, I wish to know the contents of your confession, on the basis of which all churches, as you say, have entered into communion. If it is not opposed to the truth, then neither will I be separated from it.

Later, when the imperial prosecutors inquired:

What will you do, when the Romans are united to the Byzantines? Yesterday, indeed, two legates arrived from Rome and tomorrow, on the Lord's Day; they will communicate the Holy Mysteries with the Patriarch!

To which the Saint replied:

Even if the whole universe holds communion with the Patriarch, I will not communicate with him. For I know from the writings of the holy Apostle Paul: the Holy Spirit declares that even the angels would be anathema if they should begin to preach another Gospel, introducing some new teaching.

Both Maximus and Pope Martin suffered a horrifying martyrdom at the hands of the imperial authorities. Maximus had his right hand and tongue cut off. On January 21¹, the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches sing this *tropar*:

O champion of Orthodoxy, teacher purity and of true worship, the enlightener of the universe and the adornment of the hierarchs: O all-wise Father Maximus, your teachings have gleamed with light upon all things. Intercede before Christ our God to save our souls!

Pope Martin also inherited the title of 'confessor' and eternal honor in both East and West. The very fact that one could be tortured, pope or monk, because he refused to align himself with imperial policies suffices to establish the pathetic state and ultimate lack of relevance of the so-called Christianity of the times. What then, is there to say? Perhaps that Eastern Imperial Christianity was massively wrong, not just on an obscure point of theology but at a deeper level, in its very grasp of the essence of Christianity. Likewise, with more or less theological success, Rome was not only embroiled in these endless disputes but more alarmingly on the verge of its own descent into hell.

¹ By coincidence, or perhaps synchronicity, these pages were written on January 21, 2006.

As we have briefly mentioned, the issue of forged canons and writings now becomes a real problem. We shall discuss this problem further on and see how much the councils of Lyons and Florence were affected by this plague.

At this point in our review of the historical road of Christianity, we can only wonder if the “faith once delivered to the saints” had not become “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.”¹ Even today, only a return to the spirit of the Apostles and early martyrs will give us a meaningful direction to resolve our ecclesiological and doctrinal controversies.

11. Nicea II & the Iconoclastic crisis (711-843)

The Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicea (787) holds a particular importance in the Orthodox dogmatic tradition². Every year, the feast called ‘Triumph of Orthodoxy’ is a commemoration of the final victory of Nicea’s teaching on the veneration of icons against the iconoclasts.

Between 711 and 843, the Church of Constantinople became the center of a most destructive controversy. Should images be used in Christian worship? Are we not still bound by the Third Commandment? Could it be that the Empire is being punished by God for its idolatry, and rightly given over to the Muslim conquerors who had no images? Emperors, patriarchs, bishops and monks became violently involved in the controversy. For more than a hundred years, the iconoclasts held the upper hand. A council held in 754 condemned the veneration of images and the Empire enforced its teachings as civil law. From ‘the safety’ of Damascus, now under Muslim rule and out reach of imperial control, the writings of John Mansur (†747, called ‘Damascene’) were finally heard like a voice in the desert. His elaborate defense of ‘icon worship’³ eventually prevailed, yet again, not without the support of the Roman See. When Empress Irene came to power as regent for her son Constantine VI, she was determined to restore her beloved icons to their proper place. Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément describes the situation:

¹ *Macbeth*, Shakespeare, Act 5, scene 3, 26-27

² See my article: *Relative worship: A reflection on the Trinitarian and Iconic theology of Eastern Orthodoxy*, posted on www.orthodox-church.info/hbb

³ Until recently, ‘worship’ could mean either ‘veneration’ or ‘true worship’. John’s arguments are based on the wide meaning of the Greek word *proskynesis* which implies a more generic bodily manifestation of respect. The distinction between *proskynesis* (which often has the lower meaning of homage or veneration) and *latreia* (as highest form of divine worship) was clarified at Nicea II.

For the first time in what is properly called Byzantine thought, we see the introduction of the theme of a mysterious division *inside* the Church: Constantinople and its patriarchate are not purely and simply outside of the Church, yet it is needed to seeking re-integration. It is the pope and the Council that accomplish this unity. The Pope, Irene writes, has the 'principal priesthood' from Christ. He is the 'holy head' who 'presides on the See of St. Peter'... During the Council, the pope's legates enjoyed an immense prestige, their names were first in the acts and the Church of Rome was referred to as Peter's Church.¹

Irene's letter to Pope Hadrian was more than an exercise in ecclesiastical diplomacy:

As then you are the veritable chief priest (*primus sacerdos*) who presides in the place and in the See of the holy and ever-praised Apostle Peter, let your paternal blessedness come to us, as we have said before, and add your presence to all those other priests who shall be assembled together here, that thus the will of the Lord may be accomplished.

'Elder Rome' was indeed their only hope. The other three patriarchs were out of reach², but it was felt that Rome's approval was sufficient to hold what was meant to be an Ecumenical Council³. Nicea II was eventually recognized as Ecumenical⁴, but historically, its success was short-lived. Constantinople soon returned to iconoclasm. It would take another 56 years and the influence of St. Theodore Studite to finally overcome the crisis.

My assessment of the Second Nicene Council is that it constitutes the highest point of recognition of what we can call 'Roman Catholic ecclesiology' in the East, not so much in the definitions and canons as in its letters and sessions. There was no Vigilius or Honorius factor at Nicea

¹ RA, pp. 56-57

² "The monks John and Thomas professed to represent the Oriental patriarchs, though these did not know that the council had been convoked. However, there was no fraud on their part: they had been sent, not by the patriarchs, but by the monks and priests of superior rank acting *sedibus impeditis*, in the stead and place of the patriarchs who were prevented from acting for themselves. Necessity was their excuse. Moreover, John and Thomas did not subscribe at the Council as vicars of the patriarchs, but simply in the name of the Apostolic sees of the Orient." (From CE, Entry: "The Second Council of Nicaea")

³ Mansi, 12, 984-986, 1134

⁴ For various reasons, Nicea II was not well received in the Carolingian West and its theology was never quite understood in the West because the rationale for iconography was different: didactic in the West, incarnational and theological in the East. The influence of Western art has been severe in many parts of the Orthodox Church, resulting in many aberrations, not the least being the 'icons' of God the Father.

– it was total recognition that the pope of Rome held Peter's See, and that Rome was in a unique way heir of Christ's promises to Peter.

For instance, Pope Hadrian had written the following letter to the Council Fathers:

The Lord¹ exalted the holy Catholic and apostolic Roman Church your spiritual mother, and with the other orthodox Emperors venerated it as the head of all Churches... If following the traditions of the orthodox Faith, you embrace the judgment of the Church of blessed Peter, chief of the Apostles, and, as of old your predecessors the holy Emperors acted, so you, too, venerating it with honor, love with all your heart his Vicar, and if your sacred majesty follow by preference their orthodox Faith, according to our holy Roman Church.

To be sure, the Council reaffirmed Honorius' condemnation, but for various reasons, the balance of authority was squarely on the Roman² side. It may be argued that 'this swing of the pendulum' would unavoidably lead both to arrogance in Rome and resentment in the East.

12. The Voice of St. Theodore the Studite (ca. 758 - ca. 826)

In the years that followed Nicea II, St. Theodore became the abbot of the great monastery of Studion in Constantinople. He was staunchly opposed to any imperial right of interference in ecclesiastical affairs, especially when iconoclasm regained the favor of the court. St. Theodore's letters, if genuine, confirm our view that Rome's star was shining brighter than ever. Writing to Pope Leo III, the great Byzantine saint sounds like a Roman legate:

Since to great Peter Christ our Lord gave the office of Chief Shepherd after entrusting him with the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, to Peter or his successor must of necessity every novelty in the Catholic Church be referred. [Therefore], save us, O most divine Head of Heads, Chief Shepherd of the Church of Heaven.³

Indeed, Theodore's letter to Pope Paschal is as Roman Catholic as can be:

Hear, O apostolic Head, divinely-appointed Shepherd of Christ's sheep, key-bearer of the Kingdom of Heaven, Rock of the Faith upon whom the Catholic Church is built. For Peter art thou, who adornest and governest the Chair of Peter. To thee spake Christ our Lord: 'And thou being one day

¹ In context, this is either a reference to Christ or to Constantine

² Of course, Constantinople was understood as the capital of the Roman State. Rome is used here in reference to 'old Rome'.

³ Epistle 23 (Book 1)

converted, shalt strengthen thy brethren.' Behold the hour and the place. Help us, thou that art set by God for this. Stretch forth thy hand so far as thou canst. Thou hast strength with God, through being the first of all.¹

Although he was probably aware of Honorius' condemnation, Theodore seemed to believe that Rome had received and maintained the charisma of eternal infallibility:

I witness now before God and men, they have torn themselves away from the Body of Christ, from the Supreme See (Rome), in which Christ placed the keys of the Faith, against which the gates of hell (I mean the mouth of heretics) have not prevailed, and never will until the Consummation, according to the promise of Him Who cannot lie. Let the blessed and apostolic [Pope] Paschal rejoice therefore, for he has fulfilled the work of Peter.²

And yet, the East would soon be forced to make a painful choice: to accept the pope's unconditional supremacy, even when Rome fell into its own darkness, or to leave the embrace of the See that had meant so much for so long.

13. The 'Photian' schism (860-880)

With Patriarch Photius³ of Constantinople, we reach a clear turning point in the relationship between Rome and Constantinople. As we approach the symbolic date of 1054, several problems converged to cause a lasting schism between the two 'Romes.'

The so-called 'Photian schism' was the result of a dispute between Patriarch Photius of Constantinople (†891) and Pope Nicholas I (†867)⁴. In 858, Patriarch Ignatius had been deposed by Emperor Michael and replaced by Photius, a scholar with no ecclesiastical background. When Ignatius' supporters appealed to Rome for support, Pope Nicholas I declared Photius' election invalid. When the latter refused to resign, Nicholas condemned and excommunicated the patriarch. In response to this unprecedented action, Photius convened a church council in 867 which condemned Pope Nicholas and terminated communion with Rome. This action was more than retaliation against Rome's refusal to recognize the patriarch: the deeper cause was the deteriorating situation in Bulgaria. Latin missionaries had been sent in this traditionally "Byzantine" territory

¹ PG 99, 1152-3

² Epistle 63 (Book 2)

³ I should point out that when possible, the Orthodox prefer to use 'Photios' or 'Maximos' over their Latinized versions.

⁴ Photius is a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church, whereas Nicolas is a saint in the Roman Catholic Church.

and were causing great turmoil by condemning many traditional Eastern practices, possibly to the point of urging the Bulgarians to accept Latin rebaptism. In his letter to the other Eastern patriarchs, Photius complains that the Latins:

- do not allow married men to serve as priests,
- do not allow priests to administer confirmation,
- insist on the addition of the *filioque* to the Creed.

In the same year, a new emperor, Basilus, deposed and exiled Photius and reinstated Ignatius. When Ignatius died in 877, Photius was extremely popular in Constantinople and soon returned to the patriarchal throne, this time with Rome's recognition.

In order to address what he felt was the only serious theological offence between Greeks and Latins¹, Photius called for a council to be held in Constantinople in 879. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* offers this unavoidably partial perspective:

Nevertheless [Photius] applied to Rome for legates to come to another synod. There was no reason for the synod, but he persuaded John VIII that it would clear up the last remains of the schism and rivet more firmly the union between East and West. His real motive was, no doubt, to undo the effect of the synod that had deposed him. The Pope sent three legates... The synod was opened in St. Sophia's in November, 879. This is the "Pseudosynodus Photiana" which the Orthodox count as the Eighth General Council. Photius had it all his own way throughout. He revoked the acts of the former synod (869), repeated all his accusations against the Latins, dwelling especially on the filioque grievance, anathematized all who added anything to the Creed, and declared that Bulgaria should belong to the Byzantine Patriarchate. The fact that there was a great majority for all these measures shows how strong Photius' party had become in the East. The legates, like their predecessors in 861, agreed to everything the majority desired. As soon as they had returned to Rome, Photius sent the Acts to the pope for his confirmation. Instead John, naturally, again excommunicated him². So the schism broke out again. This time it lasted seven years, till Basil I's death in 886.

A few years later, Photius was deposed and banished in 886, but communion between Rome and Constantinople was restored for almost two centuries.

¹ At this point in history, this categorization becomes more accurate.

² Pr. Anastos strongly disagreed with this assertion: "Nevertheless, neither John VIII nor any of his immediate successors ever subsequently disowned or excommunicated Photius, and the whole account of their having done so belongs to the realm of phantasy." (*Aspects*, 16)

Until recently, the Roman Catholic assessment of Photius was extremely negative, to say the least. The above cited *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1910 edition) is fairly representative of that position:

His insatiable ambition, his determination to obtain and keep the patriarchal see, led him to the extreme of dishonesty. His claim was worthless... And to keep this place Photius descended to the lowest depth of deceit. At the very time he was protesting his obedience to the pope he was dictating to the Emperor insolent letters that denied all Papal jurisdiction. He misrepresented the story of Ignatius's deposition with unblushing lies, and he at least connived at Ignatius's ill-treatment in banishment. He proclaimed openly his entire subservience to the State in the whole question of his intrusion. He stops at nothing in his war against the Latins. He heaps up accusations against them that he must have known were lies. His effrontery on occasions is almost incredible... The Orthodox, who look upon him, rightly, as the great champion of their cause against Rome, have forgiven all his offences for the sake of this championship. They have canonized him, and on 6 Feb., when they keep his feast, their office overflows with his praise. He is the "far-shining radiant star of the church," the "most inspired guide of the Orthodox," "thrice blessed speaker for God," "wise and divine glory of the hierarchy, who broke the horns of Roman pride." The Catholic remembers this extraordinary man with mixed feelings. We do not deny his eminent qualities and yet we certainly do not remember him as a thrice blessed speaker for God. One may perhaps sum up Photius by saying that he was a great man with one blot on his character - his insatiable and unscrupulous ambition. But that blot so covers his life that it eclipses everything else and makes him deserve our final judgment as one of the worst enemies the Church of Christ ever had, and the cause of the greatest calamity that ever befell her.

As we reach the tragic climax of 1054, Photius stands at the crossroads. If one is convinced that the *filioque* (understood ontologically) is both treachery and heresy, Photius is a hero and champion of Orthodoxy. If one is further convinced that the Papal ecclesiology which is about to become fully manifest in the eleventh century is a fatal disease for the Churches of Christ, then Photius is certainly the one who discerned that it may one day be necessary to cut off a 'gangrened' member.¹ This, undoubtedly, is the Orthodox position, although it should be clear that Photius and the co-called Eighth (Orthodox) Ecumenical council did endorse Rome's primacy according to the rules of Sardica. Francis Dvornik writes:

At the beginning of the Synod the legates repeatedly proclaimed that they were proceeding according to the Canons of Sardica, which declared the

¹ Orthodox Christians should also recognize that caesareo-papism, ethno-centrism, and a completely anemic universal primacy of honor can become equally fatal diseases.

pope to be the ultimate authority in the Church. What happened during the second meeting of the Synod is particularly important. The legates said: "Believe us, brethren, it is because the Fathers in the Council of Sardica decided that the Bishop of Rome has power to reopen the cause of any bishop that we desire, with the authority we have mentioned, to re-examine the case." The Bishop of Laodicea, Theodore, the speaker of the Byzantine Church, said: "Our Church rejoices at it and has no objection to it and is not offended by it."¹

One other hand, we can easily understand the traditional Latin assessment of Photius. Rome had reached other theological conclusions: the pope was the sole successor of Peter with supreme authority over the universal Church, and this authority included everything from jurisdiction over Bulgaria, ecclesiastical discipline (celibacy, confirmation) and creedal formulations. On the issue of the *filioque*, there was a real difference of theology, a controversy that dealt with a much more sensitive issue than monothelitism.



If unity is to be achieved between our two families of Churches, the status of such symbolic figures as Photius, Nicolas I or Mark (of Ephesus) will have to be dealt with, a delicate task indeed. But there is also room for optimism: if we manage to have such diverse saints as Cyprian, Stephen, Firmilian, Basil, and Leo cohabitate in our common calendar, perhaps an honest way can be found to reconcile Photius and Nicholas as saints² of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

More could and should be said about the events that shaped the life of Photius and the current state of 'Photian studies.' Fr. Francis Dvornik (†1975) was a Roman Catholic priest who did more than anyone to rehabilitate the image of Photius in the West. Fr. Dvornik also argued that the "second Photian schism" referred to by the *Catholic Encyclopedia* never took place. What is more intriguing is the idea that the Council of 879 might eventually be recognized as a workable blueprint for unity. Its status as Eighth Ecumenical Council of the Orthodox Church is a highly controversial subject, but its decrees were effective in restoring communion.

¹ *Byzantium and the Roman Primacy*, in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. Accessed electronically.

² Even in the original New Testament sense.

On the one hand, the Council condemned the problematic aspect of the *filioque* and all additions to the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople. This, I think, is something that Rome is in a position to do, if the heart of the matter is carefully worded. On the other hand, we have seen that the Council affirmed the primacy of Rome and recognized the pope's status as head of the Churches within the canonical framework of the 34th apostolic canon and the decrees of Sardica and of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. These are some of the necessary components for any viable council of union.

VI. SUMMARY: UNITY AND PRIMACY BEFORE 1054

1. A Universal Primacy for the common union

The reader should now understand why it is needful to discuss the theological nature of the Church before launching on this historical review.

If the Church is a divine organism fully revealed in the local catholic Church, what happened to the worldwide communion of Churches, however tragic, is only an organizational – indeed a political – issue. In other words, the means of salvation are not at stake, but the faithfulness of our witness to Christ ‘the unifier’ is compromised. We could also say that the holographic ‘whole-units,’ instead of being organized in such a way as to create a beautiful icon of the Lord, have instead produced a distorted image. If our Lord prayed that we “may be one¹,” we must try to discern what He had in mind and learn from our historical successes and failures in this area.



Having reviewed the historical record of the first one thousand years, we can draw the following conclusions.

During the first three centuries, the identity of the catholic Church with the local Church, or what we today call ‘Eucharistic ecclesiology’ was solidly established, even assumed. The development of Eucharistic assemblies led by a presbyter as extensions of the episcopal Eucharist was

¹ John 17:11

easily accepted because this arrangement did not alter the ontological identity of the catholic Church.

Moving one step further, we observe that the council or synod as a structure of communion was immediately adopted and practiced according to the model of Acts 15. It is interesting to note that what started as an occasional event gradually developed into an institution, leading to the creation of 'autocephalous' areas of self-regulation. It is then that the *protos* of the synod was chosen on a permanent basis.

We have seen that the attention of the Ecumenical Councils and the Emperor was focused on preserving the common union, if not universally, at least as far as the Empire could reach. Because of their concern for the welfare of the 'ecumenical Church', the Councils adopted a form universal ecclesiology that was meant to be the functional complement to Eucharistic ecclesiology. This concern also found its expression in the role of the bishop of Rome as *protos* of ecumenical unity.

We can now appreciate Fr. Schmemmann's assessment, already quoted in our Ecclesiology section:

Finally we come to the highest and ultimate form of primacy: universal primacy. An age-long anti-Roman prejudice has led some Orthodox canonists simply to deny the existence of such primacy in the past or the need for it in the present. But an objective study of the canonical tradition cannot fail to establish beyond any doubt that, along with local 'centers of agreement' or primacies, the Church has also known a universal primacy.... Neither can we quote here all the testimonies of the Fathers and the Councils unanimously acknowledging Rome as the senior church and the center of ecumenical agreement.

It is only for the sake of biased polemics that one can ignore these testimonies, their consensus and significance. It has happened, however, that if Roman historians and theologians have always interpreted this evidence in juridical terms, thus falsifying its real meaning, their Orthodox opponents have systematically belittled the evidence itself. Orthodox theology is still awaiting a truly Orthodox evaluation of universal primacy in the first millennium of church history – an evaluation free from polemical or apologetic exaggerations.¹

Jaroslav Pelikan, then writing from a Lutheran perspective, offers a more striking conclusion:

The churches of the Greek East, too, owed a special allegiance to Rome... One see after another had capitulated in this or that controversy with heresy. Constantinople had given rise to several heretics during the fourth

¹ TPOP, pp. 163-164

and fifth centuries, notably Nestorius and Macedonius, and the other sees has also been known to stray from the true faith occasionally. But Rome had a special position. The bishop of Rome had the right by his own authority to annul the acts of a synod. In fact, when there was talk of a council to settle controversies, Gregory asserted the principle that “without the authority and the consent of the apostolic see, none of the matters transacted [by a council] have any binding force.”¹

As we shall see with our discussion of the Fathers, Rome’s universal primacy was recognized as a legitimate application of apostolic canon 34, but only within canonical boundaries². The council of Sardica and civil legislation finally expressed the practical meaning of this primacy or ‘headship.’ Rome and the East disagreed on the extent of these canonical rights, partly because the canons of Nicea and Sardica had been merged in the Roman collection. Sozomen the historian gives several examples of this situation:

Julius [of Rome] having been apprised that Athanasius was far from being in safety in Egypt, sent for him to his own city. He replied at the same time to the letter of the bishops who were convened at Antioch, for just then he happened to have received their epistle, and accused them of having clandestinely introduced innovations contrary to the dogmas of the Nicene council, and of having violated the laws of the Church, by neglecting to invite him to join their Synod; for he [Julius] alleged that there is a sacerdotal canon which declares that whatever is enacted contrary to the judgment of the bishop of Rome is null³.

Happily, the quasi-ecumenical status of the canons of Sardica became widely accepted in the East⁴ and provided a usable mechanism of arbitration and problem resolution. What Russian Orthodoxy has done for its national primate was also done for the universal primate, which reminds us that the primacy of honor of the bishop of Rome was neither absolute nor empty.

This study represents an attempt to take Fr. Schmemmann’s challenge seriously, namely to offer “a truly Orthodox evaluation of universal primacy in the first millennium of church history – an evaluation free from polemical or apologetic exaggerations.”

¹ *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, University of Chicago Press, 1971, p.354; cites Gregory’s Epistle 9.156

² See for instance our discussion of Augustine in the Theological section.

³ *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.10

⁴ Canon 2 of Trullo endorses Sardica by name.

2. *The Pentarchy*

In our Ecclesiology section, we saw how the creation of structures of communion among Churches led to the formation of such functional entities as a 'metropolia' or 'patriarchate.'

After Chalcedon, the idea of five patriarchal superstructures became extremely important, especially in the East. This model allowed the bishops to harmonize the full catholicity of each local Church (now diocese) with various levels of conciliarity and functional primacies. The prerogatives¹ of the *protos* or 'head' were broadly defined by the 34th apostolic canon or by specific statutes. As emphasized by Alexander Schmemmann, this patriarchal organization implied the existence of a 'first See of the universal Church' with specific primatial prerogatives. As we have seen, these prerogatives were either customary, expressed in conciliar decisions and canons, or indeed defined in civil law. Canon 6 of Nicea and the decrees of Sardica are an example of such definitions. Moreover, the idea that the primate had a role in the presidency and approval of ecumenical decisions flows from the 34th Apostolic Canon and is visible throughout the history of the Ecumenical Councils.

In spite of the loss, in 1453, of the imperial structure that was the model during the first thousand years, this canon should be the Eastern Orthodox approach to this day and adapted to our current situation. The problem is that the rejection of Rome's claims of absolute supremacy triggered an overreaction and a swing of the pendulum to the other extreme. As a result, universal primacy was theoretically transferred to Constantinople, but in practice, the prerogatives of this See were not always recognized. The Orthodox Communion recognizes to the Ecumenical Patriarch a symbolic 'primacy of honor,' but with no clear privileges of authority. Thus, one can read the statutes of the Russian Orthodox Church and find the role of its primate explicitly spelled out, but with no mention of any form of primacy beyond its canonical boundaries². As I have expressed earlier, if the Russian Orthodox Church³ is willing to grant significant privileges to her primate for the sake of unity and good order, there is no reason to deny the rationale for a universal primacy

¹ The expression 'prerogatives' or 'privileges' seems more accurate than 'powers'.

² Interestingly, the statutes of the Orthodox Church of America (I would prefer the name 'Orthodox Metropolia of North America') contain this vague reference to a universal system of appeal: "The rulings of the Holy Synod are final, except for those instances which the canons reserve to the judgment of the universal Church."

³ Or better 'the Patriarchate of Moscow and all Russia'

which would open these autocephalous and often national structures to the world. Otherwise, the risk of nationalistic and ethnic isolation is great, with tragic consequences, notably in the realm of missionary activity. In that sense, one has to agree with Victor Soloviev's view that an international center of unity is needed to ensure the 'all-embracing' vocation of Christianity.

On the other hand, the separation of Rome from the Eastern Patriarchates meant that the pope was now free to pursue a dogmatic and practical absolutization of his authority, a process which culminated in 1870 and which remains unchanged and relatively unchallenged. Rome never liked the concept of patriarchates anyway, and effectively transformed the Patriarchate of Rome into a single, universal realm of direct administration. Apart from the troublesome Melkite (Catholic) Patriarchate, it can be said that from a Roman Catholic perspective, the curia of the Roman Patriarchate is directly in charge of the whole Catholic world. This is a situation which will require a radical and certainly painful revision.

3. *The concept of Autocephaly*

The application of the 34th apostolic Canon to certain groups of Churches meant that a "head" was to exercise limited but effective oversight responsibilities in a given area. If this structure was self-governing, it formed what is now called an 'autocephalous Church' or 'local Church' – again with the customarily improper use of the word Church.

A good example is the 'Church of Cyprus' which is one of the oldest autocephalous areas. When the Archbishop of Antioch, to whose diocese Cyprus was attached, tried to abolish the right of the Cypriot Churches to appoint their own metropolitan (or archbishop), the issue was brought to the attention of the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 which ratified the autocephaly of Cyprus by its 8th canon, a decision confirmed by the council in *Trullo* of 692.

This arrangement, obviously endorsed by the Ecumenical Councils, did not negate the existence of a "bishop of the first see"; it simply prevented the uncalled-for interference of the superstructure in the affairs of the local Churches¹.

¹ In 2006, the Holy Synod of the 'Church of Cyprus' did appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch to solve an internal problem, in this case the retirement of the disabled Archbishop.

The existence of autocephalous groups of Churches, e.g. ‘the Church of Russia’ or ‘the Church of Greece’ is prominent in the life of the modern Eastern Orthodox Communion, as it was during the first millennium.

Dr. Lewis Patsavos notes that such structures typically have the following characteristics:

- It has the right to settle all internal matters without the intervention of any other ecclesiastical jurisdiction;
- It has the right to appoint its own bishops. In order to attain these rights, however, certain essential conditions must be met. Accordingly:
- There must be a sufficient number of bishops to appoint (at least 3 according to canon 4 of the First Ecumenical Synod) and ordain (2 or 3 according to apostolic Canon 1) other bishops;
- The independent ecclesiastical jurisdiction must coincide with an independent state or political division;
- The independent ecclesiastical jurisdiction must emanate from a canonical ecclesiastical source.

As long as it does not negate the existence, indeed the need for universal conciliarity with a *protos* acting as instrument of agreement, the concept of autocephaly is important to understand worldwide communion. On the other hand, autocephalous ‘Churches’ can also introduce an element of ecclesiological confusion and national identification with potentially dangerous consequences. As we have mentioned, it has no real equivalent in Roman Catholic ecclesiology, except perhaps in the Melkite Patriarchate.¹

4. *Mutual Tolerance*

Over the course of many turbulent centuries, East and West had to learn to accept their differences. Since the days of Victor and Polycrates, it had become clear that differences in traditions and practices were both unavoidable and problematic. The same kind of tension had come up between Stephen, Cyprian and Firmilian.

As early as Nicea (325), we find the emergence of a tolerated difference of discipline regarding clerical celibacy. The West was already in the process² of laying down strict canonical rules forbidding married men to

¹ National conferences of bishops were authorized by Pope Paul VI, but they have no real existence or authority in Roman Catholic law. Nevertheless, they have proved to be a successful experience and could be the foundation for more autonomous structures.

² See, for example, the councils of Elvira (Spain, 399) and Carthage (North Africa, 399)

continue their marital relationship after ordination, a discipline that eventually led to the promotion of lifelong celibacy. But as long as the consciousness of being a common union remained, these issues remained secondary. Whatever the West did took place far away and the East did not really care. As we have seen, it is only when missionaries from Rome and Constantinople met in Bulgaria (at the time of Photius and Nicholas) that these differences became visible and unbearable. Reflecting on the record of the first nine hundred years, Cardinal Congar concluded:

The East never accepted the regular jurisdiction of Rome, nor did it submit to the judgment of Western bishops. Its appeals to Rome for help were not connected with a recognition of the principle of Roman jurisdiction but were based on the view that Rome had the same truth, the same good. The East jealously protected its autonomous way of life. Rome intervened to safeguard the observation of legal rules, to maintain the orthodoxy of faith and to ensure communion between the two parts of the church, the Roman see representing and personifying the West... In according Rome a 'primacy of honor,' the East avoided basing this primacy on the succession and the still living presence of the apostle Peter... The East remained oriented on the logic of local or particular churches in communion with one another in the unity of faith, love and eucharist; this unity was realized by means of exchanges and communications and then, when the need made itself felt, by the holding of a council. It was a unity of communion. The West, which Islam had cut off from North Africa, accepted the authority of the Roman see, and over the course of history Rome occupied an increasingly prominent place.¹

5. *Rome – rampart of Orthodoxy*

It is fair to say that the Churches have been plagued by schisms and heresies since the days of the Apostles. After all, this should not surprise us: if we believe that the Church is the locus of salvation, we should also expect her who is the Bride of Christ to be caught in the midst of a spiritual warfare of cosmic proportions. This was Cyprian's argument:

What can be more crafty, or what more subtle, than for this enemy. After light has come to the nations and saving rays have shone for the preservation of men, [the Devil] has invented heresies and schisms, whereby he might subvert the Faith, might corrupt the truth, might divide the unity... He snatches men from the Church itself; and while they seem to themselves to have already approached to the light, and to have escaped the night of the world, he pours over them again, in their unconsciousness, new darkness... They still call themselves Christians, and, walking in darkness, they think that they have the light...²

¹ *Diversity and Communion*, Yves Congar, Twenty-Third, Mystic, 1982, pp. 26-27

² *On the unity of the catholic Church*

Many are tempted to conclude that the East was especially prone to developing heretical teachings and therefore schisms. This may or may not be a fair assessment if we consider the entire history of Christianity. For the sake of simplicity, let us admit that Eastern Christians had a propensity for wild theological speculations. This is often blamed on the Hellenistic philosophical background of the Greek-speaking world. The Western world, by comparison, was soon affected by the barbarian invasions while the Latin juridical mindset remained dominant. For many reasons, the Church of Rome was theologically orthodox for the most part of the first millennium. Of course, it may also be argued that from a liturgical, philosophical and ecclesiological perspective, the Roman Church was in fact drifting at a rapid pace, but the facts remain: the East often ended up turning to Rome to resolve its endless controversies. In a sense, it was a humiliating experience for the proud Greek-speaking 'Romans of the East' who tended to look down on the 'Barbarians of the West.' At the same time, this recourse to Rome helped maintain a real bond of unity and respect. Rome was orthodox, Rome was the 'elder,' Rome had the primacy and therefore East and West manifested the same one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. This does not imply that the Eastern bishops always accepted Rome's view of herself. Certainly, they must have been delighted to be in position to bully Virgilius or to condemn Honorius, 'former Pope of old Rome,' as a heretic. The same time, we find St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Theodore the Studite expressing the view that Rome was in unique sense 'the Chair of Peter' that would never fall into heresy.

This triumph of Roman orthodoxy is an important historical factor. It strengthened the Roman case for being 'the See of Peter that can never fail.' Thus, Rome's idea of having divine primacy and inerrancy acquired historical support and even found sporadic acceptance in the East.

6. *The Papacy as 'theologoumenon'*¹

Since the times of Stephen, the Roman Church has consistently taught that her bishop is the successor of Peter in a unique sense and that he holds by divine right a primacy of power over the universal Church. In other words, Rome made no secret that her ecclesiology and concept of primacy were different from that of the East, as we have seen in the reaction of Pope Leo to the canons of Chalcedon.

This was expressed consistently and unambiguously by a number of Popes commemorated as saints in the Orthodox Church, including such

¹ Acceptable opinion

luminaries as Leo, Agatho and Hadrian. As we have seen, this ecclesiology was accepted by a number of Eastern¹ Saints.

Because Rome was a stronghold of stability and orthodoxy for over eight hundred years, this idea had at least the status of acceptable or accepted opinion. At the same time, this does not imply that the theory of Roman supremacy ever found full recognition in the East, as Archbishop Miller acknowledges, it simply means that the East never overtly condemned Rome for teaching this view. In the final analysis, it might be said that Photius was the first Eastern Patriarch to fully grasp the implications that Rome's ecclesiology had become a claim to absolute divine authority, so that conciliar dialogue and communion with Rome would soon become a practical and theological impossibility.

We shall now turn our attention to the events that led to the breakdown of 1054.

VII. THE "GREAT SCHISM" OF 1054

1. *The decline of the Roman Church*

At this point, we must take into account the deteriorating condition of the papacy during the fateful years that preceded the schism of 1054.

It seems that both Patriarch Photius and Pope John VIII died the same year (891). Formosus succeeded John as Pope of Rome and did his best to heal the schism with the East. But he was primarily concerned with his own realm and unable to accomplish much.

Let us refer to a traditional Roman Catholic source for a glimpse at the sad state of the papacy in those days:

By now the Papal throne had become nothing but a pawn at the mercy of the great feudal families of Italy. This was made even more evident with the election of Pope Stephen VI (896). He was merely a puppet in their hands and went so far as to allow them to manipulate him in a way that brought great embarrassment to the Church and the Chair of Peter. Stephen VI [had the decaying body of his predecessor Formosus exhumed] and propped up in a mock trial presided over by Stephen VI himself. To no one's surprise Formosus was declared guilty of perjury and other crimes by this kangaroo court and to add insult to desecration, they not only nullified all the ordinations and acts Formosus had pronounced, but chopped off the three fingers of his right hand which this holy man had

¹ Of course, many Popes were 'Greeks' not 'Latins,' including St. Agatho.

used to swear in, crown and bless. They then threw his body into the Tiber.¹

The dismal condition of the Church of Rome in the years that preceded the pontificate of Leo IX is well-known, and perhaps too embarrassing to detail here. To be sure, the state of the Papacy at the turn of the millennium was indicative of a grave spiritual crisis, one that was bound to affect the relationship between Rome and Constantinople. Truly, 'love had grown cold,' and the political rivalry between two 'Roman Empires' would lead Christendom to a disastrous divorce.

2. *The problem with forgeries*

The ninth century witnessed the production of large amount of spurious documents whose influence would be considerable. Patristic quotations and canonical collections were among the target of such 'revisions.'

Protestant apologist William Webster argues forcefully that these forgeries had a profound influence on the development of the papacy. He writes:

[In] the 9th century, a literary forgery occurred which completely revolutionized the ancient government of the Church in the West. It provided a legal foundation for the ascendancy of the papacy in Western Christendom. This forgery is known as the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals, written around 845 A.D. The Decretals are a complete fabrication of Church history. They set forth precedents for the exercise of sovereign authority of the popes over the universal Church prior to the fourth century and make it appear that the popes had always exercised sovereign dominion and had ultimate authority even over Church Councils.²

Webster is among those who contend that Pope Nicholas I, Photius' opponent, had been the first to use the *False Decretals* to support his claims of authority. This point is highly controversial and should be considered speculative. On the other hand, it is well established and significant that Cardinal Humbert, writing for Pope Leo IX, quoted extensively from these forgeries in his correspondence with Patriarch Michael Cerularius. It is the same Cardinal Humbert who would later place a bull of excommunication on the altar of the Church of Constantinople, on a fateful day of July 1054.

¹ *Daily Catholic: History of the Church*, Chapter 4, accessed electronically.

² *Forgeries and the Papacy: The Historical Influence and Use of Forgeries in Promotion of the Doctrine of the Papacy*, William Webster, published electronically.

Most historians would agree with Webster that during the course of the 11th century, the *Decretals* were used in a significant way to alter the government of the Western Church¹. *The False Decretals* were combined with other forgeries, especially *The Donation of Constantine* and the *Liber Pontificalis*, and compiled into a system of canon law which granted to the popes absolute authority over the Church in the West. In 1151, a monk and jurist named Gratian published the *Decretum*, a collection of everything - genuine and spurious - that could be gathered to establish the historical precedents of Papal supremacy². The *Decretum* was extremely successful and became a standard work of canon law for the Roman Church.

In addition to the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals*, the *Donations of Constantine* and the *Decretum*, another type of forgery should be mentioned. At some point during the early 1200s, an unknown Latin forger created a compilation of patristic quotations which consisted of a mixture of genuine and spurious writings from the Greek Fathers. This document was accepted by Pope Urban IV (who was almost certainly unaware of its origin) and became widely known as the *Thesaurus Graecorum Patrum* or *Thesaurus of the Greek Fathers*. Sadly, these forgeries were able to influence Scholastic theology and found their way into such important documents as *Against the errors of the Greeks* of St. Thomas Aquinas. The following is a striking example:

Chapter thirty-five: That he enjoys the same power conferred on Peter by Christ.

It is also shown that Peter is the Vicar of Christ and the Roman Pontiff is Peter's successor enjoying the same power conferred on Peter by Christ. For the canon of the Council of Chalcedon says: "If any bishop is sentenced as guilty of infamy, he is free to appeal the sentence to the blessed bishop of old Rome, whom we have as Peter the rock of refuge, and to him alone, in the place of God, with unlimited power, is granted the authority to hear the appeal of a bishop accused of infamy in virtue of the keys given him by the Lord." And further on: "And whatever has been decreed by him is to be held as from the vicar of the apostolic throne."

Likewise, Cyril, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, says, speaking in the person of Christ: "You for a while, but I without end will be fully and perfectly in sacrament and authority with all those whom I shall put in your place, just as I am also with you." And Cyril of Alexandria in his *Thesaurus* says that the Apostles "in the Gospels and Epistles have affirmed in all their teaching that Peter and his Church are in the place of the Lord, granting him participation in every chapter and assembly, in every election and proclamation of doctrine." And further on: "To him, that is, to Peter, all by

¹ TSATR, p. 95-99

² For instance, the *Decretum* included quotes from the Donation of Constantine.

divine ordinance bow the head, and the rulers of the world obey him as the Lord Jesus himself.” And Chrysostom, speaking in the person of Christ, says: “Feed my sheep (John 21:17), that is, in my place be in charge of your brethren.”¹

With the exception of the last reference to Chrysostom, all these quotations are forgeries. It is certain that the great theologian used the *Thesaurus* with intellectual honesty, unaware of its spurious contents, but in the process, the possibility of a meaningful dialogue with the East was greatly compromised.²

Exactly what role did these forgeries play, both in defending Papal supremacy in the West and causing schism with the East? It is hard to say. Many of the popes of the first seven centuries had been explicit enough regarding their Petrine claim of authority. Yet, there was a difference between having primacy as First See in the universal Church and the absolute supremacy, temporal and spiritual, advocated by the forgeries. It is my assessment that spirit and type of primacy expressed by the forgeries did mark the consciousness of the Roman Church from the pontificate of Nicholas I onward.

3. *The Great Schism of 1054*

Technically speaking, the term ‘Great Schism’ refers to the mutual excommunications of Cardinal Humbert and Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople which took place in July 1054. The latter is often blamed for the chain of events that led to this incident, because of his intolerant policy towards Latin parishes in his ‘realm,’ but it is also certain that Cardinal Humbert was equally strong-headed on the issue of Greco-Latin relations. When Pope Leo decided to send a legation to Constantinople to improve the relationship between the two Sees, Humbert may not have been the wisest choice. As Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) observes:

¹ *Against the Errors of the Greeks*, Thomas Aquinas, in James Likoudis, *Ending the Byzantine Greek Schism*, New Rochelle, Catholics United for the Faith, 1992, pp. 182-184.

² James Likoudis is aware of this problem but argues that every spurious quote could in fact be replaced with a genuine equivalent. This approach works fairly well to establish Petrine primacy but is rather unsuccessful in the case of papal supremacy. At any rate, select quotations from the Fathers can be used to prove just about anything, hence the need to understand what is often called “the mind of the Fathers.”

The choice of Cardinal Humbert was unfortunate for both he and Cerularius were men of stiff and intransigent temper, whose mutual encounter was not likely to promote good will among Christians.¹

The Papal legate had brought with him to Constantinople a refutation of the writings of Archbishop Leo of Ochrid which left no room for doubt as to his position on the status of Constantinople *vis-à-vis* Rome:

No one can deny that, just as the whole door is directed by its handle, so the order and structure of the whole Church is defined by Peter and his successors. And just as the handle pushes and pulls the door while itself remaining stationary, so Peter and his successors have the right to pronounce judgment on any local church. No one should resist them in any way or try to usurp their place for the supreme seat is not to be judged by anyone.²

The Cardinal's refutation led to a series of public debates where the Eastern position was defended by Nicetas Stethatos. At the end of the last session, the Emperor declared Humbert victorious, a move which may have emboldened the Papal legate for his next move. Angered by the attitude of Patriarch Michael, he composed a bull of excommunication which listed a number of Greek 'heresies' and proceeded to the great cathedral of Hagia Sofia. There, he placed the parchment on the high altar and having shaken the dust from his feet, departed.

The bull itself was directed specifically against the Patriarch and his followers, but the errors listed on the document applied to all Eastern Christians: the Cardinal accused the Greeks of permitting priests to marry, of rebaptizing Latin Christians, of being corrupted by simony, of refusing communion from clean shaven men and of having removed the *filioque* from the Creed! One can only wonder how a constructive public debate could have taken place a few weeks earlier without such erroneous notions being addressed and corrected.

This action, promptly reciprocated by Michael Cerularius, was not only strictly personal, it was also void because Pope Leo had died during the mission, leaving his legate without a valid mandate. Eastern Orthodox historian Harry Magoulas writes with lucidity:

The schism of 1054, it should be emphasized, involved only a handful of high churchmen and was little noticed by the masses. It was only with the events inaugurated by the First Crusade and culminating in the Fourth

¹ TOC, p. 67.

² *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, Alexander Schmemmann, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1977, pg. 249

Crusade that sufficient hostility was generated among the inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire to make reconciliation impossible.¹

It is difficult for us to assess the degree of estrangement between Latin and Greek Christianity at this time in history. It seems clear that wherever both rites came into contact (e.g. Bulgaria, Southern Italy), the reaction was explosive. Indeed, the two 'ways of doing things' had become incompatible, both in popular perception and in terms of ecclesiastical administration. The two 'Churches' simply didn't look the same with married bearded priest on one side and clean shaven celibates on the other! Several factors, including the order of the grievances contained in Humbert's bull, seem to indicate that the issue of celibacy was among the most sensitive, and indeed, it remains so today. In spite of all this, there was a deep sense that a complete break with the West in general and with the See of Rome in particular was not a good idea. Writing to his colleague Patriarch Michael of Constantinople, Peter of Antioch expressed profound grief and dismay at the news of what had just happened:

I beg and implore your divine beatitude, kneeling in spirit at your sacred knees, to yield under this blow and bow to circumstance. I tremble lest, while you endeavor to sew up the wound, it may turn to something worse, to schism; lest while you try to raise up what has been smitten down, a worse fall may be in store. Consider the obvious result of all of this, I mean the yawning gulf that must ultimately separate from our holy Church that magnanimous and apostolic see... Life henceforth will be filled with wickedness, and the whole world over turned. If two queens of the earth are at loggerheads, then alas! Abundant sorrow will reign everywhere; our armies will nowhere again be victorious.

In the end, it would take much more than a conflict between two arrogant and misinformed clerics to bring about complete schism in the common union. The tragic adventure of the Crusades followed by doomed councils of union would simply confirm that is was no longer possible to hold together two divergent ecclesiological, theological and political systems.

¹ *Byzantine Christianity: Emperor, Church and the West*, Harry Magoulas, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1982, pg. 116.

VIII. PAPAL PRIMACY AFTER 1054

1. *The Gregorian Reforms*

The schism of 1054, although intended to be personal and repairable, actually brought about a permanent rupture of communion between Rome and the four Eastern Patriarchates¹. Rome had always been the only patriarchate in the West, and now it had become the only center of gravity of Western Christendom. In fact, the Pope's struggle to establish his authority against that of kings, lords and bishops (in the West) was very intense. In order to be in a position to implement a policy of radical centralization and reform, Gregory VII (†1085) led the concept of Roman primacy to a new level. The famous *Dictatus Papae*, included in the Papal register in 1075, stated that:

- The Roman church was founded by God alone
- The Roman pontiff alone can with right be called universal
- In a council his legate, even if a lower grade, is above all bishops, and can pass sentence of deposition against them
- For him alone is it lawful, according to the needs of the time, to make new laws, to assemble together new congregations, to make an abbey of a canonry; and, on the other hand, to divide a rich bishopric and unite the poor ones
- No synod shall be called a general one without his order
- A sentence passed by him may be retracted by no one; and that he himself, alone of all, may retract it and that he himself may be judged by no one
- The Roman church has never erred; nor will it err to all eternity, the Scripture bearing witness
- He may depose and reinstate bishops without assembling a synod
- He who is not at peace with the Roman church shall not be considered catholic
- He may absolve subjects from their fealty to wicked men.²

In the bold words of Roman Catholic historian Klaus Schatz, "this document has become the symbol of a papacy that, by its claim to sovereign power, even goes so far as to take the place of Christ."¹

¹ Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem

² *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, Ernest F. Henderson, George Bell and Sons, London, 1910, pp. 366-367

Yet, these statements are a fairly accurate representation of how Rome then understood and to an extent still understands her primacy, and how tremendously different it is from the Eastern Orthodox model. Indeed, the code of canon law of 1983 reiterates the same principles of government:

Canon 331 - The office uniquely committed by the Lord to Peter, the first of the Apostles, and to be transmitted to his successors, abides in the Bishop of the Church of Rome. He is the head of the College of Bishops, the Vicar of Christ, and the Pastor of the universal Church here on earth. Consequently, by virtue of his office, he has supreme, full, immediate and universal ordinary power in the Church, and he can always freely exercise this power.

Canon 333 - 1° By virtue of his office, the Roman Pontiff not only has power over the universal Church, but also has pre-eminent ordinary power over all particular Churches and their groupings. This reinforces and defends the proper, ordinary and immediate power which the Bishops have in the particular Churches entrusted to their care.

2° The Roman Pontiff, in fulfilling his office as supreme Pastor of the Church, is always joined in full communion with the other Bishops, and indeed with the universal Church. He has the right, however, to determine, according to the needs of the Church, whether this office is to be exercised in a personal or in a collegial manner.

3° There is neither appeal nor recourse against a judgment or a decree of the Roman Pontiff.

This vision of a centralized government from Rome was in full harmony with the Western paradigm of universal ecclesiology. In that sense, nothing really new happens after 1054 – reunion with the East is impossible, and the ongoing decay of the West is paving the way for the revolt of a Martin Luther². I will therefore only provide a few highlights of the events leading to the apex of 1870.

2. *Innocent III (1198-1216)*

The twelfth and thirteenth century are chiefly remembered for the tragedy of the Crusades, the Sack of Constantinople and the failed union council of Lyons (1254). Even before the pontificate of Innocent III, the animosity between Greeks and Latin had gone well beyond the realm of theological disputations:

¹ *La Primauté du Pape*, Klaus Schatz, CERF, Paris, 1998, p. 136

² After 1054, 'Rus' became the new powerhouse of the Eastern Orthodoxy. The Eastern Roman shrank and struggled until 1453. The East escaped the turmoil of the Reformation but certainly not on account of its spiritual health.

The growing animosity between the Greeks and Crusaders flamed up into open conflict at the end of the twelfth century. In 1185, the Knights captured and sacked Salonika, the second largest city of the Byzantine Empire; they conducted themselves with such complete disregard for the sanctity of Christian Churches that horror and indignation overwhelmed the whole of the Christian East. Contemporary Greek historians describe how the drunken soldiers danced on the alters of Orthodox Churches, how the sacred vessels and reserved sacrament, together with the icons, were made the object of the most revolting abuses, and how the corpses of men, women, and children were profaned by the conquerors. The Greeks were staggered by the scenes of deliberate cruelty and sacrilege, for the Moslems, their inveterate enemies, had always showed a genuine respect for places of worship.¹

It is at the price of a final separation with the Christian East that Innocent III led the papacy to new heights of authority, both theologically and politically.

Since St. Leo the Great, the popes had adopted the title *Vicarius Petri* which Innocent deemed insufficient: for him, the pope of Rome was successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ with plenitude of spiritual and temporal powers. This evolution is somewhat noteworthy because the latter title was officially adopted in the decrees of the council of Florence and in the dogmatic constitution of Vatican I.

Still, the title 'Vicar of Christ' was not new in terms of ecclesiology² – what was different was its extension to the political realm. Innocent's views on temporal authority are well expressed in his letter to Italian aristocrats:

Just as the moon derives its light from the sun so too the royal power derives the splendor of its dignity from the pontifical authority.³

In terms of relations between East and West, Innocent's pontificate marks a turning point. The pope supported the Fourth Crusade whose aim was to free the Holy Land from the Turks who had conquered Jerusalem in 1071. This goal was never accomplished. Instead, the crusader turned against the "Greeks" with an equal sense of self-righteousness. One of the Latin knights, Robert of Clari, offers a first-hand account of the events leading to the sack of 'the Great Church of Christ:'

¹ Article by Yuri Koszarycz, Australian Catholic University, published electronically.

² Of course, 'Vicar of Christ' is theologically speaking a very problematic title. The expression was first used by Tertullian in reference to the Holy Spirit, and it may be argued that the only true 'Vicar of Christ' is indeed the Paraclete promised by our Lord in John 14.

³ Tierney, 1964: 132

Meanwhile the bishops and the clergy in the army debated and decided that the war was a righteous one, and that they certainly ought to attack the Greeks. For formerly the inhabitants of the city had been obedient to the law of Rome and now they were disobedient... And the bishops said that for this reason one ought certainly to attack them, and that it was not a sin, but an act of great charity... Moreover, the bishops said that, by the authority of God and in the name of the pope, they would absolve all who attacked the Greeks. Then the bishops commanded the pilgrims to confess their sins and receive the communion devoutly; and said that they ought not to hesitate to attack the Greeks, for the latter were enemies of God.¹

This is how Constantinople was tragically conquered and sacked in 1204. Pope Innocent first expressed sorrow and outrage, but the deed was done and had to be used for some advantage. The Pope wrote to the crusaders:

If the Lord had granted the desires of His humble servants sooner, and had transferred, as He has now done, the Empire of Constantinople from the Greeks to the Latins before the fall of the Holy Land, perhaps Christianity would not be weeping today over the desolation of the land of Jerusalem. Since, therefore, through the wonderful transference of this empire God has deigned to open to you a way to recover that land, and the detention of this may lead to the restoration of that, we advise and exhort you all, and we enjoin upon you for the remission of your sins, to remain for a year in Romania², in order to strengthen the Empire in its devotion to the apostolic See and to us, and in order to retain it in the power of the Latins.³

Clearly, the 'devotions of empires to the apostolic See' had become of paramount importance. The great Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates reveals the state of shock experienced by 'the Greeks' in these haunting words:

In truth, they were exposed as frauds. Seeking to avenge the Holy Sepulcher, they raged openly against Christ and sinned by overturning the Cross with the Cross they bore on their backs, not even shuddering to trample on it for the sake of a little gold and silver... The sons of Ishmael (the Moslems) did not behave in this way! The enemies of Christ dealt magnanimously with the infidels, inflicting upon them neither sword, nor fire, nor hunger, nor persecution, nor nakedness, nor bruises, nor constraints. How differently, as we have briefly recounted, the Latins treated us who love Christ and are their fellow believers, guiltless of any wrong against them.⁴

¹ *European History*, Dana Carlton Munro, vol. III, no. 1, University of Pennsylvania, 1907, pp. 13-14.

² Romania was the expression for the Eastern portion of the Roman Empire.

³ *Regesta went. Rern.*, No. 2507. Possible date: May 20, 1205

⁴ *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Niketas Choniates, H. J. Magoulias, trans., Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1984. pp 316-317.

Amazingly, the Eastern Roman Empire would soon resurface for another two hundred years of struggling existence, until that fateful day of May 1453.

3. *Unam Sanctam: Papacy and Salvation*

Under Pope Innocent III, Papal authority over temporal rulers was affirmed both in theory and practice. Within eighty years, Pope Boniface VIII would make even stronger claims of temporal authority and express the somewhat bizarre theory of “the two swords”:

Certainly the one who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter has not listened well to the word of the Lord commanding: ‘Put up thy sword into thy scabbard’ [Mt 26:52]. Both, therefore, are in the power of the Church. However, one sword ought to be subordinated to the other and temporal authority, subjected to spiritual power.

In spite of its political overtones, this famous bull, *Unam Sanctam* (1302), is ultimately about salvation. The pontiff opens with the words:

Urged by faith, we are obliged to believe and to maintain that the Church is one, holy, catholic, and also apostolic. We believe in her firmly and we confess with simplicity that outside of her there is neither salvation nor the remission of sins.

The Roman formula: Salvation = Church = Peter = Pope, is then applied to ‘the Greeks’:

Therefore, of the one and only Church there is one body and one head, that is, Christ and the Vicar of Christ, Peter and the successor of Peter, since the Lord speaking to Peter Himself said: ‘Feed my sheep’...Therefore, if the Greeks or others should say that they are not confided to Peter and to his successors¹, they must confess not being the sheep of Christ.

From this logic, Pope Boniface concludes with words often understood as conveying Ex-Cathedra authority:

Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.²

This is universal ecclesiology pushed to its logical conclusion: if there is no salvation outside the Church and if one has to be in communion-subjection to the Roman Pontiff to be in the Church, then *Unam Sanctam*

¹ Of course, the Eastern would have affirmed with St. John Chrysostom that they were “confided to Peter and his successors,” the bishops.

² *Unam Sanctam*, quoted in TP, p. 112. This bull was typically considered Ex-Cathedra and infallible until Vatican II.

makes perfect sense. Indeed, starting with this controversial bull and consistently after Florence, Rome would often express the idea that salvation is inseparably connected to the Papal office. As late as 1903, Pope Leo XIII declared:

This is our last lesson to you: receive it, engrave it in your minds, all of you: by God's commandment, salvation is to be found nowhere but in the Church; the strong and effective instrument of salvation is none other than the Roman Pontificate.¹

Indeed, the Church almost became identified with the Roman Church:

[Enlighten] the minds wretchedly enfolded in the darkness of ignorance and sin, that they may clearly recognize the Holy, Catholic, Roman Church to be the only true Church of Jesus Christ, outside of which neither sanctity nor salvation can be found. Call them to the unity of the one fold, granting them the grace to believe every truth of our holy faith and to submit themselves to the Supreme Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth...²

As recently as 1958, John XXIII, although considered 'modern and liberal,' declared during his enthronement address:

How beautiful is the Church of Christ, "the fold of the sheep!" Into this fold of Jesus Christ no man may enter unless he is led by the Sovereign Pontiff, and only if they be united to him can men be saved.³

It is in this context that we can understand the words of Pope Pius XI and his reference to Photius: the 'Church' is identified with the Church of Rome, and primacy is to be understood and embraced as "supremacy:"

Furthermore, in this one Church of Christ no man can be or remain who does not accept, recognize and obey the authority and supremacy of Peter and his legitimate successors. Did not the ancestors of those who are now entangled in the errors of Photius and the reformers, obey the Bishop of Rome, the chief shepherd of souls? Alas their children left the home of their fathers, but it did not fall to the ground and perish for ever, for it was supported by God. Let them therefore return to their common Father, who, forgetting the insults previously heaped on the apostolic See, will receive them in the most loving fashion. For if, as they continually state, they long to be united with Us and ours, why do they not hasten to enter the Church, "the Mother and mistress of all Christ's faithful?"⁴

¹ *Papal Teachings: The Church*, Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, St. Paul Editions, Boston, 1962, par. 653

² *The Raccolta*, Pope Pius XII, Benzinger Brothers, Boston, 1957, No. 626

³ *Coronation Homily*, Pope John XXIII

⁴ *Mortalium Animos*, Pope Pius XI (1928)

The two ecclesiologies described at length in this study have come into full bloom¹, and the results are clearly incompatible.

4. *The Great Western Schism*

In 1307, Clement V moved the Papal court to Avignon, France. The Papacy became entangled in French politics and in dubious schemes aimed at filling its treasury. These two factors, coupled with the divorce between ancient Rome and the Papacy, resulted in a tremendous loss of prestige and influence. According to Jesuit historian Klaus Schatz:

The most dangerous crisis of its history and the loss of authority with most consequences to this day, the papacy has known them during and after the Great Schism of 1378-1417.²

When Pope Gregory XI (†1378) decided to return to Rome, the stage was set for a confrontation between rival factions. For a period of forty years, the Roman Catholic Church had two, then three claimants to the Papal throne, all of them with a certain amount of legitimacy and political support. Ultimately, it took a council (Constance) to vacate all three seats and elect Martin V as Pope in 1417. In the conciliar decree *Haec Sancta*, it was unambiguously affirmed that “everyone, even with Papal dignity” is subject to the Council. This was the only way to restore to the Western Church the very office that was supposed to have protected it from schisms and heresies. Indeed, it was the strength of Conciliarism in the West that made possible this *tour-de-force* solution to the Papal Schism.

IX. DOOMED ATTEMPTS AT REUNION

1. *The council of Lyons (1274)*

This failed council of union is considered as the 14th Ecumenical Council by the Roman Catholic Church. In the wake of the Sack of Constantinople, the ‘Byzantine’ Empire was able to rise from its ashes, but weakened and under constant pressure from the Turks. Understandably, the Emperors were eager to secure an ecclesiological, political and military alliance with the West.

¹ Of course, the full bloom is Roman Catholic ecclesiology is Vatican I (1870), although we have seen that the *Formula Hormisdæ* was substantially equivalent. Let us note, however, that Vatican II and especially the pontificate of John Paul II would be marked by a significant ‘reinterpretation’ of these statements.

² Klaus Schatz, *La Primauté du Pape*, CERF, Paris, 1998

The council of Lyons is a good example of the new state of mind that resulted from the tragedy of the Crusades. The people and low-clergy were now vehemently opposed to the union while the ruling class was willing to 'be flexible' to secure Western aid. The dogmatic decrees of the council, approved by a small Greek delegation under pressure from Emperor Michael VIII, showed little room for compromise. On the issue of the *filioque*, Rome made it clear that it was not just 'a Spanish addition to refute Arianism'; it was a dogmatic truth about the ontological nature of the Godhead:

1. We profess faithfully and devotedly that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, not as from two principles, but as from one principle; not by two spirations, but by one single spiration. This the holy Roman church, mother and mistress of all the Faithful, has till now professed, preached and taught; this she firmly holds, preaches, professes and teaches; this is the unchangeable and true belief of the orthodox fathers and doctors, Latin and Greek alike. But because some, on account of ignorance of the said indisputable truth, have fallen into various errors, we, wishing to close the way to such errors, with the approval of the sacred council, condemn and reprove all who presume to deny that the holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, or rashly to assert that the holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as from two principles and not as from one.¹

As we have seen, Latin theologians, notably St. Thomas Aquinas, had been unable to reach a more balanced assessment of the patristic terminology because of their reliance on the *Thesaurus* and their dependency on St. Augustine. Not surprisingly, the union signed at Lyons failed to produce any lasting results.

2. The council of Florence (1439)

The council of Florence should not only be remembered as a failed council of union with the East. At a time of great struggle between the Conciliarists gathered at Basle and Pope Eugene, the Greek decision to negotiate with Pope Eugene dealt a fatal blow to the council of Basle and to the Conciliar movement in general. With Florence, the weakened Papacy overcame the greatest crisis of its history and obtained full (if artificial and short-lived) support from the East. As the *Catholic Encyclopedia* admits:

One advantage, at least, resulted from the Council of Florence: it proclaimed before both Latins and Greeks that the Roman pontiff was the

¹ *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, p. 286. See our discussion of the *filioque* controversy in our Theological section.

foremost ecclesiastical authority in Christendom; and Eugene IV was able to arrest the schism which had been threatening the Western Church anew. This council was, therefore, witness to the prompt rehabilitation of Papal supremacy...¹

The reader will understand that a comprehensive review of the events and discussions that took place at Florence is beyond the scope of this essay. In one sense, it might be said that anyone serious about dialogue and reunion between today's 'Greeks and Latins' should be familiar with the details of the proceedings². At the same time, our present intent is only to give a rather brief overview of the historical events beyond 1054, which means that our discussion of the theological aspects of the council will be postponed. Suffice it to say that the Roman doctrine of the *filioque* was phrased in a way that could be considered reasonably compatible with the Eastern emphasis on the 'Monarchy of the Father.'

Whatever the Father is or has, he has not from another but from himself and is principle without principle. Whatever the Son is or has, he has from the Father and is principle from principle. Whatever the Holy Spirit is or has, he has from the Father together with the Son. But the Father and the Son are not two principles of the Holy Spirit, but one principle, just as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three principles of creation but one principle.

More importantly for our historical study of the Roman primacy, the title "true Vicar of Christ" was adopted at what the Latin West would soon consider to be an Ecumenical Council. This is significant because Vatican I would rely on the authority of Florence to re-affirm this title and to promulgate the dogma of Papal infallibility.

The lesson to learn from Florence is that even though both sides were willing to debate and compromise, to the point of signing a formula of union, the end result is that of an unmitigated failure. Moreover, the issue of ecclesiology was never seriously discussed. Technically, the union lasted until 1472 when it was officially repudiated by a synod held under Patriarch Dionysius of Constantinople. The problem is that this time, it was the people who adamantly opposed any kind of 'union by compromise.' The eagerness of the Eastern emperor and bishops to sign documents that were 'acceptable' was fed by military and political considerations, not by a sense of genuine unity. This lasted as long as both sides could ignore or reinterpret their wording. Instead of being an-depth examination of the fundamental differences between Greek and Latin

¹ CE, Entry "Council of Florence."

² Two major sources are *The Council of Florence* by Joseph Gill (RC), and a decidedly more polemical Orthodox perspective with the same title by Ivan Ostromoff.

theology, the council failed to take into account the mindset of the Orthodox Communion as a whole. Florence turned out to be a Rome-Constantinople transaction which was effectively ignored by the other Eastern Patriarchates and violently squashed by the Muscovites.¹

In the end, the council of 'Basel-Ferrara-Florence' is only a reflection of the agonizing state of Christendom at the end of the Middle Ages. Constantinople would fall within twenty years, and already, Martin Luther's shadow is lurking on the doorsteps of Wittenberg Castle Church.

3. *Beyond Florence*

The repudiation of the union of Florence by the Greeks and Slavs marked the beginning of a new era: the Latin West had effectively become the Roman Catholic Church, and the East was quickly evolving into a loose communion of autocephalous Orthodox Churches. It was no longer time for hope and dialogue: the Schism was deeply entrenched and the efforts were no longer towards reconciliation but aggressive conversion and assimilation (mostly from the Latin side).

The events connected with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation have little relevance to the historical aspect of this study. It is interesting to note, though, that it is the problem of indulgences, a practice rejected by the Orthodox, that became the trigger of Martin Luther's Reformation. In dealing with the Protestant theological arguments, the Church of Rome formulated responses conditioned by a frame of mind far removed from that of the Fathers. This scholastic and Counter-Reformation approach had a profound impact on the teaching of theology not only in the West, but also throughout the Orthodox world. This 'pseudomorphosis' of Patristic theology into Latinized systematization was often denounced by Fr. Georges Florovsky:

The Seventeenth century was a critical age in the history of Eastern theology. The teaching of theology had deviated at that time from the traditional patristic pattern and had undergone influence from the West. Theological habits and schemes were borrowed from the West, rather eclectically, both from the late Roman Scholasticism of Post-Tridentine times and from the various theologies of the Reformation. These borrowings affected heavily the theology of the alleged "Symbolic books"

¹ The Union of Florence had a more lasting effect in Kiev, a fact which may have been instrumental in the acceptance of the Union of Brest in 1596 (see below).

of the Eastern Church, which cannot be regarded as an authentic voice of the Christian East. The *style of theology* has been changed.¹

The crippling of the ancient patriarchates under the yoke of the Ottoman Turks, the rise to power of the 'Third Rome' (Moscow), the merger of national politics with ecclesiastical affairs make up of the somber background of the next level of antagonism between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy: the Unia.

X. UNIATISM

1. *The Union of Brest (1596)*

At the outset, it should be said that 'the Unia²,' as a method, is no longer the official and politically correct means by which Rome seeks to unite the Orthodox. This evolution is rather recent but marks an extremely important step in laying the groundwork for an acceptable path of reconciliation.

First, let us define what the so-called 'Unia' is: it is the reintegration of Orthodox Christians into communion with the Church of Rome by means of a canonical structure which allows them to retain their Eastern rites and customs. In 1993, the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches³ identified it as "the proselyte activity on the part of Catholics" which results in "the union of individuals or particular churches of the east with Rome rather than aiming at the restoration of full union with the entire Church⁴ of the east."

The two largest 'Uniate' groups are the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Melkite Patriarchate, although there are other 'non-Latin' Catholic Churches⁵.

¹ *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol. IV, "Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church," Part II, Nordland Publishing, Belmont, MA, p. 15-22

² I would like to repeat that 'Unia' is used as a purely technical term, without any intended pejorative meaning.

³ This is referring to the agreement signed in Balamand, Lebanon.

⁴ Obviously, I would rather see 'orthodox catholic Churches of the East'.

⁵ In the past, these groups were considered 'rites' of the Catholic Church. The modern expression is 'Eastern Catholic Churches,' which conveys the idea that the Roman Catholic Church is now a communion of Churches: the very large Latin Church and the smaller

The reason why the Church of Rome aggressively sought to reintegrate these Orthodox communities is twofold: political and ecclesiological. In the case of the Union of Brest-Litovsk which will preoccupy us here, the presence of a large Orthodox community in the *Rech Pospolita*¹ was troublesome for the Roman Catholic king and for the Latin bishops. We can certainly understand that the Orthodox bishops were interested in restoring communion with the Latins while ‘changing nothing essential.’

The ecclesiological motivation was on the Roman Catholic side: the Latins believed in all seriousness that anyone not in submission to the pope could not be saved, a belief system we have already documented. As Archbishop Vsevolod of Scopelos noted in his remarkable *We are all Brothers*, the Ruthenian Orthodox had no such understanding. Two years before the Union, the Orthodox hierarchs still wrote that along with the Roman Catholic, they were “people of the same God” and “children of the same mother, the holy catholic Church.” In other words, they came forward as separated but salvific Churches, hoping to secure communion with the See of Rome on a relatively equal basis. The Ruthenian Orthodox bishops who made the journey to Rome had been warned by the Papal Nuncio not to expect any such recognition. Archbishop Vsevolod continues:

The Metropolitan and the Bishops adopted certain Articles for the Union which they desired. Pope Clement VIII had these articles reviewed by a Papal commission, which *rejected* them on the ground that membership in the Roman Church is essential for salvation, and therefore no one seeking that membership may attach any preconditions... [They] were supposed to have lived outside the true Church of God until the moment of their union with Rome.

This appears with absolute clarity in the text of the constitution *Magnus Dominus* which proclaimed the union. This Papal document says that the Ruthenian bishops came to the conclusion that they themselves and the flock entrusted to their responsibility “had not been members of Christ’s Body which is the Church, because they lacked any link with the visible head of His Church, the Supreme Roman Pontiff”; that “they were not inside the sheepfold of Christ, inside the Ark of Salvation”...²

twenty-two Eastern entities known as ‘Churches’ or ‘rites’ (the terminology remains somewhat unsettled). See the *Annuario Pontificio* and UTR, pp. 136,137.

¹ The Kingdom of Poland and Great Lithuanian Principality united into a federative state in 1569.

² WAAB, pp. 199-202

It is easy to see how the development of the Roman primacy discussed in this Historical section is relevant to the relationship between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. In the framework of universal Petrine ecclesiology dogmatized by Rome, there can only be a return to “the common Father and Shepherd.” Hence, ‘union’ is understood as an unconditional submission to Rome with the hope to retain whatever peculiarities the Roman Pontiff is willing to accept. This conviction was expressed by the great Roman Catholic catechist Fr. John Hardon (†2000):

As Bishops of Rome, the Popes have succeeded St. Peter as visible heads of the Church on earth. From Peter on, over the centuries, the Bishops of Rome have been thus recognized by all believing Catholics. The Pope is therefore called the Vicar of Christ because he has received from the Divine Master delegated authority over all the People of God. [The Pope] has supreme authority to teach and govern the universal Church. This authority is not merely nominal, but real. It is not merely honorary, but binding in conscience on everyone who belongs to the Catholic Church.

Christ waited until the end of the first century before He solemnly declared that His Church rests on visible authority which is the papal primacy. Since the close of the first century, this has been the final test of whether a person who calls himself a Christian is also Catholic. Every break in Catholic unity has been based on the rejection of the papacy. Correspondingly, every union among Catholics has been based on the acceptance of papal authority. As we enter the third millennium, this will be the great hope of reuniting a dismembered Christendom. The great hope of one Roman pontiff after another has been to restore unity among Christians by restoring the authority of the Bishop of Rome. There is nothing on earth that is more desperately needed to reunite Christendom than to recognize the Pope as the Vicar of Christ on earth.¹



Perhaps the most tragic aspect of the Union of Brest is that it deepened the schism not only between Catholics and Orthodox but even failed to bring any real union between Latin Catholics and Greek Catholics. Archbishop Vsevolod rightly criticizes that misleading word of ‘Union.’

But the “union” of Brest of 1596 did not put anyone into Eucharistic communion with anyone else. Roman Catholics were *forbidden* to receive the Eucharist from the Greek-Catholic clergy. Nearly three hundred years later, when Andrew Sheptytsky was ordained to the priesthood in 1892, it required a special Papal dispensation, obtained directly from Pope Leo XIII, for him to be allowed to give his own father and mother Holy

¹ Article *The Papacy Unites the Catholic Church*, Catholic Faith Magazine, May/June 1999

Communion on the occasion of his first celebration of the Divine Liturgy – and even with that extraordinary Papal dispensation, the newly-ordained Father Andrew could not communicate his parents in public, nor with the Holy Eucharist from his own celebration of the Divine Liturgy... Under these circumstances, it is seriously inaccurate to suggest that this community was “in Communion” with Rome.

Hence, it should be abundantly clear that ‘Uniatism,’ to put it mildly, cannot be considered a satisfactory approach to end the Schism between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. We should rejoice that this approach has been abandoned by the Roman Catholic Church, although we must also notice that no official Papal statement has publicly and officially affirmed the end of ‘Uniatism’ as a method.¹ The Balamand agreement of 1993 is only an agreed text of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches, not an official statement of the Church of Rome.² The reason for the official *status quo* is in fact simple, as Cardinal Walter Kasper frankly admitted in 2001:

The problem and the accusation of proselytism and so-called ‘uniatism’ is to some degree a projection of fear and a form of self-protection.

However, the demand of the Orthodox churches to discuss and solve first the problem of ‘uniatism’ before continuing with the agreed agenda of the dialogue has led to a dead end. How can we solve these problems without speaking about the Petrine ministry which is the very rationale of the existence of the Catholic Oriental churches?³

Cardinal Kasper is quite lucid: ‘Uniatism’ is connected with the underlying issue of ecclesiology, and this is what has to be discussed (and hopefully resolved) first. Universal-Petrine ecclesiology is the theological foundation of ‘Uniatism,’ and we must first of all agree on what we mean by ‘Petrine ministry.’

In this study, we have seen that a ministry of universal communion analogous to that of Peter would be desirable to ensure the coherence of the common union of all the catholic orthodox Churches. Yet, the

¹ Of course, Greek Catholics are not to be rejected or abandoned because ‘uniatism’ as a method, with its underlying ecclesiology, has been renounced. This is made very clear in the Balamand agreement, although it should be noted that most Greek Catholic Churches denounced it as betrayal.

² The Agreement opens with this disclaimer: “As with all the results of the joint dialogue commissions, this common document belongs to the responsibility of the Commission itself, until the competent organs of the Catholic Church and of the Orthodox Churches express their judgment in regards to it.”

³ Accessed at vatican.va

persistence of universal Petrine ecclesiology (*à la* Vatican I) on the Roman Catholic side, (although now disconnected from the issue of salvation), remains the foundation of an approach that continues to disturb the Orthodox.

2. *The 'Melkite' Patriarchate*

Our discussion of 'Uniatism' would be incomplete without a brief discussion of other Greek Catholic communities. We have seen that 'monophysitism' became the majority position in both Alexandria and Antioch after 451. This resulted in the creation of separate communities led by a 'monophysite' patriarch: the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt and the Syrian Orthodox or Jacobite Church in Antioch. Those who remained faithful to the Chalcedonian faith of the Empire were called 'Melkites' – literally those who follow the king. Today, this adjective is normally reserved for the Greek Orthodox communities who accepted unity with Rome during the eighteenth century. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* offers a succinct and historically accurate overview of the events:

The latinizing tendency of Syria was so well-known that in 1722 a synod was held at Constantinople which drew up and sent to the Antiochene bishops a warning letter with a list of Latin heresies (in Assemani, "Bibl. Orient.," III, 639). However, in 1724 Seraphim Tanas, who had studied at the Roman Propaganda, was elected Patriarch of Antioch by the latinizing party. He at once made his submission to Rome and sent a Catholic profession of faith. He took the name Cyril (Cyril VI, 1274-1759); with him begins the line of Melchite patriarchs in the new sense (Uniates).

The relationship of these 'reunited' Christians with Rome has always been tense: one of the patriarchs was excommunicated by the Pope and several of their confessions of faith denounced as heretically non-Roman Catholic. In spite of this, Patriarch Maximus III (1833-1855) obtained, (from Rome) for himself and his successors, the additional titles of Alexandria and Jerusalem, whose 'Uniate' communities had been administered by the Melkite Catholic Patriarchate for several decades. As we shall see, the relationship between the Melkite hierarchy and Rome remains quite tense to this day, as their efforts to resist Latinization and curial control is now quite strong.

From an Orthodox perspective, what strikes many as disturbing is the ease with which the Roman Catholic Church has been giving Eastern sees

as effective or titular titles to her clergy¹. It would seem obvious that the recent title of 'Patriarch of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem', in spite of its Papal certification, is simply absurd. The Roman Catholic communion also has a 'Latin Patriarch' in Jerusalem and a 'Coptic Catholic Patriarch' in Alexandria, but those patriarchal titles mean almost nothing in Rome. This practice, which has not been reciprocated by the Orthodox, only creates more schisms in the local catholic Church, a tragedy with real consequences on the people.

By the grace of God, the relationship between the 'Rum'² Greek-Orthodox and Melchite Patriarchates is now very good. Perhaps the sight of these Christian communities struggling to survive in a predominantly Muslim context should encourage those of us who live in Europe or North America to reflect on the bleak future of a divided Christianity in today's world.

3. *The decay of Eastern Orthodoxy*

The reader may perhaps complain that our review of post-Schism Roman Catholicism has been extremely negative and one-sided. It is important, therefore, to discuss some aspects of Eastern Orthodoxy during the same period.

It is always difficult to assess to what extent the parishes and the people are actually impacted by the decay or compromises of the leadership. There is no doubt that both East and West were affected by the constant efforts of the civil authorities to control and subdue the power of the Church. In the West, the early fall of the Roman Empire meant that the Bishop of Rome became the effective ruler of the ancient capital and of what came to be known as 'the Papal States' (of which Vatican City is the only remnant). We have seen how the theory of the two swords meant that the Pope claimed absolute temporal powers in the West, a program which encountered much resistance. The investiture controversy, the tragedy of the Inquisition, political losses connected with the Reformation, the Anglican schism and the union of 'Church and Crown' in parts of Europe are manifestations of this long struggle for spiritual and temporal authority. This is a battle that Rome eventually lost

¹ Two examples among many; the very latinizing Ukrainian Catholic Bishop Roman Danylak is "Titular Bishop of Nyssa." Another Ukrainian Catholic Bishop, Demetrius Martin Greschuk, was "Titular Bishop of Nazianzus" between 1974 and 1986.

² For the Muslim rulers, the Orthodox patriarchates were always called 'Rum' (Roman), not Greek. This terminology endures to this day.

during the past two centuries: the 'triple crown' was set aside, along with the denunciation of civil liberties and freedom of religion.

The history of Christianity in the West, marked by violent contrasts of light and darkness, has no real equivalent in the Orthodox East. There, the struggle for survival of the Eastern Roman Empire, soon reduced to Constantinople and Thessalonica, was matched by the growth of Orthodoxy in the lands of Kiev and Moscow. After 1452, Eastern Orthodoxy was effectively divided into two blocks: the Greek and Slavic Churches subject to Ottoman Muslim rule on one side, the powerful and free realm of Russian Orthodoxy on the other. Although tolerable at first, the 'Rum Millet' of the Ottoman Turks meant that the Patriarch was now the 'Ethnarch' – the civil and religious leader – of the Christian population. The office was both dangerous and coveted; a large sum had to be paid by the incumbent and corruption was rife. At the parish level, the concern was survival, not missionary expansion: the only authorized vehicle of the Orthodox faith was the Divine Liturgy which became an unchangeable and mysterious spectacle. The focus on ritualistic frozenness and ethnic identity would become an peculiar combination of strength and weakness down the centuries. The Orthodox could denounce the Latins for not serving the sacred wine and not using the language of the people, but in fact, hardly anyone in the East ever received communion or understood anything of the service. This appearance that things were unchanging and 'just fine' was a thin veneer that could not and still cannot hide the magnitude of the spiritual crisis. The aborted attempt of Patriarch Cyril Lucaris (1572–1637) to 'revive' Greek Orthodoxy through partial 'Protestantization' came from his sincere concern to revitalize his flock in the face of internal delay and Roman Catholic proselytism.

At least, the Ottomans did not try to influence the theology of their 'Roman' population, but strong winds from the West were blowing in. Many bishops received their training in the West, to the point that Latin eventually became the principal language of theological instruction in the Russian Church. The strongest form of 'caesaropapism' in the Orthodox Church came about in the context of the Westernizing policies of Tsar Peter the Great (1672–1725). Western musical styles and art forms became extremely popular in Russian Orthodoxy, sometimes with tragic theological consequences.¹ More importantly, the Tsar abolished the

¹ The widespread adoption of icons of God the Father, in spite of official condemnations, is especially problematic. The entire theology of icons, based on the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity, the incarnation of the Word and the fact that Christ is the icon of the Father, is effectively destroyed by this representation.

institution of the Patriarchate and transformed 'the Church' into a department of the State. The members of the Holy Synod were then forced to recognize the Tsar as "the supreme judge" of their assembly, a situation that makes the super-primacy of the Church of Rome appear as a preferable alternative on the bell curve. It is important, therefore, to be lucid about the problems that plagued both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy in the course of these turbulent centuries.

XI. VATICAN I

1. The struggle with Gallicanism

Between Florence and Vatican I, the papacy had to deal with what many historians interpret as the consequences of its own decadence. While Protestantism was certainly a movement of revolt against Papal authority, it immediately left the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church and never posed a real theological threat. The last obstacle on the road to Vatican I was a movement known as Gallicanism. Even during the counter-reformation council of Trent (1545-1563), there was an acute tension between the pope and the bishops, to the point of leading the council to the brink of failure. The French bishops were especially suspicious of Roman centralism and absolutism, for reasons that were both theological and political. At the time, every French theologian had to swear compliance with the four so-called 'Gallican articles:' (1) that the pope has no temporal powers (2) that the pope is subject to the Council (3) that the pope is not above the canons but subject to them (4) that the pope is not infallible against the consent of the Church. These articles were not just theology; they also had force of law in the Kingdom of France. Fearing the possibility of a schism, Rome had to wait until the 17th century to condemn these articles and was forced to temporarily compromise by signing concordats with the French crown.

But Gallicanism was not only a French phenomenon. The German bishops had their own struggle of authority with Rome, especially with the Papal nuncios whose role was rather undefined and who seemed to compete with the local episcopate. Again, Rome was forced to compromise until more favorable times.

2. The victory of Ultramontanism

At the turn of the century, the Papacy seemed to have reached its lowest ebb in the modern era. Pius VI had just died in Valence, as prisoner

of Napoleon. Everywhere, the theological mindset seemed to have been opposed to any kind of Papal centralism. While it has been argued that the triumph of the papacy can be traced to the consequences of the French revolution, the real intellectual turning point occurred over a period of thirty years (1820-1850). It is significant that many proponents of what came to be called ultramontanism¹ were converts (e.g. Manning). Against nationalistic tendencies, the ultramontane vision challenged the idea of alliance between 'the crown and the altar' and actually became a populist idea. Interestingly, the foremost ultramontane apologist, Joseph de Maistre, had served as French ambassador to the Court of Russia.

Under the pontificate of Pius IX (1846-1878), Rome developed a siege mentality in reaction to the growing threat of liberalism and the impending loss of the Papal States to a unified Italy. At the same time, ultramontanism had become a mass phenomenon, especially among the people and the younger clergy with the development of what can properly be termed 'papal devotion.' When Pius IX convoked a council in 1869, there is no doubt that he himself was very eager to see the dogma of Papal Infallibility proclaimed against the likely opposition of many bishops. Indeed, the participants were carefully selected and only those bishops who had remained in Rome until 1870 participated in the final vote. By then, a large group had opted to leave rather than to embarrass themselves and the pope.²

It is significant, although often ignored, that the dogmatic definitions of Vatican I did not come in the form of a conciliar decree. Instead, since the council was 'suspended' by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, the pope issued a bull called *Pastor Aeternus* that makes a brief reference to the "approval of the sacred synod." In view of these facts, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov concludes:

These words were an external expression of the fact that the Council had abolished itself as such.³

We will discuss the theological implications (and usability) of the Vatican I proclamation in great detail in our Theological section. For now,

¹ Literally, 'beyond the mountains'; the belief that all things should be referred to and subjected to Rome, 'beyond the Alps'.

² 535 members remained for the final voting. Only 4 out of 24 German bishops were present, 44 out of 86 for the French, 9 out of 60 for Austria-Hungary and 148 out of 264 from Italy. A large number of voting prelates were titular bishops.

³ *The Vatican Dogma*, Sergius Bulgakov, Saint Tikhon's Press, South Canaan, 1957, p. 17

we should simply note that 1870 marks the completion of a long process of development by which ‘an acorn had truly become a full-grown oak.’¹

3. *Orthodox reactions to Vatican I*

The Orthodox world expressed little interest in Vatican I and ignored the pope’s surprising invitation to send delegates and observers to the council. In 1848, the authoritative *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs* of 1848 had preemptively condemned the current form of the papacy in no uncertain terms:

Of these heresies was formerly Arianism, and at present is the Papacy.²

In spite of these seemingly harsh words, the Orthodox Patriarchs had also offered an olive branch and the promise to restore the pope to a primacy of ‘brotherly character and hierarchical privilege.’ With this background in mind, the synod of Constantinople felt compelled to reply to Pope Leo XIII’s invitation to consider ‘reunion’ with the Roman See which came twenty-four years after Vatican I. The encyclical of 1895 expresses the Orthodox astonishment at the recent developments:

These facts we recall with sorrow of heart, inasmuch as the Papal Church has widened the existing gulf by officially proclaiming, to the astonishment of the Christian world, that the Bishop of Rome is even infallible. The orthodox eastern and catholic Church of Christ, with the exception of the Son and Word of God, who was ineffably made man, knows no one infallible upon earth.³

Another cause of “the astonishment of the Christian world” was the self-aggrandizing language used by the Pontiff in the same apostolic Letter:

But since We hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty... We feel drawn to follow the example of Our Redeemer and Master, Jesus Christ, who... in earnest prayer, that His disciples and followers should be of one mind and of one heart: I pray... that they all may be one, as thou Father in Me, and I in Thee: that they also may be one in Us.

As we noted in our brief reflection on ‘Uniatism,’ Rome’s approach to ‘Reunion’ was historically expressed in terms of return and conversion of “all Greek or other Oriental rites who are separated from the Catholic Church”:

¹ This image is often used by Roman Catholic apologists. In all fairness, it should be noted that the image/parable of a seed that becomes a large tree is from the Lord.

² *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs*, 1848

³ *Patriarchal Encyclical*, 1895

[The] yearning desire of our heart bids us [to] conceive and hope that the day is not far distant when the Eastern Churches, so illustrious in their ancient faith and glorious past, will return to the fold they have abandoned.¹

Indeed, the nineteenth century came to end with the greatest possible gulf between both communions. The next century would prove incredibly chaotic and tragic for the entire world with its two world wars, the nightmare of communism, and a host of related events ranging from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Greek independence, the dying of Constantinople, the Balkan wars and the 'revolution' of Vatican II. We shall mention some of these events and the hopes and challenges posed by post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism as we discuss perspectives of genuine convergence and reconciliation.

¹ *Præclara Gratulationis Publicæ*, 1894

SECTION IV:
THEOLOGY

SECTION IV: THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The breakdown in theological and Eucharistic communion between the Latin West and the Greek East was clearly the result of a gradual process. Some scholars even argue that the cultural and political aspects of the Great Schism far surpass genuine theological differences. As we have seen, there are historical reasons to support this point of view. However, this does not mean that we are dealing with an historical process without theological foundations. The lesson of history is that it will not be enough for prelates to solve theological controversies in order to achieve reunion. We are still at a point where most of the past, medieval and recent, speaks of enmity, not charity. Sadly, hatred among 'Christians' is often the result of theological quarrels. Or could it be that we use theological 'differences' to justify our parting of ways? Warfare, literal and metaphorical, among those who claim to serve Christ, must somehow be 'justified,' and dogma provides the excuse and rationale. The other side is always heretical, schismatic or both, therefore in need of 'intervention' or 'conversion' by any means.

We must return to the diverging ecclesiologies of East and West in order to understand the theological foundations of the controversy which have led to today's problems.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

1. The importance of ecclesiology

As we have seen, Rome's ecclesiology is essentially¹ universal, in the sense of geographical universality. This concept was aptly summarized by Orthodox scholar Alexander Schmemmann:

Universal ecclesiology finds its fullest expression in Roman Catholic theology, crowned by the Vatican dogma of 1870. Here the only adequate expression of the Church as organism is the universal structure of the

¹ In the sense of "ontologically"

Church, its universal unity. The Church is the sum of all local Churches, which all together constitute the Body of Christ. The Church is thus conceived in terms of whole and parts. Each community, each local Church is but a part, a member of this universal organism; and it participates in the Church only through its belonging to the "whole." In the words of one of its best exponents, Roman theology seeks a definition of the Church in which "parts would receive within the whole the status of genuine parts."

Fr. Schmemmann goes on with a significant observation:

The important point here is for us to see that in the light of this doctrine the need for and the reality of a universal head, i.e. the Bishop of Rome, can no longer be termed an exaggeration. It becomes not only acceptable but even necessary. If the Church is a universal organism, she must have at her head a universal bishop as the focus of her unity and the organ of supreme power...

Thus the effort of Roman Catholic theologians to justify Roman claims not by mere historical contingencies but by divine institution appear as logical. Within a universal ecclesiology, primacy is of necessity power and, by the same necessity, a divinely instituted power; we have all this in a consistent form in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Church.¹

Fr. Schmemmann's view that universal ecclesiology entails a primacy of supreme or absolute power is a point that can be debated. Be that as it may, Rome teaches the universal ontology of the Church and that for the sake of unity one needs to be set over the rest:

In order that the episcopal office should be one and undivided and that, by the union of the clergy, the whole multitude of believers should be held together in the unity of faith and communion, he set blessed Peter over the rest of the Apostles and instituted in him the permanent principle of both unities and their visible foundation.²

This is where Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy can be contrasted: in the Orthodox perspective: (1) Peter is not set over the Apostles but first among them³, (2) Peter can be seen as the principle or symbol of Church unity and, in the framework of Eucharistic ecclesiology, every bishop is his successor, and (3) the (catholic) Church is not a worldwide organism, it is the local Eucharist community assembled around her bishop and presbyters.

¹ TPOP, p. 99

² *First dogmatic constitution on the Church of Christ*, Vatican I, 1870

³ This is a subtle difference, especially if we adopt the historically orthodox view that Peter is the archetypal bishop and the Apostles (including Peter) are the archetypal presbyters. It would seem fair to admit that 'first among' is hard to distinguish from 'set over'.

By contrast, the Roman Catholic perspective is that the Bishop of Rome is the sole successor of St. Peter as head of the (universal) Church, Vicar of Christ and supreme pastor of the whole flock.

In the words of Vatican I (*Pastor Aeternus*):

[This] must be believed by all faithful Christians, namely that the apostolic see and the Roman pontiff hold a worldwide primacy, and that the Roman pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter, the prince of the Apostles, true vicar of Christ, head of the whole Church and father and teacher of all Christian people. To him, in blessed Peter, full power has been given by our lord Jesus Christ to tend, rule and govern the universal Church.

This statement summarizes the Roman Catholic concept of primacy which has been discussed at some length in the Ecclesiology section.

2. Resources

At this point, our goal is to review the apologetic defense of the Roman Catholic position. In order to do so, we will consider the following sources:

- *Dogmatic Decrees of Vatican I*
- *Catholic Answers*¹

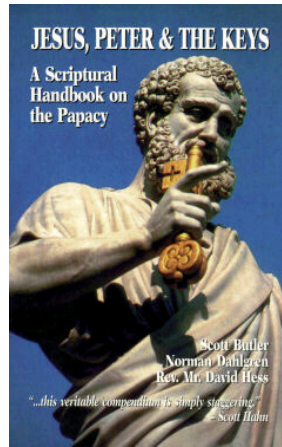
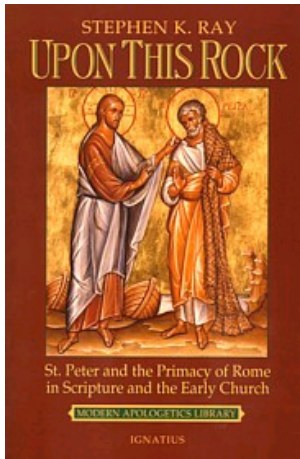
and especially:

- *Upon this Rock* (UTR: Stephen K. Ray)
- *Jesus, Peter and the Keys* (JPK: Scott Butler)

In doing so, our goal will be to present the strongest possible case in favor of the Roman Catholic view of the Papacy, with constant reference to the best apologetic material available to us. This means that no rebuttal of the evidence presented will be included at this stage, especially because our study of ecclesiology has already provided an alternative model for the concept of Petrine primacy and succession.

The reader is obviously encouraged to refer to these essential books to get a full grasp of the outstanding and convincing work done by these brilliant apologists.

¹ Catholic Answers is a remarkably successful Roman Catholic apologetics organization, not always sympathetic to Orthodox theology. Their booklets are available on the Internet at: www.catholicanswers.com



Above: two popular books of Roman Catholic apologetics for the papacy.

It is important to emphasize that we will be reviewing what can be called ‘popular evidence’ for the Papacy, not academic studies. The simple reason is that lay Roman Catholics are much more likely to read these two books than *The Shepherd and the Rock* which happens to be a more balanced presentation. Likewise, Eastern Orthodox readers will probably feel more comfortable with *Two Paths* or *Popes and Patriarchs* than with *The Primacy of Peter* or the present study. In summary, these are not ‘objective’ works in the sense that no attempt is made to present possible refutations of the arguments (or ecclesiological paradigms) presented. We shall take on this task after this initial presentation.

3. *Peter as Chief Steward*

Matthew 16:18 is the Petrine text *par excellence*, engraved on the wall of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome as foundational for the Roman vision of primacy. Let us start with the text itself:

Jesus then said to them, “But [you,] who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in

heaven.” Then, he commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was Jesus, the Christ.¹

The Roman Catholic exegesis of this text is that Peter himself is the Rock of the (universal) Church and that he alone received the keys of the kingdom, a fact that makes him and his successors/vicars of the absent King Jesus Christ. Modern apologists draw attention to the connection between Matthew 16 and Isaiah 22:

I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your post. On that day I will call my servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and will clothe him with your robe and bind your sash on him. I will commit your authority to his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open.²

In Matthew 16, Peter alone is seen as entrusted with the keys of the kingdom with a language that echoes and fulfils the description of Isaiah 22. Based on this parallel, Peter is understood as being appointed chief-minister of the Lord’s household in his absence, an office that would last until the Second Coming.

It must be noted that this connection between Isaiah 22 and Matthew 16 is not ‘a Roman Catholic fabrication.’ It is supported by prominent Protestant scholars such as F.F. Bruce, W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, individuals who have no interest in bolstering Rome’s exegesis:

Isaiah 22:15ff undoubtedly lies behind this [Matthew 16:19] saying. The keys are symbols of authority and Roland de Vaux rightly sees here the same authority as that vested in the vizier, the master of the house, the chamberlain of the royal household in ancient Israel. Eliakim is described as having the same authority in Isaiah and Jotham as regent is also described as ‘over the household.’³

The same conclusion is expressed in other major studies, such as *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, *The New Bible Commentary*, Matthew Henry’s *Commentary* and *The Interpreter’s Bible*. Last but not least, Oscar Culmann, a respected Lutheran scholar, also made the connection between these two critical passages:

Just as in Isaiah 22:22 the Lord lays the keys of the house of David on the shoulders of his servant Eliakim, so Jesus commits to Peter the keys of his

¹ Matthew 16:15-20, EOB

² Isaiah 22: 19-22, NRSV

³ *The Anchor Bible: Matthew*, W.F Albright and C.S. Mann quoted in JPK, p. 41.

house, the Kingdom of Heaven, and thereby installs him as administrator of the house.

This view was shared by few Church Fathers, notably St. Ephraim the Syrian and Aphraates:

I have given you [Peter] the keys of my Kingdom. Behold, I have given you authority over all my treasures.¹

According to these Roman Catholic presentations, the unbiased evidence is that Peter was appointed chief-steward of the Church, a successive office that exists today in the Papal office in fulfillment of the Lord's promise to Peter. The 'Church' in Matthew 16:18 is, as always, assumed to refer to the universal society of believers.

4. *Simon becomes Peter the Rock*

The fact that Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter is also of importance in the light of the Old Testament: Abraham and Jacob in particular received a new name from God when a new covenantal mission was given to them.

On the question of the identity of the Rock, Roman Catholic apologists point out to the following:

- Peter's name (Peter [Kepha] = Rock)
- The direct reading of the passage
- The testimony of the Church Fathers
- The concurrence of many Protestant scholars.

For many, the fact that Simon was renamed 'Kepha' by Jesus is clear enough: Simon is now "this Rock" as his very own name indicates.

The testimony of the Church Fathers is, we are told, equally overwhelming: Peter is called Rock by Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Basil, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, etc. Here is a sample of frequently used quotations:

Was anything withheld from the knowledge of Peter, who is called 'the rock on which the Church would be built' [Matt. 16:18] with the power of 'loosing and binding in heaven and on earth'?

(Tertullian: *Against the Heretics*, 22)

¹ St. Isaac the Syrian, quoted in UTR, p. 195.

Look at [Peter], the great foundation of the Church, that most solid of rocks, upon whom Christ built the Church [Matt. 16:18]. And what does our Lord say to him? 'Oh you of little faith,' he says, 'why do you doubt?' [Matt. 14:31]

(Origen: Homilies on Exodus, 5:4)

The Lord says to Peter: 'I say to you,' he says, 'that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven.' [Matt. 16:18–19]. On him [Peter] he builds the Church, and to him he gives the command to feed the sheep.

(Cyprian: The Unity of the Catholic Church, 4; 1st edition)

There is one God and one Christ, and one Church, and one chair founded on Peter by the word of the Lord. It is not possible to set up another altar or for there to be another priesthood besides that one altar and that one priesthood. Whoever has gathered elsewhere is scattering.

(Cyprian: Letters, 43[40]:5)

You see that of the disciples of Christ, all of whom were great and deserving of the choice, one is called a Rock and is entrusted with the Foundations of the Church.

(Gregory of Nazianzus, quoted in JPK, p. 243)

And when he, the instrument of such and so great a judgment; he the minister of the so great wrath of God upon a sinner; that blessed Peter, who was preferred before all the other disciples; who alone received a greater testimony and blessing than the rest; he to whom were entrusted the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven...

(Basil the Great, quoted in JPK, p. 236)

[Christ] made answer: 'You are Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church.' Could he not, then, strengthen the Faith of the man to whom, acting on his own authority, he gave the kingdom, whom he called the rock, thereby declaring him to be the foundation of the Church [Matt. 16:18]?

(Ambrose: The Faith, 4:5)

Roman Catholic apologist Scott Butler then moves on to a review of several Protestant commentaries with this conclusion:

We have now reviewed dozens of prominent Protestant biblical commentaries relative to the meaning of Matthew 16:18. All of them agree with the Catholic interpretation that Peter is the Rock upon which Jesus will build his Church.¹

¹ JPK, p. 29

Among many examples, let us mention Craig Bloomberg from Denver Seminary (Baptist) and Donald Hagner (Fuller Theological Seminary):

The expression ‘this rock’ almost certainly refers to Peter, following immediately after his name, just as the words following ‘this Christ’ in v.16 applied to Jesus.¹

The natural reading of the passage is that it is Peter who is the rock upon which the Church is to be built (thus rightly Morris, France, Carson, Bloomberg, Culmann [Peter, 207], Davies-Allison; so too the inter-confessional volume by Brown, Donfried and Reumann [Peter in the NT 92]. The frequent attempts that have been made, largely in the past, to deny this in favor of the view that the confession itself is the rock (e.g. most recently by Caragounis) seem to be largely motivated by Protestant prejudice against a passage that is used by the Roman Catholics to justify the Papacy.²

5. *Other key Petrine texts*

Based on this consensus, most Roman Catholic scholars present Matthew 16 as ‘sufficient proof’ to settle the issue of Peter’s office of supreme perpetual primacy in the Church – again, understood as a worldwide organism.

Let us briefly mention the other key biblical texts.

John 21:14–17 is considered the other unavoidable text that establishes the status of Peter as chief-shepherd of the whole flock:

Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?” Peter replied, “Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” Again, Jesus asked a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?” Peter replied, “Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you.”

Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” A third time, Jesus asked, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?” Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, “Do you have affection for me?” He said, “Lord, you know everything! You know that I have affection for you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep!”

As a sample of patristic exegesis of this famous text, St. John Chrysostom is frequently quoted:

¹ *The New American Commentary (Matthew)*, vol. 22, Craig L. Bloomberg, Broadman, Nashville, 1992, pp. 251-252

² *Word Biblical Commentary*, Matthew 14-28, Donald A. Hagner, Vol. 33b, Word Books, Dallas, 1995, p. 470

Peter, that leader of the Choir, that mouth of the rest of the Apostles, that head of the Brotherhood, that one set over the entire universe, that Foundation of the Church.

Peter, the Leader of the Choir, the Mouth of all the Apostles, the Head of that Tribe, the Ruler of the whole world, the Foundation of the Church, the ardent lover of Christ. It is not I who say these things, but the beloved Lord. "If you love Me," He says, "feed my sheep." Let us see whether he has the primacy of a shepherd."

Here again He alludes to his tender carefulness, and to his being very closely attached to Himself. And if any should say, "How then did James receive the chair at Jerusalem?" I would make this reply, that He appointed Peter teacher, not of the chair, but of the world.¹

The reader is referred to *Jesus, Peter and the Keys*, (Chapter VIII "Saint Peter as Chief Shepherd of John 21:15) for additional patristic quotations discussing the 'primacy interpretation' as opposed to a 'restorative interpretation.'

Other lines of evidence offered to support Peter's primacy are:

- Peter is named first in every single apostolic list,
- Peter's instruction to the other Apostles that a replacement should be found for Judas,
- Peter's superior authority at the Council of Jerusalem,
- Peter's commission by the Lord to "strengthen the brethren" in Luke 22.

Having established the special status of St. Peter, Roman Catholic theologians move on to the next logical step: identifying his dynastic successors in his divine office of chief shepherd.

6. *Peter's Successors in Roman Catholic ecclesiology*

If Peter had a unique role in 'the Church' (however defined) and a 'successive office' of Prime Minister, the next question is: who are these successors?

We have already studied this critical topic in our Ecclesiology section, but we are now discussing this concept within the Roman Catholic framework of interpretation which is universal ecclesiology.

¹ *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, LXXXVIII

Having established the historical fact that St. Peter preached and died in Rome, Roman Catholics can easily quote the testimony of various pre- and post-Nicene Fathers to find a remarkable succession to 'the Chief Apostle:'

Irenaeus: The blessed Apostles [Peter and Paul], having founded and built up the Church [of Rome], they handed over the office of the episcopate to Linus.¹ To Clement, Evaristus succeeded . . . and now, in the twelfth place after the Apostles, the lot of the episcopate [of Rome] has fallen to Eleutherus. In this order, and by the teaching of the Apostles handed down in the Church, the preaching of the truth has come down to us.²

Tertullian: But if there be any (heresies) which are bold enough to plant themselves in the midst of the apostolic age... we can say: Let them produce the original records of their Churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that (that first bishop of theirs), ed. note bishop shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the Apostles or of apostolic men... For this is the manner in which the apostolic Churches transmit their registers: as the Church of Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed therein by John; as also the Church of Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter.³

Eusebius: After the martyrdom of Paul and Peter, the first man to be appointed Bishop of Rome was Linus... the first after Peter to be appointed Bishop of Rome. Clement again, who became the third Bishop of Rome to Miltiades.⁴

Jerome: I follow no leader but Christ and join in communion with none but your blessedness [Pope Damasus I], that is, with the chair of Peter. I know that this is the rock on which the Church has been built. Whoever eats the Lamb outside this house is profane. Anyone who is not in the ark of Noah will perish when the flood prevails.⁵

Finally, we find this famous passage by the great bishop Augustine of Hippo:

There are many other things which rightly keep me in the bosom of the Catholic Church. The consent of the people and nations keeps me, her authority keeps me, inaugurated by miracles, nourished in hope, enlarged by love, and established by age. The succession of priests keeps me, from the very seat of the apostle Peter (to whom the Lord after his resurrection gave charge to feed his sheep) down to the present episcopate.⁶

¹ *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus, 3, 1:3

² *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus, 3, 1:1

³ *The Prescription Against Heretics*, Tertullian, ANF, Vol. III, p. 260

⁴ HE, Book 3

⁵ *Letters*, 15:2

⁶ *Against the Letter of Mani Called "The Foundation"*

For if the lineal succession of bishops is to be taken into account, with how much more certainty and benefit to the Church do we reckon back till we reach Peter himself, to whom, as bearing in a figure the whole Church, the Lord said: "Upon this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!" The successor of Peter was Linus, and his successors in unbroken continuity were these: — Clement... and Siricius, whose successor is the present Bishop Anastasius.¹

This is a typical selection of quotations that are used to argue that early Christians recognized that the apostolic succession to St. Peter was located in the Church of Rome (later called "the See of Peter" and "the apostolic See").

7. *Rome's primacy in the early Church*

Roman Catholic apologists also seek to demonstrate that the presidency and authority of the Roman Church was universally attested to in the early Church, starting with the now familiar statements of Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyons:

Ignatius, to the Church also which holds the presidency, in the location of the country of the Romans... and, because you hold the presidency in love, named after Christ and named after the Father.²

Irenaeus: [We point to the] succession of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient Church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul, that Church which has the tradition and the Faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. With that Church, because of its superior origin, all the Churches must agree³, that is, all the Faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the Faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition.⁴

As we move to the post-Nicene era, we recall the statement recorded in the acts of the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus, 431):

Philip, the presbyter and legate of the apostolic See [Rome] said: "There is no doubt, and in fact it has been known in all ages, that the holy and most blessed Peter, prince and head of the Apostles, pillar of the Faith, and foundation of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the kingdom from our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the human race, and that to him was given the power of loosing and binding sins: who down even to today and forever both lives and judges in his successors."⁵

¹ *Letters*, Letter 53, Augustine of Hippo

² *Letter to the Romans*, 1:1, Ignatius of Antioch

³ See our discussion of this translation in III/I/10

⁴ *Against Heresies*, 3:3:2, Irenaeus of Lyons

⁵ See our discussion of this statement in IV/V/4

Of course, these statements were made by the Roman legates themselves, not by the Council, but the overall impression can be established: in the Roman Catholic system, “his successors” refers exclusively to the Bishop of Rome in the framework of universal ecclesiology. This, we must repeat, is the crux of the argument between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

8. *Eastern recognitions of Rome's Primacy*

Roman Catholic apologists are also eager to remind the Orthodox that numerous testimonies to the primacy of the Roman See can be found in the writings (and actions) of many Eastern bishops and saints. Indeed, beyond Nicea and into the ninth century, we find a number of statements that can be used to argue that in some form, Rome's primacy was widely accepted in the East.

Although it has already been discussed in our Historical section, the ‘Formula of Pope Hormisdas,’ signed by 250 Eastern bishops is worth mentioning here because it is often mentioned by Roman Catholic apologists. We have seen that the formula concludes with these words:

I hope I may deserve to be associated with you in the one communion, which the apostolic See proclaims, in which the whole, true, and perfect security of the Christian religion resides. I promise that from now on those who are separated from the communion of the Catholic Church, that is, who are not in agreement with the Apostolic See, will not have their names read during the sacred mysteries.

Also relevant is a letter written by Emperor Justinian to Pope Hormisdas:

Yielding honor to the Apostolic See and to Your Holiness, and honoring your Holiness, as one ought to honor a father, we have hastened to subject all the priests of the whole Eastern district, and to unite them to the See of your Holiness, for we do not allow of any point, however manifest and indisputable it be, which relates to the state of the Churches, not being brought to the cognizance of your Holiness, since you are the Head of all the holy Churches.¹

Let your Apostleship show that you have worthily succeeded to the Apostle Peter, since the Lord will work through you, as Supreme Pastor, the salvation of all.²

¹ *Epistle to John*, Codex Justin. Lib. I. Tit. 1, Emperor Justinian

² *Epistle of Justinian to Pope Hormisdas* (July 9th, 520), Coll. Avell. Ep. 196

We are now also familiar with the statements St. Maximus the Confessor and especially St. Theodore the Studite which strongly affirmed the authority of the Roman See:

O arch-shepherd of the Church... Save us now! For if they, usurping an authority which does not belong to them, have dared to convene a heretical council, whereas those who follow ancient custom do not even have the right of convening an orthodox one without your knowledge, it seems absolutely necessary, we dare to say to you, that your divine primacy should call together a lawful council, so that the Catholic dogma may drive out heresy and that your primacy may neither be anathematized by these new voices lacking authority... It is in order to obey your divine authority as chief pastor that we have set forth these things as it befitted our nothingness...¹

On the same theme, St. Theodore addressed Pope St. Paschal in these words:

O apostolic head, divinely established shepherd of Christ's sheep, doorkeeper of the heavenly kingdom, rock of the Faith on which the Catholic Church has been built. For you are Peter - you are the successor of Peter, whose throne you grace and direct... To you did Christ our God say, "When you have been converted, strengthen your brethren." Now is the time and the place: help us, you who have been established by God for that purpose.²

These statements are often used to support the overall claim that many great doctors and saints of the Eastern Church accepted the divine and Petrine primacy of the Roman See.

9. *The weight of Rome's testimony*

Eastern Orthodoxy recognizes as saints and doctors a great number of Roman bishops, among them Sylvester (January 2), Leo the Great (February 18), Agatho (February 20), and Gregory called 'The Dialogist' (March 12). Is the testimony of these great orthodox hierarchs of no importance? Roman Catholic apologists are also keen to consider their testimony on this issue.

As we have seen, Rome's claim to have inherited Peter's primacy was expressed very early. During the centuries of full communion between East and West, we find many clear affirmations of Rome's primacy of jurisdiction, not honor, coming from Rome's orthodox bishops:

¹ PG 99: 1017-21

² PG 99: 1152-3

The universal ordering of the Church at its birth took its origin from the office of blessed Peter, in which is found both directing power and its supreme authority. From him as from a source, at the time when our religion was in the stage of growth, all Churches received their common order. This much is shown by the injunctions of the council of Nicea, since it did not venture to make a decree in his regard, recognizing that nothing could be added to his dignity: in fact it knew that all had been assigned to him by the word of the Lord. So it is clear that this Church is to all Churches throughout the world as the head is to the members, and that whoever separates himself from it becomes an exile from the Christian religion, since he ceases to belong to its fellowship.¹ (Pope Boniface 418-422)

We also find the following instructions send by Pope Celestine to Cyril of Alexandria before the Council of Ephesus (431):

Therefore, assuming to yourself the authority of our see and using our stead and place with power, you will deliver this sentence with utmost severity.²

Finally, we have a large number of quotations from Leo the Great, a Pope acclaimed by the Eastern Fathers at Chalcedon³ with the words "Peter has spoken through Leo," and whose sermons are still commonly read in the Orthodox Church:

But this mysterious function the Lord wished to be indeed the concern of all the Apostles, but in such a way that He has placed the principal charge on the blessed Peter, chief of all the Apostles: and from him as from the Head wishes His gifts to flow to all the body: so that any one who dares to secede from Peter's solid rock may understand that he has no part or lot in the divine mystery.⁴

[Peter] who does not cease to preside in his see, who will doubt that he rules in every part of the world.⁵

Hence, at this fairly early point in the history of Christianity, the claim of special jurisdiction of the Roman See is fully developed and receives some form of civil and ecclesiastical acknowledgment. For many Roman Catholic apologists, these quotations show that there is no substantive difference in the powers claimed by St. Leo the Great and the current Pope.

¹ *To the bishops of Thessaly*, in Giles, p. 230

² *To Cyril of Alexandria*, Epistle 11 (A.D. 430), in SPP, p. 208

³ *Acts of the Fourth Ecumenical Council*, AD 451

⁴ *Epistle 10*, in NPNF2, XII:8, (A.D 445)

⁵ *Sermon 5*, in GCC, 95, (A.D ante 461)

10. Summary

In this section, I have tried to present the most forceful Roman Catholic arguments, using the best resources available to do so. Any failure to include certain quotations or events is due to lack of space, in order to balance the presentation of both sides.

It is hoped that the Roman Catholic reader will perceive that I have genuinely tried to explain why the Church of Rome teaches that:

The apostolic see and the Roman pontiff hold a worldwide primacy, and that the Roman pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter, the prince of the Apostles, true vicar of Christ, head of the whole Church and father and teacher of all Christian people. To him, in blessed Peter, full power has been given by our lord Jesus Christ to tend, rule and govern the universal Church.

It is my personal experience that few Orthodox Christians have a clear understanding of Eucharistic ecclesiology or any awareness of these Roman Catholic arguments. What is important to realize is that Rome's vision of primacy rests on a credible biblical and patristic case that cannot be dismissed without due consideration.

What then are the reasons for the Orthodox rejection of Rome's teaching in this regard? Is it sheer rebellion and stubborn rejection of the evidence or is there an equally strong case in favor of the Orthodox model? This is what we shall consider in the next chapter, presenting both a refutation of Roman Catholic arguments as well as an Orthodox understanding of Rome's past universal primacy.

II. UNDERSTANDING THE EASTERN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

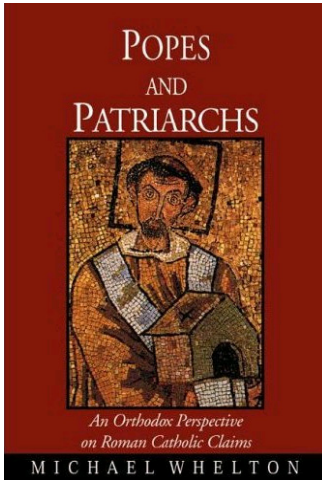
1. Resources

Having referred our readers to two major Roman Catholic resources, it is fitting to recommend several books that defend the Orthodox perspective on the same issue.

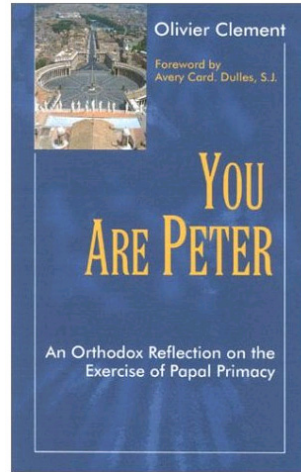
Among popular apologetics, we should mention:

- *The Papacy* (Vladimir Guetté)
- *Two Paths* and *Popes and Patriarchs* (Michael Whelton)
- *The Truth* (Clark Carlton)

- *Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy* (Theodore Pulcini)



Above: Michael Whelton's books are examples of popular Orthodox apologetics, yet as equally one-sided as their Roman Catholic counterparts.



Above: Olivier Clement seems unaware of the underlying issue of universal vs. Eucharistic ecclesiology but offers a remarkably unbiased assessment of the schism.

It must be acknowledged that these works suffer from the same lack of objectivity as their Roman Catholic counterparts. These are works of popular apologetics, not scholarly studies.

The finest examples of balanced Orthodox views on this topic are:

- *The Primacy of Peter* (J. Meyendorff)
- *You are Peter (Rome Autrement)* (O. Clément)

What, then, is the Orthodox objection to the Roman Catholic arguments presented in the preceding pages? The answer lies in several points, which we shall now attempt to present.

2. A different ecclesiology

Theologically speaking, the main divergence between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism resides in the concept of Church and consequently, Church government. Anyone who reads a popular Roman Catholic apology for the Papacy and who is familiar with the issue of ecclesiology cannot fail to notice that the universal nature of the Church is

always assumed, never discussed. As we have seen, the introduction to *Jesus, Peter and the Keys* offers the formula **Christ > Incarnation > Church (Peter) > Papacy** without any hint that this ecclesiology needs to be established. As a result, the so-called 'Peter Syndrome' is rampant. Anything about Peter is applied to the Bishop of Rome, even if the Fathers being quoted never make such an association.

Hence, the Orthodox theologian who approaches these books finds few relevant arguments. In the Eastern tradition, the exaltation of St. Peter is patristic and consistent because it is understood as either personal or applicable to the episcopate. The question is not, is Peter described as the leader, head, etc. – but rather, does this apply explicitly and exclusively to the Bishop of Rome?

At this point, I refer the reader to the ground already covered in our Ecclesiology section for more information on the relationship between ecclesiology, Petrine succession and its relative applicability to the Church (or Bishop) of Rome.

3. *Interpreting the Scriptures*

Since most of the discussion has to do with the meaning of such texts as Matthew 16, Luke 22 and John 21, it is important to note that there is, at least in theory, full concurrence between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox position on how to properly interpret the Scriptures. Indeed, an Orthodox council could have penned the following words, taken from the dogmatic decrees of Vatican I:

Likewise, I accept Sacred Scripture, according to that sense which holy mother Church held and holds, since it is her right to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures¹; nor will I ever receive and interpret them except according to the unanimous consent of the fathers.

In consequence, it is not permissible for anyone to interpret Holy Scripture in a sense contrary to this, or indeed against the unanimous consent of the fathers.

This echoes the principle of universality of St. Vincent of Lérins already quoted in our introduction.

Hence, the question should always be: is any idea the constant belief of the orthodox catholic bishops of old? What kind of support (or opposition)

¹ Of course, the Church is also subject to the Scriptures; there is relationship of interdependence and 'perichoresis' between the two.

does it receive in the writing of the ancient Fathers? Again, Vatican I took this principle for granted by stating:

To this absolutely manifest teaching of the sacred scriptures, as it has always been understood by the Catholic Church, are clearly opposed the distorted opinions of those who misrepresent the form of government which Christ the lord established in his Church and deny that Peter, in preference to the rest of the Apostles, taken singly or collectively, was endowed by Christ with a true and proper primacy of jurisdiction.

It is on this common basis that Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics reach different conclusions.

First, Orthodox Christians certainly acknowledge Peter's leadership and primacy – it is the idea of an 'absolute primacy of jurisdiction' over all (including the Apostles) that is problematic.

Second, the Petrine office in the Church is understood as existing in the episcopate of the catholic (local) Church, not in the universal papacy.

Finally, the Orthodox would deny that the universal primacy of jurisdiction expressed by Vatican I can be described as something that "has always been understood by the Catholic Church".

Let us review these points in detail.

4. *Apostolic Tradition?*

In the framework of Orthodox theology, the question of truth is always twofold. One: is this teaching something handed from the Lord, through the Apostles and down to us by the common testimony of the early Fathers? Second: if there is no clear consensus of the early Fathers, have the bishops made a binding decision on this issue, according to the apostolic model of conciliarity?

The Orthodox assessment of Rome's version of primacy is that it falls short on both criteria. Did the Apostles teach and hand down to their Churches that Peter was the chief-shepherd of all the Churches who had to be obeyed? Did they mention anything about a successive office of Universal Pastor with successors in Rome to whom submission would be required as condition for salvation?

As we have seen in our historical study, the early Church recognized that the Roman Church had a special place, a primacy of love and witness. But what happened when the Roman Bishop attempted to exercise jurisdictional primacy? It failed. Why? The Roman Catholic answer would be to point to the rebelliousness or ignorance of such men as Polycrates,

Cyprian, Firmilian or even Basil; or perhaps to the fact that the papacy had to manifest its authority gradually, like an acorn turning into a full-grown tree.

The Eastern Orthodox perspective is that the other Churches had no idea that they were supposed to obey the Bishop of Rome. In the case of Polycarp, a man ordained by the Apostle John as Bishop of Smyrna, we find that Anicet (Bishop of Rome) was unable to convince him to adopt the mainline custom. Only a few years later, we see Victor (Bishop of Rome) unable to force a change on the Asiatic Churches. Why? Because no one there recognized Rome's authority to do so. This, in the Orthodox mind, is important because these Churches were essential witnesses of the Apostles' teachings. It is likely that John, Philip and Andrew had ministered in the area. The memory of St. John was exceptionally strong among these bishops. Had they heard anything about a Petrine succession of plenary authority in Rome? No. And yet, the Beloved Apostle was alive for at least twenty years after Peter's martyrdom in Rome. Was John under the authority of Peter's successor in Rome? This conclusion, which is unavoidable according to Rome's ecclesiology, is one that the East cannot accept.

The same can be said of Cyprian in North Africa and Firmilian in Asia Minor. The latter was regarded as one of the great Eastern bishops and had probably presided over several local synods. In fact, Firmilian was aware of Stephen's claims "to hold the succession from Peter" and yet, it is obvious that he did not recognize Stephen's episcopate as being essentially different than his own. Therefore, in Firmilian's mind, the only thing that Stephen could do when trying to be a "bishop of bishop" was to cut himself off from the common union of Christian love.

As we discuss the issue of primacy, St. Cyprian's case is even more remarkable. First, he was not an Eastern; he was what we could call an 'African-Latin.' Second, Cyprian had no doubt that the rock of Matthew 16 was Peter himself. In this, he was actually an unusual case. Thirdly, Cyprian accepted the idea that the Roman See was Peter's See in a unique way so that Rome, in his view, did enjoy a form of primacy. And yet, there can be no doubt that Cyprian – right or wrong – did not view this special status as giving Rome any primacy of jurisdiction (see page 156).

In summary, Cyprian was 'Eastern Orthodox,' not 'Roman Catholic' when it comes to the issue of Rome's primacy of jurisdiction, as were the Asiatic bishops of the first three centuries.

We should also note that Cyprian is often misrepresented by Roman Catholic apologists. This is the sad side of apologetics, be it Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant. It also shows the dangers and limits of ‘proof-texting’ both the Scriptures and the Fathers. In this regard, Orthodox find fault with the Roman Catholic method of quoting a particular Father on one particular point in order to build a sequential argument, even if the Father in question has little or nothing to say about the overall discussion. For instance:

Peter as Rock: Cyprian, Basil, Gregory

Peter as ‘head’: Chrysostom

Peter as ‘chief-steward’: Ephrem

Bishop of Rome as successor of Peter: Tertullian, Irenaeus, Augustine

Hence, the Roman Catholic argument rests on a series of steps that can be individually argued in order to build a case, but the overall teaching is not found in any of these Fathers, except for Optatus and to a certain extent Jerome and Augustine.¹

Cyprian is a good example of such a temptation. He can be quoted on several points of agreement with Roman Catholic theology. However, he ultimately refutes the real point of contention: Rome’s universal primacy of jurisdiction. Likewise, Orthodox theologians find it puzzling that Roman Catholic apologists would mention the disputes between Victor and Polycrates or Stephen and Firmilian as evidence of the early primacy of jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome. This only demonstrates that the same texts and events can be understood in opposite ways.

In addition to the historical aspect of the ‘mind of the early Churches,’ Eastern Orthodoxy also looks for a ‘consent of the Fathers’ regarding the interpretation and application of the Scriptures in question, especially Matthew 16. Let us therefore see why the Orthodox understanding is somewhat different than Rome’s.

5. *The Rock(s) of Matthew 16*

Should Matthew 16 be considered the charter *par excellence* of ‘Church government’? There are several reasons for this preliminary remark and for a reserved answer.

¹ See our detailed discussion of these Fathers below.

At the outset, it should be noted that Matthew 16 is a unique text. The dialogue between Christ and Peter is only recorded in this one gospel, a fact that tends to weaken its witnessing power and centrality: "From the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every matter be established"¹. Moreover, what we have today is the Greek translation of an Aramaic conversation, a fact that has given rise to many pointless arguments, especially on the Protestant side.²

At this point, I would like to present what I would consider a standard Orthodox interpretation of this passage:

In an instrumental sense, Peter is 'the rock' or 'rock:' grafted by the power of God onto the divine Rock, in order to become the first stone of Christ's edifice. How did Simon (Peter) become 'rock'? By confessing Jesus as Messiah and Son of the Living God. And after him, all who confess Jesus with the same faith also become rocks and stones like Peter. Hence, the double interpretation Rock=Peter and Rock=Faith are not mutually exclusive. This is the conclusion presented by two foremost Orthodox scholars in *The Primacy of Peter*:

We may conclude that the early Church Fathers and Christian writers recognized Peter's position of honor and preeminence in the New Testament period... Their interpretations of Jesus' promise to Peter-- 'You are Petros, and on this petra I will build my Church' -- converge with those modern exegetes: the rock is Peter. But they also interpreted the rock as Peter's confession. The Church is built on Peter, or the Church is built upon the rock, which is Peter's confession. We cannot find two distinct groups of exegetes, one with whom states that 'the rock is Peter,' while the other concludes that 'the rock is Peter's confession.' In the writings of any given author, one can find both interpretations simultaneously (Kesich).... [T]he great Cappadocians, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine all concur in affirming that the Faith of Simon made it possible for him to become the Rock on which the Church is founded.³

However, the overall testimony of the Fathers is that ultimately, the rock or foundation of the Church does not depend on a man but on the Petrine confession of faith:

¹ 2 Corinthians 13:1, Deuteronomy 19:15. Of course, this principle also applies to the Matthean exception for divorce.

² In Aramaic, both Peter and Rock are 'Kepha,' in Greek, the words are different: 'Petros' and 'Petra'. Most scholars now agree that the conversation took place in Aramaic and that the dialogue between Jesus and Peter used a play on word between Kepha (Simon's new name) and Kepha (the rock).

³ TPOP, pp. 65,70

Origen: If we also, like Peter, say “Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God,” we become Peter to the extent that the Word says to us “You are Peter” etc. For every disciple of Christ is a rock after drinking of “that spiritual rock which followed,” and on each such rock is built every ecclesiastical “logos” (principle), and in agreement with this [is] the life of the Church.

John Chrysostom: He did not say ‘upon Peter’ for it is not upon the man, but upon his own faith that the Church is built. And what is this faith? ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’¹

John Chrysostom: Therefore He added this, “And I say unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church;” that is, on the Faith of his confession. Hereby He signifies that many were now on the point of believing, and raises his spirit, and makes him a shepherd. “And the gates of hell” shall not prevail against it.” “And if not against it, much more not against me. So be not troubled because thou art shortly to hear that I shall be betrayed and crucified.”²

Hilary of Poitiers: The Rock (petra) is the blessed and only rock of the Faith confessed by the mouth of Peter. It is on this Rock of the confession of faith that the Church is built.³

Augustine: Why have I wanted to make this little introduction? In order to suggest to you that in Peter the Church is to be recognized. Christ, you see, built his Church not on a man but on Peter’s confession. What is Peter’s confession? ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ There’s the rock for you, there’s the foundation, there’s where the Church has been built, which the gates of the underworld cannot conquer.⁴

St. Augustine is especially important because he clearly teaches both that Christ founded his Church upon the rock of faith and that Peter is also ‘the rock’ in a derivative sense:

For before he was called Simon. Now this name of Peter was given him by the Lord, and in a figure, that he should signify the Church. For seeing that Christ is the rock (petra), Peter is the Christian people. For the rock (petra) is the original name. Therefore Peter is so called from the rock; not the rock from Peter; as Christ is not called Christ from the Christian, but the Christian from Christ. ‘Therefore,’ he saith, ‘Thou art Peter; and upon this Rock’ which thou hast confessed, upon this rock which thou hast acknowledged, saying, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, will

¹ Migne, 52.806.75-807.1

² *Homily LIV*

³ *Second book on the Trinity*

⁴ *The Works of St. Augustine*, John Rotelle, O.S.A., Ed., New City Press, New Rochelle 1993, Sermons, Volume III/6, Sermon 229, P.1, p. 327

I build My Church;’ that is upon Myself, the Son of the Living God, ‘will I build My Church.’ I will build thee upon Myself, not Myself upon Thee.¹

It is remarkable that before his death, Augustine thought it fit to publish the following “retractation”:

In a passage in this book, I said about the Apostle Peter: ‘On him as on a rock the Church was built.’..But I know that very frequently at a later time, I so explained what the Lord said: ‘Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church,’ that it be understood as built upon Him whom Peter confessed saying: ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ and so Peter, called after this rock, represented the person of the Church which is built upon this rock, and has received ‘the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’ For, ‘Thou art Peter’ and not ‘Thou art the rock’ was said to him. But ‘the rock was Christ,’ in confessing whom, as also the whole Church confesses, Simon was called Peter. But let the reader decide which of these two opinions is the more probable.²

For the Orthodox, there are three important lessons to be drawn from this short review.

One, it cannot be argued that Matthew 16 is the text upon which the structure of the Church (be it local or universal) hangs, for as Augustine admitted, it was, even in his days, the reader’s right to decide which interpretation was best. At the same time, Matthew 16 was applied to the episcopate, a fact which gives this text ecclesiological significance.

Secondly, this review shows great freedom in the interpretation of this text: the Rock could be equally and simultaneously understood as Christ, Peter, or the Faith of Peter.

Thirdly, we do not find anyone – with the exception of the bishops of Rome themselves – applying Matthew 16 to the Church of Rome. We will study this issue further in our examination of ‘the mind of the Fathers.’ What we do find is a consistent tradition identifying the bishop as manifesting Peter’s office of presidency in the Church and another affirming the primacy of love, witness and honor of the Church of Rome.

Finally, being ‘the rock’ is not a metaphor of governmental primacy, which leads us to the more significant symbolism of the keys.

6. *Peter and the Keys*

As we have seen, the historical interpretation of ‘the Rock’ of Matthew 16 was not connected in any way with the Church of Rome, except in

¹ *The Works of St. Augustine*, John Rotelle, O.S.A., Ed., New City Press, New Rochelle, 1993

² *Retractations*, 20:1

Rome itself. On the other hand, the dialogue about “the keys of the kingdom” gives greater support to the interpretation that a governmental office is being created for Peter and, we may assume, his successors (bishops or popes).

Before considering what each individual Father has to say on the subject, let us make a few observations.

Christ clearly tells Peter:

I will give you (singular) the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

This passage poses several problems. First, it is not clear whether the keys refer to the same thing as “binding and loosing.” If it does (and there is a good chance that it is the case), the point is moot because immediately after, the (other) Apostles also received the same power, a fact that Rome does not contest:

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.¹

In the previous sentence, I have opted to put the word ‘other’ in parenthesis because it is debatable whether St. Peter actually received the keys and power to bind and loose in Matthew 16:18. After all, Christ said “I will,” thus indicating a promise and a future action. As a result, it is accurate to say that the giving of the keys is not recorded in Matthew 16, or perhaps anywhere in the New Testament for that matter. A possible interpretation then, is that all twelve Apostles received the keys and the power to bind and loose together either in Matthew 18:18 or in John 20:22-23:

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Even if we are to speculate that Peter alone received the keys, what would that mean? Some of the writers who held this view understood it as meaning that the Church, represented by Peter (and not just one man,) received the power of the keys. For example, Augustine wrote:

Did Peter receive these keys, and Paul not receive them? Did Peter receive them, and John and James and the other Apostles not receive them? Or are the keys not to be found in the Church, where sins are being forgiven

¹ Matthew 18:18, NSRV

every day? But because Peter symbolically stood for the Church, what was given to him alone was given to the whole Church. So Peter represented the Church; the Church is the body of Christ.¹

This symbolic aspect of the person of Peter as figure of the unity of the Church is also found in Cyprian. The question, once again, is what is the Church? As we have seen, the Eucharistic ecclesiology of the early Church explains why the bishop, like Peter, was understood and respected as being the one 'standing for the Church.'



Let us make a few final remarks on the 'keys of the kingdom.' Are these keys the same as the 'key of the Kingdom of David' mentioned in Isaiah 22? This is possible, but speculative for several reasons.

First, we have to consider the rule professed at Vatican I, not to interpret the Scriptures except in accordance with the consent of the Fathers. Yet, apart from two late and rather poetic allusions by Ephraim and Aaphrates, the Fathers do not connect Isaiah 22 and Matthew 16².

Secondly, if we let 'scripture interpret Scripture,' the 'key of the Kingdom of David' would seem to have returned to the hands of Christ after the death of Peter:

And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.³

Thirdly, if Peter alone had symbolic keys that needed to be transmitted, the question arises as to the mode of transmission of this awesome power. As we have seen, the actual 'giving' of the keys may not even be recorded in the New Testament, and neither is the transmission of the keys. This brings us back to the issue of a dynastic succession to St. Peter, a topic discussed at length in our Ecclesiology section.

What we do know is that Peter called Mark 'my son,' thereby indicating a possible spiritual succession. But Mark, who wrote his gospel 'in the name of Peter's memories,' went on to Alexandria, not Rome. In

¹ *The Works of St. Augustine*, John Rotelle Ed., New City, New Rochelle, 1992, Sermons, III/5, Sermon 149.6-7, p. 21

² Which they would seem to have applied the episcopate.

³ Revelation 3:7, NRSV. This is the exact same expression as in Isaiah 22, whereas Matthew 16 has "keys of the kingdom of heaven."

Roman Catholic apologetics, the connection between Peter's keys and Rome is to Peter's *cathedra* ('chair' or see) in Rome. The idea is that Peter's keys would be attached to Peter's chair as if on a peg, and therefore whoever would occupy Peter's chair would also inherit the keys. For the Orthodox, there is too much speculation and too little solid biblical and patristic evidence to build such a dogmatic ecclesiological model. In the East, the testimony of St. John Chrysostom is always significant, as he was among the few who recognized to Peter a real supremacy over the flock. However, the great preacher also placed the chair of the Chief-Apostle in Antioch as much as in Rome:

In speaking of S. Peter, the recollection of another Peter has come to me [St. Flavian, bishop of Antioch], the common father and teacher, who has inherited his prowess, and also obtained his chair... But though we received him as teacher, we did not retain him to the end, but gave him up to royal Rome. Or rather we did retain him to the end, for though we do not retain the body of Peter, we do retain the Faith of Peter, and retaining the Faith of Peter we have Peter.

Finally, the keys may have referred to Peter's commission to open the doors of the Kingdom, not only to the repentant Jews, but also to the Samaritans and Gentiles¹. Once the doors were opened, the mission of the keys was fulfilled.

Hence, we have many possible interpretations and the temptation of a more speculative *Sola Scriptura* approach (apart from Tradition). The Orthodox answer is that on such a controversial issue it is wiser not to dogmatize beyond the clear consensus of the Fathers.



Is it then impossible to conclude anything about these texts? More specifically, did Peter receive the keys? Yes, as Christ undoubtedly fulfilled his promise. Did the other Apostles also receive the keys, either with Peter or after him? Perhaps, although we have seen that the actual 'giving of the keys' is shrouded in mystery. The Orthodox service for the feast of the Chains of St. Peter is eloquent:

Today Peter, the rock of faith, the foundation of the church, appoints his precious chains for the devotion of our souls... Rejoice, joy of the universe,

¹ Acts 8-15

keeper of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, for you give grace to those who honor you with love and venerate your precious chains with longing!¹

Likewise, the Orthodox prayer of reconciliation of apostates (seemingly a very ancient one) is unambiguous:

O Master, Lord our God, who didst entrust the keys of thy kingdom unto Peter, the foremost Apostle, didst build on him thy holy Church and gave unto him the power, by thy grace, to bind and to loose...²

The controversy about Peter, then, is only relevant to the papacy if the Church is a universal organism governed by a College of Bishops and if only one bishop succeeds to 'the prince of the Apostles'. As Fr. Meyendorff concludes:

It is therefore comprehensible why, even after the schism between East and West, Orthodox ecclesiastical writers were never ashamed of praising the 'coryphaeus' and of recognizing his preeminent function in the very foundation of the Church. They simply did not consider this praise and recognition as relevant in any way to the Papal claims, since any bishop, and not only the pope, derives his ministry from the ministry of Peter.

The great Patriarch Photius is the first witness to the amazing stability in Byzantium of the traditional patristic exegesis. 'On Peter,' he writes, 'repose the foundations of the Faith.' 'He is the coryphaeus of the Apostles.' Even though he betrayed Christ, 'he was not deprived of being the chief of the apostolic choir, and has been established as the rock of the Church and is proclaimed by the Truth to be key-bearer of the Kingdom of heaven...'

All Byzantine theologians, even after the conflict with Rome, speak of Peter in the same terms as Photius... Their quiet assurance proves once more that they did not think of these texts (Mt. 16:18; Lk. 22:32; Jn. 21:15-17) as being an argument in favor of Roman ecclesiology, which they moreover ignored, and the 'logic' of which was totally alien to Eastern Christianity. The following points however seemed evident to them:

1) Peter is the 'coryphaeus' of the apostolic choir; he is the first disciple of Christ and speaks always on behalf of all. It is true that other Apostles, John, James, and Paul are also called 'coryphaei' and 'primates,' but Peter alone is the 'rock of the Church.'

2) The words of Jesus on the road to Caesarea Philippi—'On this rock I will build my Church'—are bound to the confession of Peter. The Church exists in history because man believes in Christ, the Son of God; without this faith there can be no Church. Peter was the first to confess this faith, and has thus become the 'head of theologians.'

¹ January 16th, Veneration of the holy and precious chains of the holy, glorious Apostle Peter

² *Book of Needs, Volume 1*, St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, South Canaan, 1998, p. 116

3) The Byzantine authors consider that the words of Christ to Peter (Matt. 16:18) possess a final and eternal significance. Peter is a mortal man, but the Church 'against which the gates of hell cannot prevail,' remains eternally founded on Peter.¹

7. Primacy in the New Testament

Since there is a broad agreement that Peter had a form of primacy, the question is: what kind of primacy? Let us not concern ourselves with the possible succession to that primacy, only to its original significance. We could also formulate the question negatively: what is primacy not meant to be?

In the context of granting his Apostles power the bind and loose (Matthew 18:18), Jesus opened with these fitting words:

And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.²

In Matthew's sequence, this reminder comes shortly after:

The greatest among you must be your servant.³

Considering the disputes of the Apostles concerning their relative greatness, these reminders were all the more appropriate. In Mark 9:33-35, the evangelist offers this sobering account:

They came to Capernaum, and when he got into the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' They said nothing, because on the road they had been arguing which of them was the greatest. So he sat down, called the Twelve to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all.'

Likewise in Luke 9:46-28:

An argument started between them about which of them was the greatest. Jesus knew what thoughts were going through their minds, and he took a little child whom he set by his side and then he said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. The least among you all is the one who is the greatest.'

It is remarkable that even after the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, the Apostles continued to debate this point:

¹ TPOP, pp. 7-29

² Matthew 18:4 NJB

³ Matthew 23:11 NJB

An argument also arose between them about which of them was considered to be the greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the nations have lordship over them, and those who have authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so with you! Instead, the one who is the greater among you should become as the younger, and one who is leading as the one who serves. For who is greater, one reclining at the table or the one who serves? Is not it the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. But you are those who have remained with me in my trials, and now I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed [a kingdom] upon me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom; and you will sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."¹

It is in the context of this important lesson that we find Peter singled out:

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has asked to have you, so that he might sift you [all] like wheat! But I have prayed for you, that your faith would not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brethren." But Simon said, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death!" Then Jesus replied, "I tell you, Peter, by the time the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me!"²

What do we learn from these key passages? First and perhaps strangely, that the Apostles seemed to have no awareness that Peter had already been appointed prime minister or vicar of their Lord, hence the ongoing debate. To be sure, the Apostles had not yet received the Holy Spirit and were slow to understand. Still, we notice that Christ did not attempt to set the record straight by saying: "Peter is my vicar, the chief and all others are equal as Apostles." This does not mean that the concept of primacy, or a call to a special ministry of "strengthening the brethren" is ignored by Christ. However, His commandment is that any legitimate primacy or greatness is one of love and service, not lordship. It is also remarkable that Christ conferred the same kingdom to them all and spoke about twelve equal thrones.³

What does this mean? If there is to be no relationship of lordship among the Apostles, is there no primacy in the Church? In the letter to the Hebrews, are we not all instructed to "submit to our leaders"⁴? Thus, Christians recognize that there can be such a thing as positions of

¹ Luke 22:24-30 EOB

² Luke 22:31-35 EOB: This version uses brackets and footnotes to convey the contrast between you (plural) and you (singular).

³ Compare this verse with the *synthronon* of the ancient basilicas. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the four kings are equally enthroned but Peter is the High King (the bishop in Eastern Orthodox ecclesiology, the Pope in Roman Catholicism).

⁴ Hebrews 13:5

authority with special jurisdictional powers. In an Orthodox context, various forms of primacy of authority are recognized (or granted) to the priests, bishops, metropolitans, patriarchs, etc.

Hence, these words of Christ are a challenge both for Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. Whatever position of primacy one may have in the Church, it must be one of service and strengthening. If a priest, bishop, patriarch or pope starts “lording over” the flock in the spirit of this world, then his greatness is destroyed. On the other hand, the Lord’s command does not remove legitimate authority or give us the right to disobey, as long as the principle of Acts 5:29¹ is observed. The question, then, is that of legitimate authority and the way in which such authority is exercised.



The book of Acts is especially interesting because it documents the activities of the Apostles after the pouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Luke gives us an ‘ideal’ vision of the life of the Church in Jerusalem, when the Apostles could still form a permanent senate. The balance between Peter’s primacy or leadership and the Apostles’ conciliarity is especially noticeable. Peter is clearly the spokesperson of the group and yet, his primacy is in the group, not over the group. We have for instance the statement that:

Now, when the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they [the Apostles] sent Peter and John to them.²

What is striking is how much the Spirit is the one in charge of the Church, as we see in the ministries of Peter, Philip, Paul, etc. It is also remarkable that the Holy Spirit does not cross ecclesiastical boundaries. This is why Philip, a deacon, can baptize the Samaritans, but also why the Apostles had to lay hands on the new converts so that they might receive the Spirit. When Peter was ordered in the Spirit to receive the first Gentiles into the Church, he had full authority to do so, both as an Apostle and because this was the clear will of God. And yet, it was a Council, not Peter alone, which settled the ensuing controversy. Much has been written regarding Peter’s role at the Council of Jerusalem. Did Peter function as primate in this instance? The general consensus is that Peter himself did not preside at the Council. In the words of St. John Chrysostom:

¹ “But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men!”

² Acts 8:14

This (James) was bishop [of Jerusalem], as they say, and therefore he speaks last. There was no arrogance in the Church. After Peter Paul speaks, and none silences him: James waits patiently.... John does not say anything, nor the other Apostles, but they held their peace, for James was invested with the chief rule, and think it no hardship. So clean was their soul from love of glory. Peter indeed spoke more strongly, but James here more mildly: for thus it behooves one in high authority, to leave what is unpleasant for others to say, while he himself appears in the milder part.

Here, Chrysostom, although a great proponent of strong Petrine primacy, admits that it was James ‘the Lord’s brother’ who was “invested with the chief rule” (in Jerusalem) and thus presided over the Council.

As a result, we must admit that, in the New Testament, the primacy of Peter is a very vague concept. He is always listed first and acts as the obvious leader of the group, and yet, he is always presented as “an Apostle” or in his own words the “fellow presbyter”.¹ Peter is presented as “one of the pillars,” the leader of the missionary work to the circumcised, but not a universal shepherd. Even if we are to see in St. Peter the ‘proto-bishop’ according to the Eastern tradition, we have had to deal with the fact that *episkopos* and *presbyteros* are interchangeable in the New Testament. In other words, the only word that qualifies the primate is *protos* or first.

There is no doubt, then, that the primate is ‘first among equals,’ but this expression is not intended to empty this role of all authority. In the biblical mindset, being ‘first’ is significant:

But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.²

We shall not belabor the point, as it is obvious that in the case of Christ, being “first” or “first born” also means having authority over all as heir:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him, all things were created, in the heavens and on earth, things visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities and powers; all things have been created through him, and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things are held together. He is the head of the body, the Church; [he is] the first cause, the firstborn from the dead, so that in all things he might have the first place.³

¹ 1 Peter 5:1-3

² 1 Timothy 2:12-13 NAB

³ Colossians 1:15-18 EOB

Finally, there is no doubt that being ‘first among’ a group, either legitimate or usurped, can be turned into a sinful abuse of power:

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first¹ among them, does not accept what we say.²

In the case of St. Peter and bishops, the key aspect is that they are symbols or representatives of the unity of the Church. Not unlike modern-day senators, their authority is derived from the reality they represent.

In summary, it is important, to understand and define the role and authority of the *protos* in any organization, and to clearly distinguish between essential or divine primacies (that of a husband or bishop) and humanly defined ones (civil rulers, structures of communion). In both cases, the admonitions of Christ to “he who would be first” and the 34th apostolic canon are fundamental.

8. *A word about Peter and John*

There are two reasons to reflect on the relationship between Peter and John in the context on our discussion of Petrine and Papal primacy. First, John 21 is often presented by Roman Catholic apologists as establishing Peter’s role as chief-shepherd of the ‘universal Church.’ Secondly, the fact that the Apostle John died thirty years after Peter brings up the question of his own theoretical submission to an alleged successor of Peter in Rome.

Before discussing John 21 and its possible interpretation, let us start with a general comment on the Gospel of John. As scholars now acknowledge, this gospel presents a different picture on several points. In chapter 2, it is Bartholomew, not Peter who makes the first confession of Jesus as Messiah. In chapter 19, Peter has to go through the beloved disciple to obtain the identity of the one who would betray. In chapter 20, the beloved disciple is the first one to understand and believe in the resurrection of Christ. Again, in chapter 21, that same disciple is the first who identifies the man on the shore as “the Lord.” It is this context that we find the famous “do you love me?” dialogue between Jesus and Peter (already cited). This passage has been interpreted in two ways. The restorative interpretation is that Peter, who had denied his Lord by a threefold denial was restored to his Apostleship and leadership by a threefold confession of faith. This was the perspective of St. Cyril of

¹ φιλο-πρωτευων

² 3 John 9

Alexandria and St. Augustine. Chrysostom would be the only clear case of a Father who did not stress the restorative nature of this event, but rather the fact that Peter was given “chief authority among the brethren.”¹

This leads us to our second reflection: if we are to understand that Peter had “chief authority among the brethren” (according to the Byzantine interpretation, with a derivative application to the episcopate), we have the question of John finding himself under the “chief authority” of the bishops of Rome. This is the Roman Catholic position if, as they contend, Peter’s successors are exclusively the bishops of that city.

It is difficult to argue that the Gospel of John allows for such an interpretation. Clearly, the destiny of the beloved disciple is not Peter’s business or concern, much less that of any future bishop of anywhere. If we are to follow Chrysostom’s interpretation, we must also note these words

And if anyone should say ‘How then did James receive the chair at Jerusalem?’ I would make this reply, that He appointed Peter teacher not of the chair, but of the world. And this He did to withdraw them (Peter and John) from their unseasonable sympathy for each other; for since they were about to receive the charge of the world, it was necessary that they should no longer be closely associated together.²

John, then, also did “receive the charge of the world,” along with his beloved fellow-Apostle Peter, although their ministries covered different geographical areas. The argument, then, that the Corinthians appealed to Clement of Rome, not John, because Clement was in fact “pastor of the universal Church” as Peter’s dynastic successor, is disconcerting. There are plenty of practical and political reasons why the Corinthians would have discussed this matter with Rome instead of John, and it would seem desirable not to invoke this argument.

9. *Apostolic Succession, Apostolic College*

As we conclude this discussion of the primacy of Peter, we understand that the level of authority associated with Peter’s status as *protos* is somewhat irrelevant to the Catholic-Orthodox debate. For the Byzantine East and modern Orthodoxy, the prerogatives of St. Peter are primarily personal, secondarily applicable to the episcopate. Only in an analogous way do they have bearing on the role of the metropolitans, patriarchs and popes. Hopefully, this study will restrain the subconscious desire to

¹ *Commentary on St. John’s Gospel*, (Homily 88)

² *Idem*

downplay the primacy of Peter (or feel uncomfortable about liturgical hymns or the writings of the Fathers) out of fear that it is ‘ammunition for the Latins.’ Instead, let us stress that the authentic Eastern Orthodox understanding of Apostolic Succession is slightly different than the Roman Catholic view, and this has significant ecclesiological ramifications.

The relationship between Peter and the other Apostles becomes a matter of concern and controversy if only one bishop succeeds to Peter (and the other bishops to the other Apostles) with the exact same relationship of authority. This is the Roman Catholic position:

The second point follows from what has been said: the bishop is the successor of the Apostles¹, but only the bishop of Rome is the successor of a particular apostle – of Saint Peter – and thus given responsibility for the whole Church.²

This is in sharp contrast with the authentic Orthodox perspective:

A careful analysis of ecclesiastical literature both Eastern and Western, of the first millennium, including such documents as the lives of saint, would certainly show that this tradition was a persistent one; and indeed it belongs to the essence of Christian ecclesiology to consider any local bishop to be the teacher of his flock and therefore to fulfill sacramentally, through apostolic succession, the office of the first true believer, Peter.³

It is not my intention to revisit this important discussion but only to re-emphasize that unless we understand these two paradigms, no fruitful dialogue can take place. The area of ‘negotiation’ has to do with the role of a ‘first Church’ or ‘first bishop’ among his peers, in which case the primacy of Peter among the Twelve provides a certain pattern or analogy that should certainly be considered.

III. THE MIND OF THE FATHERS

Trying to discern the mind of the Fathers on a particular topic is more than just collecting quotations and statistics. As we know, it is easy, very dangerous, and often dishonest to quote the Fathers as one would quote the Scriptures, with a particular agenda in mind. Indeed, virtually every heresy can be ‘supported’ by scriptural quotations. Likewise, the Fathers are now cited as ‘ancient authorities’ for all sorts of doctrines, including

¹ We have already mentioned that this view was expressed by St. Jerome.

² CTC, p. 97. Notice the popular yet problematic use of ‘whole Church’ (Romans 16:23; Acts 15:22).

³ TPOP, p. 71

Mormonism. As a result, the Fathers must be read in full and understood in the context of their life and experience in the Church.

At this point, we have extensively quoted primary and secondary sources so that for all intents and purposes, the mind of the Fathers has already been discussed at some length. As a result, we will briefly review some of the principal Fathers, bearing in mind that our investigation deals with the unique succession of Peter in Rome resulting in a universal primacy of jurisdiction for the bishop of that city. On the question of the person of Peter, it is worth repeating the broad consensus between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox which was well summarized by Meyendorff and Kesich:

We may conclude that the early church Fathers and Christian writers recognized Peter's position of honor and preeminence in the New Testament period... Their interpretations of Jesus' promise to Peter— 'You are Petros, and on this petra I will build my church' -- converge with those modern exegetes: the rock is Peter. But they also interpreted the rock as Peter's confession. The Church is built on Peter, or the church is built upon the rock, which is Peter's confession. We cannot find two distinct groups of exegetes, one with whom states that 'the rock is Peter,' while the other concludes that 'the rock is Peter's confession.' In the writings of any given author, one can find both interpretations simultaneously (Kesich).... [T]he great Cappadocians, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine all concur in affirming that the Faith of Simon made it possible for him to become the Rock on which the Church is founded.¹

In order to offer a more comprehensive study, we will review each Father and assess his closeness to the modern Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox understanding of primacy. As much as possible, I will attempt to give a fair analysis of their 'mind' on 3 subjects: (a) the meaning of Matthew 16, (b) the nature of Peter's primacy and (c) the transmission of this primacy or chair to a particular bishop.



Understandably, everyone desires to have the Fathers on their side, including Protestant apologists. But if the Fathers are used in the same reckless manner as the Scriptures, can we know the mind of a particular writer when the subject is so complex and sensitive? I think it is indeed possible. But let us start by mentioning a few difficulties.

¹ TPOP, p. 65, 70

First, we must differentiate between ‘side remarks’ and direct exegesis. For instance, it may be that a Father calls Peter “the Rock” when mentioning his name, but his specific exposition of Matthew 16 may be more detailed and convey a different picture.

The second point is that we should deal with ‘the argument from silence’ issue. A Father may be verbose on St. Peter but silent on the role of the Roman bishop. This is where actions speak louder than words. We will therefore try to take into account the relationship between a particular Father and the bishop of Rome to understand that Father’s view of universal primacy and supremacy.

Both Orthodox and Protestants often complain that Roman Catholics suffer from a serious case of the ‘Peter Syndrome.’ By this, we mean the assumption that anything a Father says about Peter can be applied to the pope, even if no such connection is ever made. This can easily happen if one is not careful to distinguish between a Father’s teaching on Peter and his teaching on the authority of the Church of Rome.

With these considerations in mind, let us try to chronologically cover every major Father or ecclesiastical writer (not already covered) whose extent works allow for a meaningful study.

1. *Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110)*

Ignatius is remarkable for his highly developed ecclesiology coupled with a genuine concern for Church unity. We have seen that his letter mentions two unique attributes of the Church of Rome.

First, Rome presides “in the region of the Romans,” a probable reference to Rome’s metropolitan authority. This will find an echo at Nicea (325), in canon 6:

Let the ancient custom be preserved, that exists in Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis, that the Bishop of Alexandria have authority in all these countries, since that has also passed into a custom for the Bishop of Rome. Let the Churches at Antioch and in the other provinces preserve also their privileges.¹

Everyone agrees that Rome had special jurisdictional authority over the so-called Suburbicarian Churches of Italy, as Alexandria did over all Egypt. What is interesting, then, is the expression “which presides in love.”

¹ *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, NPNF2, Volume 14, page 15

The possible meanings of this sentence have been explored in our Historical section under the heading “Primacy of Love.” There are basically four possible understandings:

- (1) That Rome exercised her authority “in the place of the region of the Romans” with love, not harshness.
- (2) That Rome was the exemplary Church when it came to her love for the other Churches.
- (3) That Rome, as first Church, presided over the common union of Churches with a strong, episcopal or juridical primacy.
- (4) That Rome, as first Church, presided over the common union of Churches with a limited, symbolic, or consensual primacy.

It is impossible to draw any conclusions from Ignatius’ relatively short epistle. My assessment is that the bishop of Antioch was referring to the well-known care and solicitude of the Church of Rome for other communities. We have already encountered the letter of Dionysius of Corinth to the Romans which affirms this awareness (see page 142).

At the conclusion of his letter, Ignatius expresses the same idea:

Remember in your prayers the Church in Syria, which now has God for its shepherd, instead of me. Jesus Christ alone will oversee it, and your love [will also regard it].¹

It is better, then, to recognize that Ignatius had a tremendous respect for the great Church of the Romans. It was the Church honored by the last preaching and martyrdom of the two ‘chief Apostles’ and renowned for her generosity. On the other hand, we find no statements indicating universal jurisdiction, although ‘universal solicitude’ may be implied.

Finally, Ignatius has nothing to say about St. Peter or his successors.

2. *Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 120)*

With St. Irenaeus, we have voluminous writings which address a wide range of topics. The great disciple of St. Polycarp struggled mightily against the so-called ‘secret apostolic traditions’ of the Gnostics and consistently pointed to the publicly accessible and consistent teaching of the apostolic Churches. It was an argument of common sense, one that could still be used at the start of the second century:

¹ *Epistle to the Romans* (Roman Catholic translation, accessed at NewAdvent.com)

It is possible then for everyone in every church who may wish to know the truth to contemplate the Traditions of the Apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world.¹

This approach brings us to his conviction that Rome was an especially powerful witness of that apostolic deposit:

Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we do put to confusion [all schismatics] by indicating that tradition derived from the Apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the Faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should [convenire: agree with or resort to] this Church, on account of its [superior origin or pre-eminent authority], that is, the Faithful [from] everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.²

If Ignatius was a clear witness to Rome's primacy of love, Irenaeus focused on Rome's primacy of witness to the apostolic Faith. It is understandable that the lost Greek original and its Latin translation have been the subject of much controversy. To summarize, *convenire ad* should probably be translated "resort to"³. In this case, Irenaeus is saying that in order to ascertain controversial issues, the Churches should consult with the 'apostolic witness' *par excellence*, the Roman Church because the preaching of Peter and Paul was fresh and preserved intact. This indeed became the practice of the Churches of East and West throughout the centuries. On the other hand, Irenaeus does not say that this is a perpetual charism of infallible authority inherent to the bishop of Rome, or that every Church *must agree* with Rome on everything. We have already discussed Irenaeus' intervention when Pope Victor attempted to alter the Paschal calendar of the Asiatic Churches.

There is nothing much in Irenaeus about the personal primacy of the Apostle Peter, but we do find an explicit testimony that Peter and Paul entrusted the office of the episcopate to Linus before their martyrdom. The bishop of Lyons is silent about a Petrine succession in the episcopate, perhaps because his focus is on the apostolic pedigree of the Churches. In summary, Irenaeus gives us an indication that Rome's primacy of witness is acknowledged as early as the second century because of her historical

¹ Giles, p. 9

² *Against Heresies*, 3:3:2 (A.D. 180), in ANF,I:1415-416. Also see Giles pp.10-12

³ See also page 143

connection with Peter and Paul and because Rome was the nexus or center of gravity of the known world. During and beyond the Arian controversy, this special status of doctrinal stability will become especially important. We should conclude, however that Irenaeus can neither be considered proto-Roman Catholic or proto-Eastern Orthodox. His culture and theology form a unique and interesting blend of Hellenism and Judeo-Christianity which marked the formative years of orthodox Christianity.

3. *Origen (c. 250)*

Although Origen is not technically speaking 'a Father,' his erudition and scholarship were widely respected. The 'Alexandrian master' always looked for new ways to unravel and apply the sacred text, which means no dogmatic interpretation is to be expected beyond the basic apostolic *kerygma*.

On the one hand, Origen presents Peter as the rock of the Church in a special sense:

Look at [Peter], the great foundation of the Church, that most solid of rocks, upon whom Christ built the Church. And what does our Lord say to him? 'Oh you of little faith,' he says, 'why do you doubt?'¹

On the other hand, he stresses the common and equal powers of the Twelve Apostles:

But if you think the whole church to be built by God upon that one Peter only, what would you say of John the son of thunder or each of the Apostles? Are we to venture to say that the gates of Hades do not prevail against Peter by a special privilege, but prevail against the other Apostles and the perfect? What is said surely belongs to each and all of them, since all are 'Peter' and the 'Rock,' and the church of God has been built upon them all, and against none who are such do the gates of Hades prevail. Is it to Peter alone that the Lord gives the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and will no other of the blessed receive them? But if this privilege, 'I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,' is common to the others, so also are all the preceding words addressed as it were to Peter.²

But this did not mean that Peter had no primacy among the Twelve:

Jesus [said] that a coin would be found which was to be given for himself and Peter. It seems to me, then, that they thought that it was a very great honor which had been bestowed on Peter by Jesus, who judged that he was greater than the rest of His friends, they wished to learn accurately the truth of their suspicion, by making inquiry of Jesus and hearing from Him, whether, as they supposed, He had judged that Peter was greater than

¹ *Homilies on Exodus*, 5:4 [A.D. 248]

² Giles, p. 46

they; and at the same time also they hoped to learn the ground on which Peter had been preferred to the rest of the disciples... And, indeed, if we were to attend carefully to the evangelical writings, we would also find here, and in relation to those things which seem to be common to Peter and those who have thrice admonished the brethren, a great difference and a pre-eminence in the things said to Peter, compared with the second class. For it is no small difference that Peter received the keys not of one heaven but of more, and in order that whatsoever things he binds on the earth may be bound not in one heaven but in them all, as compared with the many who bind on earth and loose on earth, so that these things are bound and loosed not in the heavens, as in the case of Peter, but in one only; for they do not reach so high a stage, with power as Peter to bind and loose in all the heavens.¹

E. Giles is therefore correct to conclude that “Origen definitely believes that Peter held some sort of primacy,” and yet that he “shows no knowledge of the doctrine of Papal jurisdiction derived from Peter.”²

More importantly, we have already mentioned that Origen testified to the fact that bishops used Matthew 16 to substantiate their power to bind and loose:

Those who maintain the function of the episcopate make use of this word as Peter, and, having received the keys of the kingdom of heaven from the Savior, teach that things bound by them...are also bound in heaven³

The controversial author of *Peri Archon* is a precious witness to the life and mind of the early Churches. His travels brought him as far as Rome and Asia Minor, giving him a clear sense of the common deposit of “all the Churches of Christ under heaven.” Unlike his followers, Origen was careful to distinguish between the simple apostolic faith⁴ from his own speculations. This is how we learn that all the Churches used the Septuagint (and its longer canon) as their collection of Scripture, and that infant baptism was considered an apostolic Tradition. Although no explicit theory of a Petrine succession in the episcopate is found in Origen’s extant writings, his testimony that the bishops applied Matthew 16 to themselves is significant.

¹ Giles, pp. 47-48

² Giles, pp. 48

³ *Second Book of the Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*, Book XII, 14 – quoted in DECB, p. 68

⁴ Giles, pp. 44-45

Origen seems to belong more naturally in the Eastern camp¹, especially considering the absence of any argument in favor of a Roman primacy based on Peter's succession.

4. *Tertullian (c. 220)*

Tertullian is sometimes considered 'the Father of Latin theology' and the predecessor of Cyprian and Augustine. The fact that Tertullian eventually left the catholic Church of Carthage to join the Montanist sect forces us to consider his writings in the context of his growing disillusion with the Church leadership.

During his orthodox-catholic period, Tertullian was a staunch defender of apostolic succession and Tradition, very much like St. Irenaeus. He was also a rigorist who became very critical of the 'laxity' of the catholic bishops, considering that reconciling fallen Christians to the Church was tantamount to 'a license to sin.'

We find nothing relevant to the claims of Rome during this first period of his life, except for the awareness that in the West (which included North Africa), Rome was the apostolic Church "at hand":

We can say [to heretics]: let them make known the origins of their Churches, let them unfold the rolls of their bishops, so running down in succession from the beginning, that their first bishop had as his ordainer one of the Apostles...For in this way do the apostolic Churches reckon their origins. [Blessed is that Church] upon which the Apostles poured out their whole doctrine...²

Like Augustine, Tertullian saw in Peter (whom he considered to be the Rock in personal sense³) a symbol of the Church:

For though you think that heaven is still shut up, remember that the Lord left the keys of it to Peter here, and through him to the Church, which keys everyone will carry with him if he has been questioned and made a confession [of faith].⁴

After his defection to the Montanist sect, Tertullian became bitterly critical of the 'lax' absolutions granted by an unnamed bishop who may have been either Callistus of Rome or Aggripinus of Carthage:

It is the system of Christian modesty which is being shaken... I hear that there has even been an edict set forth, and an authoritative one. The

¹ He was a friend of Firmilian of Caesarea.

² Giles, p. 22

³ Giles, p. 21

⁴ *Antidote against the Scorpion*, 10 [A.D. 211]

Pontifex Maximus, that is the bishop of bishops pronounces: “I remit the crimes of adultery and fornication to those who have done penance.” O edit on which cannot be inscribed “Well done!”

Tertullian then reversed his older understanding that the power of the keys had been granted to the Church through Peter. Instead, he now claimed that the keys were given uniquely and personally to the blessed Apostle. Not unlike Origen, he made Petrine authority conditional to personal holiness¹, which for a Montanist, meant “prophetic gifts”:

Now, then, apostolic sir, show me examples of your prophetic gifts and I will recognize their divine origin. Secondly, justify your claim to the power of remitting such sins. Now with reference to your decision, I ask: how do you come to usurp the prerogatives of the Church? If it is because the Lord said to Peter, “Upon this rock I will build my Church, to thee I have given the keys”; do you for that reason presume to have diverted the power of binding and loosing to yourself, that is to every sister Church of Petrine origin? What a fellow you are, subverting and wholly changing the obvious intention of our Lord, who conferred this on Peter personally! He says, “on thee I will build my Church and I will give the keys to thee, no to the Church.”²

Unfortunately, there is no way to determine whether Tertullian was referring to the bishop of Carthage or Rome. It is interesting, though, to notice that the claim was “to have diverted the power of binding and loosing to yourself, that is to every sister Church of Petrine origin,” a wording that is reminiscent of the Petrine foundation of episcopal, not Papal³, authority.

As it stands, it is better to admit that one cannot reliably quote Tertullian to elucidate the subject at hand.

5. *Cyprian of Carthage* (†258)

For various reasons, including his personal charisma and martyric death, St. Cyprian of Carthage is often regarded as an important witness in the controversy. Over the past centuries, it was mostly Anglicans and Catholics who scoured the writings of the North African bishop for support of their respective theories. As we have seen, modern Roman Catholic apologists often use snippets from Cyprian’s writings in which he

¹ This perception was very strong in North Africa, and led to the disastrous Donatist schism.

² Giles, p. 27

³ Incidentally, the title ‘pope’ was also commonly used to refer to the Bishop of Carthage, which renders the identification of Tertullian’s opponent all the more difficult.

strongly supports ‘the unity of the catholic Church around the chair of Peter.’

Yet, we have already discussed Cyprian’s ecclesiology at some length, and quoted on no less than three instances Fr. Quasten’s irrefutable assessment of his ecclesiology (see page 156).

If one wonders why the author of *De Unitate* is so often brought to the witness bar by Roman Catholic apologists, the reason is simple: the casual reader who has no concept of the Eucharistic-Petrine ecclesiology (which Cyprian took for granted) will come across passages that may sound decidedly Roman Catholic. Cyprian is among the few Fathers who did not place the ‘faith’ interpretation for Matthew 16 on a higher plane than the personal one. If an attempt is made to reconstruct the universal Petrine ecclesiology of Vatican I by using pieces from various ancient authorities, Cyprian is certainly a good place to start. He strongly stresses the fact that Peter is the rock on which the Church is built, and that the unity of the catholic Church is dependant on unity with the Chair of Peter. Hence, and for the sake of comprehensiveness, let us present anew Cyprian’s discussions pertaining to Peter, Church unity and Rome’s primacy. The historical context of the *lapsi*, Novationism and rebaptism has already been discussed at length. Cyprian’s concern was the fragmentation of the (local) Church and the issue of legitimacy, authority and salvation. It is with this in mind that he wrote his famous treatise *On the unity of the catholic Church* which contains these often-cited words:

The Lord says to Peter: ‘I say to you,’ he says, ‘that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven. ‘On him [Peter] he builds the Church, and to him he gives the command to feed the sheep [John 21:17], and although he assigns a like power to all the Apostles, yet he founded a single chair [cathedra], and he established by his own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was [i.e., Apostles], but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair... If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the Faith? If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?’¹

¹ *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, 4 [A.D. 251]). There are two versions of this treatise and much controversy over the authorship and authenticity of the so-called “primacy version.” The debate is irrelevant from an Orthodox point of view since the issue is always that of episcopal, not papal authority.

In his friendly correspondence with his “colleague” Bishop Cornelius of Rome, Cyprian wrote:

With a false bishop appointed for themselves by heretics, they dare even to set sail and carry letters from schismatics and blasphemers to the chair of Peter and to the *ecclesiam principalem*¹ in which sacerdotal unity has its source; nor did they take thought that these are Romans, whose faith was praised by the preaching Apostle, and among whom it is not possible for perfidy to have entrance.²

In this letter, Cyprian is both confident and worried about the solidity of the Roman Church, as he concludes with this request:

Now I both exhort and beg you to do any request what on other occasions you do of you own accord and courtesy, and read this my letter, so that if any contagion of poisoned language or pestilent propaganda has crept in over there [in Rome], it may be completely removed from the ears and hearts of the brethren...³

Obviously, the expression “chair of Peter” was applied by Cyprian to every bishop, but what about “the *ecclesiam principalem*” in which sacerdotal unity has its source?” It seems indeed probable that this expression was intended as a special attribute of the Roman Church. It is on this basis and because of Cyprian’s refusal to assign any jurisdictional authority to the bishop of Rome that Quasten concludes that what Cyprian had in mind was a primacy of honor as “center of solidarity.”

In our Ecclesiology section, we have discussed the rationale of this primacy of honor concept: if the episcopate is “the chair of Peter”, the episcopate at Rome is connected with the Apostle in an obvious and radiant way.

Hence, the key to doing justice to Cyprian’s teachings is to grasp this simple yet often ‘odd’ idea that every bishop holds the place of Peter as symbol of the unity of the Church, and that the catholic Church is the local assembly, not the worldwide society of Christians. This view is taught consistently by the great bishop:

You ought to know, then, that the bishop is in the Church and the Church in the bishop, and if someone is not with the bishop, he is not in the Church. They vainly flatter themselves who creep up, not having peace

¹ Often translated “principal Church” although “most ancient” is the likely ancient, as in the writings of Irenaeus.

² *Letters*, 59 (55), 14 to Cornelius of Rome, c. AD 252

³ Giles, p. 61

⁴ Often translated “principal Church” although “most ancient” is the likely ancient, as in the writings of Irenaeus.

with the priests of God, believing that they are secretly in communion with certain individuals. For the Church, which is one and Catholic, is not split nor divided, but it is indeed united and joined by the cement of priests¹ who adhere one to another.²

It is only with this paradigm in mind that we can understand why Cyprian (and even Augustine) could write a detailed treatise called *On the unity of the catholic Church*, quote Matthew 16 at length, yet without ever mentioning the bishop of Rome. This does not mean that Rome has no role as center of gravity and possible organ of unity of the common union of Churches, but this would require another treatise with a different title.

In our Historical section, we have seen that Cyprian's warm relations with the bishop of Rome came to an abrupt end when Stephen succeeded Cornelius and attempted to impose the Roman discipline on the reception of heretics on the North African Churches. A council presided over by the same Cyprian rejected the jurisdictional claims of Stephen:

For neither does any of us set himself up as a bishop of bishops, nor by tyrannical terror does any compel his colleague to the necessity of obedience; since every bishop, according to the allowance of his liberty and power, has his own proper right of judgment, and can no more be judged by another than he himself can judge another.³

There can be no doubt that Fr. Quasten was correct and that St. Cyprian was proto-Eastern Orthodox in his ecclesiology. However, it is important to note that he also saw Rome as the special Petrine center of the common union. It is unfortunate, then, that the martyrs' words are so often quoted in a way so at odds with his original intention.

Of course, some will contend that Cyprian was mistaken. After all, his view on rebaptism was eventually abandoned, and his theory that "every bishop, according to the allowance of his liberty and power, has his own proper right of judgment⁴" was seriously limited by the metropolitan organization endorsed by Nicea.

¹ Here, "priests" (sacerdos) means bishops, not presbyters. Likewise in the East, the term *hiereus* referred almost exclusively to the *episkopos* (as Eucharistic presider) until the fifth century.

² *Letters*, 66[69]:8)

³ *Acts of the Seventh Council of Carthage under Cyprian*, (The Judgment of Eighty-Seven Bishops)

⁴ Of course, the North African council meant that a bishop cannot judge another bishop, not that a council of bishops has no authority over a particular Church.

6. *Athanasius of Alexandria (†373) and the Church of Rome*

It is well-known that St. Athanasius was the champion of the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity against the Arians, and that because the Eastern Emperors favored the latter, the bishop of Alexandria was expelled from his see no less than five times. It is in this context of civil interference in the life of the Church that we detect a growing awareness that some kind of ecclesiastical court of appeal should be formalized.

There is nothing in the writings of Athanasius that is directly relevant to the claims of Rome, but the fact that he sought refuge in the orthodox capital and sought vindication from his fellow-bishops should be examined.

It is important to note that Julius of Rome had a clear sense that his see should have been immediately involved in the controversy surrounding Athanasius' removal from Alexandria. We have already discussed Julius' letter in our Historical section (see page 169), but it is indispensable to revisit this issue. The Bishop of Rome appealed to the "rule (canon) of the Church" and to "custom." Julius may have been referring to a version of the canons of Nicea to which were appended (as ecumenical) the canons of Sardica. The issue of Rome's merger of Nicea and Sardica became a heated issue during the council of Carthage (419), as Sozomen testifies:

St. Augustine of Hippo was in attendance. Pope Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, presided. As the proceedings began, a certain Faustinus, legate of the Roman church, asked that the council acknowledge the right of deposed bishops to appeal to Rome. Faustinus claimed that this right had been granted by the council of Nicea. Pope Aurelius sent to Constantinople for copies of the acts of the council of Nicea, and found no such canon. Subsequently, he wrote a letter to Pope Celestine of Rome ("our most honorable brother") explaining that the African church was not obliged to allow disputed cases to be referred to Rome. In addition, he warned Celestine against hearing such cases - "how shall we be able to rely on a sentence passed beyond the sea, since it will not be possible to send thither the necessary witnesses?" - and against receiving those who had been excommunicated in Africa into communion in Rome.

The great Church historian was explicit on the fact that Rome and the East had a very different understanding of what Rome's primacy entailed:

Athanasius, on leaving Alexandria, had fled to Rome. [Other expelled bishops were] dwelling at this period in Rome. The Roman bishop, on learning the accusation against each individual, and on finding that they held the same sentiments about the Nicæan dogmas, admitted them to communion as of like orthodoxy; and as the care for all was fitting to the dignity of his see, he restored them all to their own churches. He wrote to the bishops of the East, and rebuked them for having judged these bishops

unjustly, and for harassing the Churches by abandoning the Nicæan doctrines. He summoned a few among them to appear before him on an appointed day, in order to account to him for the sentence they had passed, and threatened to bear with them no longer, unless they would cease to make innovations... Athanasius and Paul were reinstated in their respective sees, and forwarded the letter of Julius to the bishops of the East. The bishops [of the East] could scarcely tolerate such documents, and they assembled together at Antioch, and framed a reply to Julius, beautifully expressed and composed with great legal skill, yet filled with considerable irony and indulging in the strongest threats. They confessed in this epistle, that the Church of Rome was entitled to universal honor, because it was the school of the Apostles, and had become the metropolis of piety from the outset, although the introducers of the doctrine had settled there from the East... They called Julius to account for having admitted the followers of Athanasius into communion, and expressed their indignation against him for having insulted their Synod and abrogated their decrees, and they assailed his transactions as unjust and discordant with ecclesiastical right...

The same pattern will be found a few years later in the case of the Antiochian schism: the bishop of Rome is convinced that he can 'write letters restoring bishops to their Churches or handing over bishoprics to a preferred candidate,' a position utterly rejected by the East. In the case of Athanasius, Rome was obviously right, but turned out to be on the losing side in the case of Paulinus.



In this context of great confusion, the relationship between East and West had converged towards a general agreement that Julius of Rome – and we may conclude the bishop of Rome in general – should be given the prerogative to hear appeals from other bishops. The council of Sardica was an East/West council held under the leadership of the aged bishop Hosius of Cordova (in Spain) who was universally respected as the “father of the bishops.” The canons of the Sardica are clear that Hosius proposed a number of disciplinary canons for which he received the approval of the bishops. Canons 3 - 5 are relevant to the question of Rome's primacy:

3 (Latin text): Bishop Hosius said: This also it is necessary to add,—that bishops shall not pass from their own province to another province in which there are bishops, unless perchance upon invitation from their brethren, that we seem not to close the door of charity.

But if in any province a bishop have a matter in dispute against his brother bishop, one of the two shall not call in as judge a bishop from another province.

But if judgment have gone against a bishop in any cause, and he think that he has a good case, in order that the question may be reopened, let us, if it be your pleasure, honor the memory of St. Peter the Apostle, and let those who tried the case write to Julius, the bishop of Rome, and if he shall judge that the case should be retried, let that be done, and let him appoint judges; but if he shall find that the case is of such a sort that the former decision need not be disturbed, what he has decreed shall be confirmed. Is this the pleasure of all? The synod answered: "it is our pleasure."

4 (Latin text): Bishop Gaudentius said: It ought to be added, if it be your pleasure, to this sentence full of sanctity which you have pronounced, that—when any bishop has been deposed by the judgment of those bishops who have sees in neighboring places, and he [the bishop deposed] shall announce that his case is to be examined in the city of Rome—that no other bishop shall in any wise be ordained to his see, after the appeal of him who is apparently deposed, unless the case shall have been determined in the judgment of the Roman bishop.

5 (Greek text): Bishop Hosius said: Decreed, that if any bishop is accused, and the bishops of the same region assemble and depose him from his office, and he appealing, so to speak, takes refuge with the most blessed bishop of the Roman church, and he be willing to give him a hearing, and think it right to renew the examination of his case, let him be pleased to write to those fellow-bishops who are nearest the province that they may examine the particulars with care and accuracy and give their votes on the matter in accordance with the word of truth. And if any one require that his case be heard yet again, and at his request it seem good to move the bishop of Rome to send presbyters *a latere*, let it be in the power of that bishop, according as he judges it to be good and decides it to be right—that some be sent to be judges with the bishops and invested with his authority by whom they were sent. And be this also ordained. But if he think that the bishops are sufficient for the examination and decision of the matter let him do what shall seem good in his most prudent judgment. The bishops answered: What has been said is approved.

Although the canons were adopted in complete freedom, it should be mentioned that they were presented to Julius of Rome with great respect:

[It] will appear best and more fitting, that the priests of the Lord from all the provinces should report to the head, that is to the See of Peter the apostle.¹

It is clear, then, that Sardica was initially a personal affair: Hosius was the acknowledged leader and Pope Julius was mentioned by name. When Liberius succeeded Julius as Bishop of Rome, things became more complicated. Under persecution and duress, Liberius was forced to sign a

¹ Giles, pp. 105-106. The authenticity of this passage has been questioned, but there is general agreement that it is probably genuine and as the context indicates, it is a letter from the Western bishops only.

compromise with the Arians and to break communion with Athanasius¹. Reflecting on this turn of events, the bishop of Alexandria wrote:

From the outset, they [the Arians] did not even spare Liberius bishop of Rome, but extended their fury even to that place; they did not respect it because it is an apostolic throne, nor were they cautious because Rome is the metropolis of Romania... For when they saw that he was orthodox and hated the Arian heresy, and that he tried hard to persuade everyone to renounce it and withdraw from it, these profane man reasoned thus: "If we persuade Liberius we shall soon prevail over all!" [Emperor] Constantius plotted against all, and banished Liberius...

But Liberius, after he had been exiled for two years, gave way, and from fear of threatened death he subscribed [to an Arianizing creed]. But this also shows their violence, and the hatred of Liberius against the heresy, and his support of Athanasius, whilst he had a free choice. For what is done under torture against a man's first judgment is not the willing deed of those who fear, but that of the tormentors.

It is noteworthy that Athanasius calls Rome only "an apostolic throne" and "the metropolis of Romania." However, it is clear that the Arian victory in Rome – obtained by duress² and without validity – was a grand victory. But the real guardian of Nicene orthodoxy, as far as Athanasius was concerned, was the great Hosius:

But although the ungodly had done all this, yet they thought they had accomplished nothing, so long as the great Hosius escaped their knavish tricks... They felt no shame that he is the father of the bishops... [The Arians] went to the Constantius [the Arianizing emperor], and argued, "We have not succeeded, as long as Hosius remains... He is the president of councils, and his letters are heard everywhere... If therefore he remains, the banishment of the rest is superfluous."³

As we look back on the Arian crisis of which Athanasius was a major protagonist, we see the common union of Churches torn apart by doctrinal controversy and political interference. The bishops of Rome continued to claim final authority based on "rule (canon) of the Church" and "custom," as well as (we may assume), 'Peter's authority.' But in fact, the customs were vague until Sardica⁴ and the canons non-existent.

There was, since the apostolic times and after the fall of Jerusalem, a universal agreement that Rome should "preside in love" and have "care for all." The need to deal with internal problems and to maintain communion

¹ Giles, pp. 107-108

² Athanasius never blames Liberius for his compromise.

³ Athanasius, in *Historia Arianorum*, in Giles pp. 110-112

⁴ "Custom" might refer to the appeal of the Corinthian Church to Rome at the time of St. Clement.

between the Churches, in isolation from imperial pressure, led to the formal definition of practical prerogatives granted to the bishop of Rome. The bishops understood that only a council with specific canons would settle the issue and create a workable system. Athanasius himself has nothing specific to say that is relevant to the modern debate on the origin and scope of Rome's primacy, but the council of Sardica is significant. Its language and spirit are extremely helpful in understanding how it was possible for East and West to find an agreement on what powers should be recognized to make Rome's primacy of honor an effective and recognized instrument of universal unity.

7. *Hilary of Poitiers* (†367)

Hilary was a leading bishop in modern-day France who worked hard to reconcile the anti-Arian groups. He had nothing to say about the primacy of Rome but is often cited from his non-Roman interpretation of Matthew 16:

Next, the Father's utterance 'This is My Son,' had revealed to Peter that he must confess 'Thou art the Son of God,' for in the words 'This is,' God the Revealer points Him out, and the response, 'Thou art,' is the believer's welcome to the truth. And this is the rock of confession whereon the Church is built...

This faith it is which is the foundation of the Church; through this faith the gates of hell cannot prevail against her. This is the Faith which has the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatsoever this faith shall have loosed or bound on earth shall be loosed or bound in heaven... The very reason why he is blessed is that he confessed the Son of God. This is the Father's revelation, the foundation of the Church, this is the assurance of her permanence.¹

It should be repeated that the identity of Rock=Peter or Rock=Confession is, from an Orthodox perspective, a moot point. Roman Catholicism has also accepted the confessional and personal interpretations as equally valid. What is interesting in Hilary is his disillusionment with the 'institutional Church,' its changing creeds and divided episcopate. He writes:

While we fight about words, take advantage of ambiguities, criticize authors, fight on party questions, have difficulty in agreeing, and prepare to anathematize each other, there is scarce a man who belongs to Christ.²

¹ *The Trinity*, Book 6.36 (NPNF vol. 9)

² Giles, p. 114

This sad statement applies to us, and calls us first and foremost to the path of repentance and prayer.

8. *Basil of Caesarea* (†379)

Basil is a close second to Chrysostom in the Orthodox consciousness of its own heritage. His liturgy is served ten times a year (on feast days), that of John Chrysostom being the standard for every other day.

The author of *On the Holy Spirit* is often quoted by Roman apologists, not so much on the theme of Peter's primacy but rather on his request for 'assistance from Rome' during the Antiochian schism. The passage in question reads:

It has seemed to me to be desirable to send a letter to the bishop of Rome, begging him to examine our condition, and since there are difficulties in the way of representatives being sent from the West by a general synodical decree, to advise him to exercise his own personal authority in the matter by choosing suitable persons to sustain the labors of a journey, suitable, too, by gentleness and firmness of character, to correct the unruly among us here; able to speak with proper reserve and appropriateness, and thoroughly well acquainted with all that has [taken place in the East].¹

The reader will already be familiar with the story of the schism at Antioch and should refer to our discussion of the matter as needed. The intention of St. Basil, as indicated in his letter, is quite clear: because it has proved impossible to organize a delegation of Western visitors by means of a local council, the bishop of Caesarea is requesting that the bishop of Rome should use his personal authority to find a suitable delegation. Basil was convinced that the Churches of the West should have been involved in the ongoing post-Nicene controversies and that Rome should play an active part in the resolution of this conflict.

As Michael Whelton narrate in *Popes and Patriarchs*, Basil soon encountered in the bishop of Rome a vision of primacy that clashed with his own agenda. Damasus I (366-384) was probably the first bishop of Rome to assert that Rome's primacy rested solely on Peter and to refer to the Roman church as "the apostolic See." St. Basil took side with Meletius of Antioch against Paulinus and his sponsor, Damasus of Rome. Indeed, his bitter criticism and rejection of Rome's 'solution' in the matter is acknowledged by the *Catholic Encyclopedia* who tried to minimize the importance of this position:

¹ *Epistle*, 69

Some difficulty has arisen out of the correspondence of St. Basil with the Roman See. That he was in communion with the Western bishops and that he wrote repeatedly to Rome asking that steps be taken to assist the Eastern Church in her struggle with schismatics and heretics is undoubted; but the disappointing result of his appeals drew from him certain words which require explanation. Evidently he was deeply chagrined that Pope Damasus on the one hand hesitated to condemn Marcellus and the Eustathians, and on the other preferred Paulinus to Meletius in whose right to the See of Antioch St. Basil most firmly believed. At the best it must be admitted that St. Basil criticized the pope freely in a private letter to Eusebius of Samosata and that he was indignant as well as hurt at the failure of his attempt to obtain help from the West. Later on, however, he must have recognized that in some respects he had been hasty; in any event, his strong emphasis of the influence which the Roman See could exercise over the Eastern bishops, and his abstaining from a charge of anything like usurpation are great facts that stand out obviously in the story of the disagreement.

Writing to his fellow bishops or to civil administrators, Basil expressed his rejection of the disastrous Western intervention. His letter to Eusebius of Samosata concludes thus:

The news of the West you know already... Apart from the common document, I should like to have written to their Coryphæus¹ - nothing, indeed, about ecclesiastical affairs except gently to suggest that they know nothing of what is going on here, and will not accept the only means whereby they might learn it. I would say, generally, that they ought not to press hard on men who are crushed by trials. They must not take dignity for pride. Sin only avails to produce enmity against God.²

We have already quoted Basil's equally clear statement to Count Terentius (page 128) which is an outright rejection of "the letter from Rome." Hence, faced with the proto-Eastern Orthodox behavior of St. Basil, Cardinal Newman preferred to blame the "lingering imperfections of the Saints," a tacit admission that the great doctor did not accept Rome's primacy of jurisdiction. On the other hand, it is certain that Basil desired communion and cooperation with the West, whose *coryphæus* (leader, chief) was the bishop of Rome. He may have been wrong in his rejection of Rome's authority, as Roman Catholics must argue, but must be recognized for who he was: a 'claimable' Father among of the saints for modern Eastern Orthodoxy.

¹ A clear reference to Damasus of Rome.

² *Letter 239*

9. *Gregory of Nyssa* († c. 386)

Considering their lengthy writings, there is little in both ‘Gregories’¹ that is directly relevant to the question of Rome’s primacy. Gregory of Nyssa – Basil’s brother – talks about “the memory of Peter, who is the head of the Apostles... he is the firm and most solid rock, on which the savior built his Church²” but his only application of Matthew 16 is that “through Peter gave to the bishops the keys of heavenly honors.”³

Hence, Gregory of Nyssa is a typical Easterner who belongs to the ancient ‘Byzantine’ tradition discussed in our Ecclesiology section.

10. *Gregory of Nazianzus* (†389)

St. Gregory of Nazianzus is the beloved poet-theologian of Eastern Christianity, honored with the rare title of “Theologian.” He was dragged, somewhat against his will, into the endless Arian controversies over the nature of God. An eloquent speaker, he was successful in strengthening the Nicene party in Constantinople, an achievement which earned him a controversial and short-lived episcopal transfer to the imperial capital.

The great saint had little to say about Petrine primacy, but he is on record for affirming the ecumenical presidency of the Church of Rome.

The faith [of Rome] was of old, and still is now, right, binding the whole West by the saving word: as is just in her who presides over all (*ten proedron ton olon*), reverencing the whole harmony of God.⁴

The problem is that St. Gregory is not explicit: is he talking about a divine primacy of jurisdiction *à la* Vatican I or about an ecumenical prerogative of honor, coordination and appeal *à la* Ignatius, Cyprian and Sardica? Since no one denies that the first see presides in some sense, what is being analyzed is the issue of the origin and scope of this primacy.

Faced with this type of patristic record and mentioning St. Gregory by name, Cardinal Congar offers this picture:

Many of the Eastern Fathers who are rightly acknowledged to be the greatest and most representative and are, moreover, so considered by the

¹ Nyssa and Nazianzen

² *On St. Stephen*, 3

³ PG XLVII, 312 C, quoted in TPOP, p. 71

⁴ *Carmen de Vita Sua*. Alternative translation: "Regarding the faith which they uphold, the ancient Rome has kept a straight course from of old, and still does so, uniting the whole West by sound teaching, as is just, since she presides over all and guards the universal divine harmony."

universal Church, do not offer us any more evidence of the primacy. Their writings show that they recognized the primacy of the Apostle Peter, that they regarded the See of Rome as the *prima sedes* playing a major part in the Catholic communion... but they provide us with no theological statement on the universal primacy of Rome by divine right. The same can be said of St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. John Damascene.¹

11. John Chrysostom (†407)

Often criticized and misunderstood, St. John Chrysostom is certainly among the greatest and most beloved saints of the Orthodox Church. His teachings on the place of Peter and his relationship with other Apostles are rather complex, but the overall picture is clear: Peter was indeed entrusted with preeminent “authority over the brethren” by the Lord himself, although it is unclear if the other Apostles were thought to be under his authority. It is fair to say that among the Fathers, Chrysostom is the one that held to the highest view of Peter.

Cyprian and others had seen in Peter the symbolic figure of the Church but they did not see in him or in the Bishop of Rome power over the other Apostles. As we shall see, Augustine basically inherited Cyprian’s views. In contrast, a fair assessment of Chrysostom’s corpus reveals a different view.

On the one hand, the great preacher teaches that not only Peter but also John “were to receive the care of the world²” and he applies the title *coryphaei* to other Apostles. Chrysostom is also somewhat contradictory on his interpretation of Matthew 16 because he often calls Peter “the foundation of the Church” all the while explicitly teaching that the rock of Matthew 16 is in fact Peter’s confession³. But this is of no concern because both interpretations are complementary, not exclusive.

On the other hand, Peter is clearly presented as the *coryphaeus par excellence* and his primacy among the brethren and the Apostles cannot be denied. Certainly, it is possible to diffuse almost every epithet ascribed by Chrysostom to Peter, as has been done by Protestant apologist William Webster. But there is one passage where Peter’s preeminence is unambiguous and which gives us a clue as to Chrysostom’s interpretive

¹ *After Nine Hundred Years*, Yves Congar, Fordham University, New York, 1959, pp. 61-62

² *Homily 88* [87]

³ “He did not say upon Peter for it is not upon the man, but upon his own faith that the church is built. And what is this faith? You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (*Pentecosten*, Migne 52.806.75-807.1)

framework. Commenting on Acts 1, the great commentator writes, almost as a passing thought:

[Peter] did not say, 'We are sufficient.' So far was he beyond all vain-glory, and he looked to one thing alone. And yet he had the same power to ordain as they all collectively.¹

Mentioning this text, Dom Chapman (RC) exclaims:

I know no more emphatic testimony to the supreme jurisdiction of St. Peter in any writer, ancient or modern, than the view taken in this homily of the election of St. Matthias, for I know of no act of jurisdiction in the Church more tremendous than the appointment of an apostle.²

This reference to the 'power to ordain' is an unmistakable reminder that like most of the Fathers, St. John Chrysostom saw Peter as the prototype of the bishop. We have already discussed this point at some length, but it is interesting that the rest of St. John's commentary focuses on the glories and dangers of the episcopate. Chrysostom's other key passage on this subject, previously quoted, is a clear illustration of this ecclesiology:

In speaking of S. Peter, the recollection of another Peter has come to me [St. Flavian, bishop of Antioch], the common father and teacher, who has inherited his prowess, and also obtained his chair... For though we do not retain the body of Peter, we do retain the Faith of Peter, and retaining the Faith of Peter we have Peter.³

Peter, then, is the symbol of episcopal authority, so that Peter's successors are the bishops, beginning with the first non-symbolic bishop: James. It is no wonder that Chrysostom ascribes such authority to the first bishop of Jerusalem, all the while exalting the conciliar ideal:⁴

This [James] was bishop, as they say, and therefore he speaks last ... There was no arrogance in the Church. After Peter Paul speaks, and none silences him: James waits patiently; not starts up (for the next word). No word speaks John here, no word the other Apostles, but held their peace, for James was invested with the chief rule, and think it no hardship. So clean was their soul from love of glory. Peter indeed spoke more strongly, but James here more mildly: for thus it behooves one in high authority [i.e. James], to leave what is unpleasant for others to say, while he himself appears in the milder part.⁵

¹ *Homily 3 on Acts*, NPNF1,XI:20

² SEP, p. 99

³ *Beginnings on Acts 2:6*, in Chapman 96

⁴ "But observe how Peter does everything with the common consent; nothing imperiously" (*Homily 3 on Acts*)

⁵ *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, Homily 33

As far as the Roman Catholic – Eastern Orthodox dialogue is concerned, the real question is: who are Peter’s successors? Has the archbishop of Constantinople nothing to say about the Petrine primacy of the Roman See? The answer is in fact well-known; Edward Giles notes:

Dom Chrysostom Baur, who has made an exhaustive study of Chrysostom’s life and writings, tells us that in his copious works ‘there is no clear and direct message in favor of the primacy of the pope.’ (Catholic Encyclopedia, volume 8:457A) How then was unity to be preserved? Chrysostom’s answer is that the Holy Ghost was given to bind us together ‘by the glow of charity.’¹

What, then, is Chrysostom taking about in the following text?

It was not Christ’s intention to show how much Peter loved Him, because this already appeared in many ways, but how much He himself loves His Church; and He desired that Peter and we all should learn it, that we may also be very zealous in the same work. For why did God not spare His Son and only-begotten, but gave Him up, though He was His only One. That He might reconcile to Himself those who were His enemies, and make them a people for Himself. Why did He also pour forth His blood? To purchase those sheep whom he committed to Peter and his successors.”

Even Dom Chapman explains that “his successors” “does not mean the popes, but all bishops.” Likewise, when Chrysostom talks about Peter as “that faithful servant and prudent, whom the Lord will set over His house,” Fr. Chapman notes that the application “in a general way to bishops”². In spite of this, this text is often used as evidence of that Chrysostom taught Papal supremacy. For instance, *Upon this Rock* quotes Chrysostom with the footnote: “This is indeed one passage which may be a categorical affirmation of the primacy of the pope”³. The same quote is found in *Jesus, Peter and the Keys*, again with no indication that Chrysostom is talking about the bishops and never had in mind any unique application to the bishop of Rome.⁴ This, I believe, is done in honest ignorance and only illustrates the dangers of popular apologetics (on both sides).

In summary, it is my personal assessment that Chrysostom’s view of Peter was determined by his understanding of the episcopate more than the other way around.

Very much like St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom is an Easterner who cannot be enrolled in support of the modern Roman Catholic position

¹ Giles, p. 169

² *De Sacerdotio*, 2, 1, 632

³ UTR, p. 220

⁴ JPK, p.295

because of his view of ecclesiology and succession. Still, it should be clear that any attempt Orthodox Christians to claim that Chrysostom only assigned a primacy of honor to the chief apostle is both misinformed and unnecessary.

12. *Ambrose of Milan* (#397)

Ambrose is remembered as the exceptional leader of the great Church of Milan who forced Emperor Theodosius to a humiliating (and much needed) penance. Like everyone in those days, he tried his best to deal with the last commotions of the Arian crisis. Working in concert with the other bishops of Italy, he attempted to restore visible and effective bonds of communion between East and West. Ambrose saw the Church of Rome as the center of the common union and arbiter of ecclesiastical disputes, “from which flow all the rights of venerable communion”:

How is it possible that we should not judge the person whom we have seen united to their society to be also a maintainer of their perfidy? What even if he were not there? We might still have besought your Graces not to allow the Roman Church, the Head of the whole Roman world, and the sacred faith of the Apostles to be disturbed; for from which flow all the rights of venerable communion to all...¹

Writing to Theodosius on behalf of the bishops of Italy, Ambrose “grieved that the fellowship of holy communion between the East and West was interrupted” and called for a council:

For we seek not our own things, but the things of all; not for Gaul and Africa which enjoy the individual fellowship of all their Bishops, but that the circumstances which have disturbed our communion on the side of the East might be enquired into in the Synod, and all scruple be removed from among us.²

Ambrose’s idea was that communion with Rome should have been an effective mechanism of unity, at least within the “whole Roman world,” but he also realized that other centers of communion were keeping things together. His advice to resolve the crisis was not an appeal to a centralized authority, but indeed to combine primacy and conciliary to achieve unity of mind.³

¹ *Letter XI* (c. 381 AD)

² *Letter 14*

³ The reader is encouraged to read *Letter 13* to understand the mind of St. Ambrose on the matters.

As far as I can tell, Ambrose does not say anything particularly Petrine about Rome, and he is quoted by Orthodox apologists as rejecting a primacy of jurisdiction for St. Peter:

As soon as Peter heard these words, 'Who do you say that I am?' remembering his place, he exercised this primacy, a primacy of confession, not of honor; a primacy of faith, not of rank.¹

Like Cyprian before him, Ambrose also wrote the famous line "where therefore Peter is, there is the Church," but no application is made to the bishop (as in Cyprian) or to the pope (as perhaps in Jerome).

It would seem that Ambrose thought very much along the lines of Cyprian or Gregory Nazianzen: Rome was the head of the Roman world, the center of ecumenical unity, but without direct jurisdictional primacy.

13. Jerome (†420)

St. 'Hieronemus' is universally respected as a great scholar and a man of radical sanctity, ever remembered for his translation of the Latin Vulgate. Although Jerome always considered himself a 'member at large' of the Church of Rome, he left the distracting capital and traveled to Palestine to become a monastic and study Hebrew. There, he encountered the Churches of the East in a state of utter chaos and division. In his own words to Pope Damasus:

Since the East, shattered as it is by the long-standing feuds, subsisting between its peoples, is bit by bit tearing into shreds the seamless vest of the Lord, woven from the top throughout,' since the foxes are destroying the vineyard of Christ, and since among the broken cisterns that hold no water it is hard to discover the sealed fountain' and the garden enclosed,' I think it my duty to consult the chair of Peter, and to turn to a Church whose faith has been praised by Paul.

In our historical study, we have observed the catastrophic effect of the Arian controversy in the East. The contrast between the stability of Rome and the confusion that beset the Eastern sees is striking: apart from the possible failure of Pope Liberius, Rome stood strong in defense of the orthodox faith. Faced with competing bishops of Antioch and elsewhere, Jerome now realized that the assurance of being in the Church was to be found in his home Church of Rome which he calls 'the Chair of Peter' in a special sense:

I appeal for spiritual food to the Church whence I have received the garb of Christ... The fruitful soil of Rome, when it receives the pure seed of the

¹ *On the Incarnation*. Also in Giles, p. 144

Lord, bears fruit a hundredfold; but here the seed corn is choked in the furrows and nothing grows... My words are spoken to the successor of the fisherman, to the disciple of the cross. As I follow no leader save Christ, so I communicate with none but your blessedness, that is with the chair of Peter. For this, I know, is the rock on which the Church is built! This is the house where alone the paschal lamb can be rightly eaten, this is Noah's ark... I know nothing of Vitalis; I reject Meletius; I have nothing to do with Paulinus. He that gathers not with you scatters; he that is not of Christ is of Antichrist.¹

If Jerome knew that the expression "Chair of Peter" was legitimate for all bishops, he also felt that it was impossible to know who held Peter's chair in nearby Antioch ("I reject Meletius; I have nothing to do with Paulinus"). However, there was no such doubt with the bishop of Rome: he was certainly sitting in Peter's chair in a most splendid and assured manner.

Even though Jerome said nothing of Papal jurisdiction, he clearly knew where to turn when the other sees were devoured by schism and confusion. Jerome considered Damasus to be the successor of St. Peter in a unique sense, the pillar of true communion and orthodoxy. Hence, he begged him as his bishop: "tell me with who I ought to communicate in Syria."

Jerome received word from Rome that Paulinus was the bishop of Antioch endorsed by and in communion with Damasus, and he was even ordained by him to the presbyterate. He eventually returned to Rome and served as secretary to Pope Damasus, only to be disappointed not to succeed him in the pontificate. The 'caustic Dalmatian' was basically driven out of Rome and retired to Bethlehem to work on what would become the Latin Vulgate.

Looking at the rest of his life and writing, there is not much more to be found in support of a Vatican I view of the papacy, except for his factual statement that "no heresy ever had its origin there [in Rome]²." In fact, Jerome's views became quite unsympathetic to Rome in many ways.

As we have seen, Jerome's theory of the episcopate is that it came about by ecclesiastical choice, not by divine order³. Hence, presbyters were thought to be inferior to bishop only functionally, but not according to divine order. Jerome applied this logic to the episcopate as well:

¹ *Epistle to Damasus*, 15:1-2 (A.D. 375), in NPNF2, VI:18

² Giles, p.159

³ See II/II/2

We must not believe that the city of Rome is a different church from that of the whole world. Gaul, Britain, Africa, Persia, the East, India, all the barbarous nations, adore Jesus Christ, and observe one and the same rule of truth. If one is looking for authority, the world is greater than one city. Wherever there is a bishop, be he at Rome or at Eugubium, at Constantinople or at Rhegium, at Alexandria or at Tanis, he has the same authority, the same merit, because he has the same priesthood (Epistle 146).

At the same time, Jerome could write what may be a contradictory statement:

But you say, the Church was founded upon Peter: although elsewhere the same is attributed to all the Apostles, and they all receive the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the strength of the Church depends upon them all alike, yet one among the twelve is chosen so that when a head has been appointed, there may be no occasion for schism.

However, it seems that this was Jovinian's argument, not Jerome's. In his zeal exalt virginity over married life, Jerome actually elevated John over Peter, a position consistent with his intention and with his overall views:

Peter is an Apostle, and John is an Apostle—the one a married man, the other a virgin; but Peter is an Apostle only, John is both an Apostle and an Evangelist, and a prophet.

If Jerome was indeed endorsing the teaching that “among the twelve is chosen so that when a head has been appointed, there may be no occasion for schism,” his application would have been to the episcopate as an “ecclesiastical” (not divine) institution¹. Likewise, it is certain that the appointment of a universal head, not by divine order but by episcopal consent is a decidedly Eastern concept.

In his latter days, Jerome did not seem to endorse any kind of universal jurisdiction for the bishop of Rome. He praised Polycrates for his opposition to Victor of Rome² and reminded his readers that Pope Liberius had subscribed to “the heretical and false doctrine.”³

In short, Jerome is both endearing and infuriating. In one sense, he always remained a faithful son of the Church of Rome, and yet, his theology and ecclesiology place him – like many of the Fathers - in a category of his own.

¹ See *Contra Luciferianos*, par. 9, in Giles, p.152

² Giles, p. 157. “I [Jerome] quote this [Polycrates utter rejection of Victor's authority] to show through a small example the genius and authority of the man.”

³ Giles, p. 151

14. Augustine of Hippo (†430)

St. Augustine is not especially esteemed by Eastern Orthodox theologians, although his status as saint and Father was courageously upheld by Fr. Seraphim Rose¹. In a sense, the majority of the Orthodox care little about Augustine's perspective on any given issue. His anti-Pelagian views were considered somewhat extreme both in East and West, and his intellectual approach to the Trinity is often seen as the origin of the *filioque* doctrine. Last, but not least, his teaching on the generational propagation of 'original guilt' through concupiscence is not popular in the East. A more balanced view is that Augustine was simply a human teacher, an authentic Christian who was removed from the culture, language and times of the Apostles, and who offers us the usual 'mixed bag' of pebbles and diamonds². As we conclude our review of the Fathers, it seems appropriate to remember that these men are all commemorated as saints by the holy Churches, and that our duty is neither to exalt them as infallible teachers nor to disparage them as heretics. The example of the sons of Noah covering the shame of their father should be kept in mind. In his article *Saint Augustine in the Greek Orthodox Tradition*, Rev. Dr. George C. Papademetriou writes:

Beginning with Photios, generally, the Greek Orthodox perceive Augustine as a saint whose doctrines have been deformed or distorted by the West and that as a human being, he erred on certain teachings. As Greek Orthodox we reverence the person of Saint Augustine... I would like to conclude with the Dismissal Hymn chanted in the Orthodox Church on June 15, the Feast of Saint Augustine:

"O blessed Augustine, you have been proved to be a bright vessel of the divine Spirit and revealer of the city of God; you have also righteously served the Savior as a wise hierarch who has received God. O righteous father, pray to Christ God that he may grant to us great mercy."³

This being said, where does Augustine stand on the issue of Peter's primacy and of the role of the Roman Church? It certainly a difficult task to do justice to the life and writings of the famous bishop of Hippo, since we sometimes have to consider how his views evolved over time. It is well-known, for instance, that somewhat of a reversal took place in his interpretation of Matthew 16:

¹ (*The place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church*)

² This is true of other Fathers. St. Gregory of Nyssa is sometimes criticized for his dubious speculations.

³ Accessed at: <http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article8153.asp>

In a passage in this book, I said about the Apostle Peter: ‘On him as on a rock the Church was built.’.. But I know that very frequently at a later time, I so explained that it be understood as built upon Him whom Peter confessed... And so Peter, called after this rock, represented the person of the Church which is built upon this rock, and has received ‘the keys of the kingdom of heaven...’ But let the reader decide which of these two opinions is the more probable.¹

Obviously, this issue was not a critical one, since it was a matter of private opinion. What seems to be a constant teaching, and one that is consistent with St. Cyprian whose name was often on Augustine’s lips, is that Peter was the symbol of the unity of Church:

One wicked man [Judas] represents the whole body of the wicked; in the same way as Peter, the whole body of the good, yes, the body of the Church... For if in Peter’s case there were no sacramental symbol of the Church, the Lord would not have said to him, ‘I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven...’ If this is said only to Peter, it gives no ground of action to the Church. But if such is the case also in the Church, then what is bound on earth is bound in heaven; and what is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven... if such, then, is the case in the Church, Peter, in receiving the keys, represented the holy Church.²

This echoes Cyprian’s teachings that bishops are Peter’s successor and that the unity of catholic Church depends on them, and the unity of the common union on their “cleaving together.” As we have seen, Cyprian’s view is quite interesting, and I think, consistent with the mind of the Fathers: the catholic Church was the local community gathered around its bishop who sat on what we could call a hologram of Peter’s chair. Augustine was of one mind with Cyprian and the consensus of ancient ecclesiology when he wrote:

So the Lord entrusted his sheep to us bishops, because he entrusted them to Peter...³

In another famous letter, the Bishop of Hippo exclaims:

The succession of priests (here, *sacerdos* = bishops) keeps me [in the catholic Church], beginning from the very seat of the Apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, after His resurrection, gave it in charge to feed His sheep, down to the present episcopate.⁴

¹ *Retractations*, 1:21

² *Tract 50 on St. John’s Gospel*, section 12. See also *Sermon* 295:2-4

³ *Sermons*, 296.13

⁴ *Against the Letter of Mani called the “Fundamental,”* 4:5 – the reference to the episcopate is generic, not specific to the any particular bishop.

Again, this text is often misunderstood: Augustine is talking about the catholic Church as the local Church, or indeed as a class for the Churches. The succession of Peter is not only the episcopate at Rome; it exists in every Church. It is only if we understand that every bishop is ecclesialogically successor of Peter, while remembering that the bishop of Rome is also historically successor of Peter that we can make sense of Augustine's arguments. Augustine is aware that there are many "apostolic Sees" in the historical sense, but North Africa was not directly in relation with the ancient sees of the East, including the Petrine ones – hence the appeal to the most convincing apostolic lineage "at hand," that of Rome:

[The Catholic Church] is propagated and diffused over all the world by the apostolic sees, and the succession of bishops in them...

Augustine's *Letter to Glorius* is often misquoted¹ as referring to "Church of Rome, where the primacy of the apostolic chair has always flourished," but the actual text reads:

Carthage... had a bishop of more than ordinary influence, who could afford to disregard even a number of enemies conspiring against him, because he saw himself united by letters of communion both to the Roman Church, in which the supremacy of an apostolic chair has always flourished... For it was not a matter concerning presbyters or deacons or clergy of inferior order, but concerning colleagues who might refer their case wholly to the judgment of other bishops, especially of apostolic churches, in which the sentence passed against them in their absence would have no weight, since they had not deserted their tribunal after having appeared before it, but had always declined to appear because of the suspicions which they entertained.²

Because Rome is an apostolic see, indeed the most honorable of all, Augustine knows that her bishop has "preeminence of a loftier summit."³ As we can see, great care is required to present the thoughts of Augustine in context and with accuracy.

Returning to the question of Peter's primacy, Augustine may seem confusing: what he ascribed to Peter was not a primacy of power and jurisdiction (as Cyprian⁴ believed), it was a symbolic primacy of great

¹ For instance, in *Satis Cognitum* (Leo XIII), JPK p. 318

² *Epistle*, 53

³ *Epistle to Pope Boniface*

⁴ "Assuredly the rest of the Apostles were also the same as was Peter endowed with a like partnership both of honor and power, but the beginning proceeds from unity" (*On the unity of catholic Church*).

importance¹. Augustine can be summarized as teaching that “Peter is first among the Apostles” “who are all shepherds” because “he represented the Church” and “the unity of all.” Considering the application of Petrine primacy to the place of the bishop in the (local) Church, we can say that John Chrysostom was more consistent when he saw in Peter a strong episcopal primacy of power.

The real question, then, is that of the status and powers recognized to the bishop of Rome by reason of his most glorious connection to Peter and his status as “apostolic see.” There is no doubt that Augustine, like Cyprian, considered the Chair of Peter at Rome loftier, more honorable, more worthy of consideration than any North African bishopric. Augustine makes this point quite clear in his correspondence with the bishops of Rome. On matters of faith, the judgment of Rome, especially if confirmed by other apostolic Churches, was especially powerful. This is illustrated the famous maxim *Roma locuta est, causa finita est* (Rome has spoken, the case is finished), which is a loose paraphrase of one of Augustine’s sermons:

[Already] on this matter [Pelagianism] two councils have sent to the apostolic See, from which rescripts (reports) have also come. The cause is finished.²

This maxim has sometimes been used to prove that Augustine accepted the absolute doctrinal and jurisdictional authority of the Roman see, but there was indeed a clear boundary in Augustine’s mind as to what those limits were. On the theological side, disaffected by the tragic error of Pope Zosimus who was temporarily deceived by Pelagius, Augustine made it clear that the authority of an Ecumenical Council was superior to the judgment of Rome:

As if it might not have been said, and most justly said, to them: ‘Well, let us suppose that those bishops who decided the case at Rome were not good judges; there still remained a plenary Council of the universal Church, in which these judges themselves might be put on their defense; so that, if they were convicted of mistake, their decisions might be reversed.’³

In jurisdictional matters, Augustine and his fellow North African bishops limited the prerogatives of the Roman bishop to what had been

¹ “He had not the primacy over the disciples but among the disciples. His primacy among the disciples was the same as that of Stephen among the deacons” (*Sermon on Peter and Paul*).

² *Sermons*, 131

³ *Epistle*, 43

decreed by the Ecumenical canons, as was illustrated in the appeal of the presbyter Apiarius. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* tells us the story:

Again, early in the fifth century, the appeal to Rome of Apiarius, a deposed priest, stirred up strong feeling among the African bishops, and appeals of priests and laics “over sea” (to Rome) were forbidden in the Synod of 418. Legates came from Rome to adjust the difference. In the Synods of 419 an enquiry was made into the canonical warrant for such appeals. The Roman legates cited by mistake, as canons passed at Nicea (325), the canons of Sardica (343) regulating the appeals of bishops.

The primary sources¹ make it clear that the North African bishops, including Augustine, did not acknowledge that the Bishop of Rome had “episcopal immediate and immediate jurisdictional power over the universal Church”; only those privileges granted by a recognized Ecumenical Council.

If Augustine cannot be enlisted as a supporter of the Vatican I ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church, it would be an error to think that he considered the Petrine primacy of honor of the bishop of Rome as something insignificant. Because of the Donatist schism, the need to affirm the unity and legitimacy of the Catholic Church became especially important. The ancient Eucharistic ecclesiology, which saw in the catholic Church (the local episcopal Church) the place of the Kingdom of salvation also needed to ‘look outside’ to find a criteria of authenticity. The Donatist bishops had created alternative ‘Churches’ all over North Africa, but their claim could be defeated by appealing to the most glorious of all the chairs of Peter, that of Rome:

Since you were pleased to acquaint us with the letter sent to you by a Donatist presbyter, although, with the spirit of a true Catholic, you regarded it with contempt, nevertheless, to aid you in seeking his welfare if his folly be not incurable, we beg you to forward to him the following reply... For if the lineal succession of bishops is to be taken into account, with how much more certainty and benefit to the Church do we reckon back till we reach Peter himself, to whom, as bearing in a figure the whole Church the Lord said: “Upon this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!” The successor of Peter was Linus, and his successors in unbroken continuity were these:—Clement, Anacletus, Evaristus... Julius, Liberius, Damasus, and Siricius, whose successor is the present Bishop Anastasius. In this order of succession no Donatist bishop is found. But, reversing the natural course of things, the Donatists sent to Rome from Africa an ordained bishop, who, putting himself at the head of a few Africans in the great metropolis, gave some

¹ See for instance, SEP, pp. 184-209. Dom Chapman’s conclusion, p. 209 is a good summary of the peculiar status of the North African bishops.

notoriety to the name of “mountain men,” or Cutzupits, by which they were known.¹

For Augustine, the lineal succession of bishops was important. The case of Rome, historically connected to the historical Peter, was a major argument against the claims of the North African schismatics. They were unrecognized by that undeniably Petrine see of Rome and therefore, their claim to be legitimate and apostolic was defeated. It is important, then, to consider every aspect of Augustine’s writings and actions to avoid placing him in a position defined by our current state of affairs.

Did Augustine have “a well developed understanding of the primacy of St. Peter and of his successors, the bishop of Rome,” as Stephen Ray contends? Is Robert Sungenis correct when he contends that “All in all, Augustine was a diehard supporter of the papacy”²? I do not think these statements do justice to the mind of the famous bishop. His weak view of Peter’s symbolic primacy and his appeal to Ecumenical canons against the claims of Rome preclude such a conclusion. At the same time, I think that Augustine is authentically orthodox and catholic in his ecclesiology. He affirms the unique dignity of the special See of Peter at Rome while demanding that this primacy of honor be joined to conciliar canons in order to ensure the harmony of the common union.

15. Cyril of Alexandria (†444)

St. Cyril of Alexandria is recognized as a great Christological theologian, but his character flaws have not made him a particularly beloved saint. There is nothing directly relevant to the topic at hand in his extant writings, except perhaps a testimony to the restorative interpretation of John 21:

The Lord already extends His pardon and sets him (Peter) again in his apostolic office.³

For the wondrous Peter, overcome by uncontrollable fear, denied the Lord three times. Christ heals the error done, and demands in various ways the threefold confession... Therefore, by the threefold confession of blessed Peter, the fault of the triple denial was done away. Further, by the Lord’s saying, Feed my lambs, we must understand a renewal as it were of the Apostleship already given to him, washing away the intervening disgrace of his fall, and the littleness of human infirmity.⁴

¹ *Epistle*, 53

² *The Catholic Answer*, November/December '94 issue

³ *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*

⁴ *Commentary on John’s Gospel*

As regards the question of Rome's primacy, nothing specific is quoted from Cyril's writings, and we shall let him stand on the sidelines of the debate.

16. The bishops of Rome as Fathers of the Church

Our brief review of the Fathers would be incomplete if we failed to mention anew that the bishops of Rome, whose orthodoxy was generally pristine, consistently affirmed the supremacy of their see, sometimes based on Matthew 16, sometimes on ecclesiastical law. Pope St. Boniface's (†422) letter to the bishops of Thessaly is very typical and anticipates the *Formula Hormisdæ* or indeed Vatican I:

The universal ordering of the Church at its birth took its origin from the office of blessed Peter, in which is found both directing power and its supreme authority. From him as from a source, at the time when our religion was in the stage of growth, all churches received their common order. This much is shown by the injunctions of the council of Nicea, since it did not venture to make a decree in his regard, recognizing that nothing could be added to his dignity: in fact it knew that all had been assigned to him by the word of the Lord. So it is clear that this church is to all churches throughout the world as the head is to the members, and that whoever separates himself from it becomes an exile from the Christian religion, since he ceases to belong to its fellowship.¹

Many of these popes are considered saints by Catholics and Orthodox alike, so that their perspective is also part of the common – or sometimes contradictory – witness of the Fathers.

IV. THE ISSUE OF PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

1. Understanding the dogma

We now turn to the much debated and misunderstood dogma of Papal infallibility. This dogma is a major point of contention between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, and constitutes the ultimate 'argument from authority' which has direct bearing on the resolution of other dogmatic disputes. It also remains a point of debate and reflection among Roman Catholic theologians.

Admittedly, the first part of this study will be fairly negative, but I will follow with an attempt to reflect on a possible applicability of infallibility in an ecumenical perspective.

¹ Quoted in T. G. Jalland, *The Church and the Papacy*, SPCK, London, 1946, p. 276

The dogma of Papal Infallibility was proclaimed by the papal bull *Pastor Aeternus* when the first Vatican Council was disbanded in 1870. Its wording is very specific:

The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks “Ex-Cathedra,” that is:

- when, exercising the office of pastor and teacher of all Christians,
- he defines with his supreme apostolic authority
- a doctrine concerning faith or morals
- to be held by the universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in St. Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to be endowed in defining doctrine concerning faith and morals: and therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves and not from the consent of the Church.

The definition seems quite straightforward, but what does it mean in practice?

In recent years, an attempt has been made to scale down the importance and scope of this dogma. Hence, for the purpose of understanding this complex and critical issue, we shall extensively refer an excellent article by Brian Harrison (RC) on the interpretation of Vatican I which is actually a defense of the thesis that *Humanae Vitae* was an Ex-Cathedra pronouncement. Fr. Harrison writes:

Peter L. Chirico’s “Infallibility: The Crossroads of Doctrine” (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1977) effectively denatures the whole dogma, rendering it of little or no practical use. Chirico... reduces its role to something like that of a mere foreman of the jury, who enunciates a consensus already existing. Although Chirico denies that his position contradicts the dogma’s explicit assertion that the pope’s definitions do “not” require the consent of the Faithful in order to be binding, his denial seems to me mere sophistry. He tells us, for instance, that the very fact of “*Humanae Vitae*’s” having been greeted by widespread dissent shows that it was not infallible. On Chirico’s terms, no theologians or members of the Faithful need ever feel “bound” to accept any Papal declaration, no matter how solemnly worded and promulgated, unless it has “the ring of truth in their minds and hearts.” That is, unless their own private judgment agrees with it anyway! For the very fact of significant dissent from such a declaration on the part of professing Catholics, according to Chirico, shows that it is not infallible! The very fact that infallible definitions have so often appended an “anathema” against dissenters shows how flagrantly Chirico’s interpretation of this dogma clashes with that of the popes and Councils which have promulgated such definitions. Nevertheless, his book bears the imprimatur of the Archbishop of San Francisco, and is promoted by

Chirico himself in a supplementary volume of the highly respected "New Catholic Encyclopedia" under the entry "Infallibility."¹

Chirico's view is obviously extreme in one direction, and yet, he is only trying to deal with a question that has perplexed Roman Catholic thinkers since the promulgation of 1870: what past, present and future Papal statements are infallible? How can one really tell?

The popular consensus among Roman Catholic theologians is that the charisma of infallibility has been positively used only on two occasions: in 1854 (16 years before Vatican I) for the Immaculate Conception and in 1950 for the Assumption, although the Tome of Leo and the Agatho's Letter to the Sixth Council are also cited as examples of Ex-Cathedra statements. Yet, this opinion seems artificially restrictive: it ignores the plain meaning of the decree and implies that such an awesome charisma would have been used less than five times in two thousand years.

For this discussion, I suggest a two-step approach. First, let us try to understand the original intent of *Pastor Aeternus* / Vatican I and establish a list of possible Ex-Cathedra proclamations meeting the criteria set forth in the bull. Secondly; we shall attempt an evaluation of the infallible characters of these pronouncements.

Rightfully so, Harrison proposes:

We will need to devote our attention to the Church's official documents: in the first place, the Vatican I Constitution itself; secondly, the teaching of Vatican II and the post-conciliar magisterium; and finally, the official and highly authoritative "relatio" of Bishop Vincent Gasser, who explained to the Vatican I Fathers the authentic meaning of the schema which was being presented for their vote, and which finally was promulgated as the dogma...

Bishop Vincent Gasser, spokesman for the deputation "de fide" (the committee of Conciliar Fathers charged with drafting the solemn definition), delivered a four-hour speech explaining and defending the draft which was submitted to the assembled Fathers for their vote. The importance of this learned, historic dissertation lies in the fact that it is the only "official" commentary on the 1870 definition. This speech informed the conciliar Fathers beforehand "what they were to understand" by the formula which was being presented for their vote...

Vatican II itself recognizes the vital importance of Gasser's "relatio" by actually making the substance of some of his comments part of the Dogmatic constitution "Lumen Gentium" itself: he is quoted no less than

¹ *Infallibility of Humanae Vitae - Ex Cathedra Status of the encyclical 'Humanae Vitae'*, Fr. Brian W. Harrison, O.S.

four times in the official footnotes to “Lumen Gentium” 25, which treats of infallibility...

Two other passages from Gasser’s “relatio” make it still more indisputable that the formula was officially understood to include the secondary truths under the guarantee of Papal infallibility, and not only “de fide” definitions of revealed truth.

Harrison continues with an amazing point:

In replying to some Fathers who urged that the procedures or form to be used by the pope in arriving at an infallible decision (i.e., his grave moral duty to pray for guidance, diligently consult the existing teaching of the Church, etc.) be included in the definition, Gasser replied:

But, most eminent and reverend fathers, this proposal simply cannot be accepted because we are not dealing with something new here. “Already thousands and thousands of dogmatic judgments have gone forth from the apostolic See;” where is the law which prescribed the form to be observed in such judgments?

In other words, Gasser was able to assert “in passing”—that is, as something which did not need arguing and would be taken for granted by his audience— that there had already been “thousands and thousands” of infallible definitions issued by the Roman see! Even if he did not intend to be taken quite literally and meant only to make the point that “a great many” such definitions were “Ex-Cathedra,” it is obvious that he was not only referring to solemn definitions of revealed truth, such as Pius IX’s definition of the Immaculate Conception a few years previously. There have in fact been only a few such definitions. So Gasser obviously meant to include the many Papal definitions of secondary truths, including censures less than heresy, as genuine “Ex-Cathedra,” infallible definitions.

In summary, Harrison argues that any Papal definition pertaining to morals, dogmas or ‘secondary truths’ is infallible and irreformable if it meets the criteria of Vatican I. Indeed, the official interpretation of the definition by Bishop Gasser makes it clear that a large number of such documents are in existence, not just the proclamation of 1854 or Leo’s Tome. According to Vatican I, the signs that a definition is infallible are:

1. The definition comes from the pope himself
2. He must act as Pastor of all the Faithful
3. He must invoke his apostolic authority
4. He renders judgment on an issue of faith or morals
5. The definition is to be held by the universal Church.

Keeping these criteria in mind, we are now in a position to consider a few Papal documents that may exhibit of the earmarks of being Ex-Cathedra and discuss their infallible character.

2. *Exsurge Domine* (1520)

The first text to consider is the famous bull *Exsurge Domine*¹ promulgated by Pope Leo X against Martin Luther.

Let us carefully study the text of this bull and observe how all five criteria are indeed fulfilled:

1. The definition comes from the pope himself.
2. He is acting as Pastor of all the Faithful:

In virtue of our pastoral office committed to us by the divine favor” and “We forbid each and every one of the Faithful...

3. He invokes his apostolic authority:

When you were about to ascend to Your Father, You committed the care, rule, and administration of the vineyard, an image of the triumphant Church, to Peter, as the head and Your vicar and his successors. Rise, Peter, and fulfill this pastoral office divinely entrusted to you as mentioned above. In virtue of our pastoral office committed to us by the divine favor...

4. This is a judgment on an issue of faith or morals:

We can under no circumstances tolerate or overlook any longer the pernicious poison of the above errors without disgrace to the Christian religion and injury to orthodox faith... We have therefore held a careful inquiry, scrutiny, discussion, strict examination, and mature deliberation with each of the brothers, the eminent cardinals of the holy Roman Church, as well as the priors and ministers general of the religious orders, besides many other professors and masters skilled in sacred theology and in civil and canon law. We have found that these errors or theses are not Catholic, as mentioned above, and are not to be taught, as such; but rather are against the doctrine and tradition of the Catholic Church, and against the true interpretation of the sacred Scriptures received from the Church.

5. The definition is binding on all:

By listing them, we decree and declare that all the Faithful of both sexes must regard them as condemned, reprobated, and rejected . . . We restrain all in the virtue of holy obedience and under the penalty of an automatic major excommunication.... We forbid each and every one of the Faithful of either sex, in virtue of holy obedience and under the above penalties to be incurred automatically, to read, assert, preach, praise, print, publish, or defend them.

Based on these characteristics, most pre-Conciliar Roman Catholics agreed that Pope Leo's bull was an Ex-Cathedra proclamation. The

¹ Pope Leo X, Bull issued June 15, 1520

problem is that this document clearly says: “we condemn, reprobate, and reject completely each of these errors,” including the following that are relevant both to the Orthodox – Catholic dialogue and to the issue of infallibility:

17. The treasures of the Church, from which the pope grants indulgences, are not the merits of Christ and of the saints.

25. The Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, is not the Vicar of Christ over all the Churches of the entire world, instituted by Christ Himself in blessed Peter.

33. That heretics be burned is against the will of the Spirit.

This last article poses a serious ethical problem. It is well-known that Luther decried the Church-approved practice of burning heretics at the stake¹. And here, we have an Ex-Cathedra document condemning Luther for this criticism and therefore at risk of endorsing the burning of heretics as being “the will of the Spirit.” This is not the only instance of such a statement. In its canon 3, the Fourth Lateran council of 1215 (considered ecumenical by the Roman Catholic Church) declared:

We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy that raises against the holy, orthodox and Catholic faith which we have above explained; condemning all heretics under whatever names they may be known... Secular authorities, whatever office they may hold, shall be admonished and induced and if necessary compelled by ecclesiastical censure, that as they wish to be esteemed and numbered among the Faithful, so for the defense of the Faith they ought publicly to take an oath that they will strive in good faith and to the best of their ability to exterminate in the territories subject to their jurisdiction all heretics pointed out by the Church... If [a ruler] refuses to [comply] let the matter be made known to the supreme pontiff, that he may declare the ruler's vassals absolved from their allegiance and may offer the territory to be ruled lay Catholics, who on the extermination of the heretics may possess it without hindrance and preserve it in the purity of faith... Catholics who have girded themselves with the cross for the extermination of the heretics, shall enjoy the indulgences and privileges granted to those who go in defense of the Holy Land...²

For the sake of honesty, let us admit that this kind of intolerance also affected the Eastern Churches. Today, both sides repudiate this position as contrary to the apostolic Faith and the spirit of Christianity. The Orthodox have less of a problem because most theologians agree that only the dogmatic definitions of the Ecumenical Councils are considered true or

¹ Or more accurately, to hand them over to the secular authorities for that purpose.

² Internet Medieval Source Book, Fordham University

infallible. The same could probably be said of the above canon. But what can be done with *Exsurge Domine*? There are many Roman Catholic apologists and theologians who admit that this bull is indeed an Ex-Cathedra pronouncement. What then? Maybe there is an elaborate way to rationalize this situation in order to maintain the dogma of Vatican I, but our point here is to show why many Christians cannot see how Papal infallibility can be a usable and sustainable concept.

3. *Unam Sanctam* (1302) and *Unigenitus* (1713)

Let us briefly mention two other cases of problematic applications of the concept of infallibility. We have already mentioned the famous bull *Unam Sanctam*. Before Vatican II, it was typically considered Ex-Cathedra. As we have seen, other popes had expressed the same idea in more or less definitive documents. In the context of *Unam Sanctam*, Pope Boniface had the (Greek) Orthodox in mind:

Therefore, if the Greeks or others should say that they are not confided to Peter and to his successors, they must confess not being the sheep of Christ, since Our Lord says in John “there is one sheepfold and one shepherd.”

The bull concludes with this powerful and unambiguous statement:

Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.

Notice the similarity of language with the 1854 Papal proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, universally recognized as infallible by modern Roman Catholics:

We declare, we proclaim, we define...¹

This leads us to several questions that we leave unanswered: Was *Unam Sanctam* Ex-Cathedra? Does the Roman Catholic Church still teach that “it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff?” and if no, why not?

A few words should also be said about the controversial bull *Unigenitus*. It does not bear the five marks of an Ex-Cathedra statement but it is worth studying because of these words for Pope Benedict XIV:

The authority of the apostolic constitution which begins with the word *Unigenitus* is certainly so great and lays claim everywhere to such sincere

¹ *Ineffabilis Deus*, Apostolic Constitution issued by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854

eneration and obedience that no one can withdraw the submission due it or oppose it without risking the loss of eternal salvation.¹

And yet, *Unigenitus* condemns such ideas as:

LXX. The reading of the Holy Scriptures is for all

Again, we must realize that Orthodox prelates and synods have also condemned the private reading of the Holy Scriptures, a fact that shows the possible tension between ecclesiastical obedience and one's own discerning of God's commands.²



The informed reader may be surprised that no attempt has been made to discuss the condemnation of Pope Honorius by the Sixth Ecumenical Council or the case of Liberius since these are often brought to the witness-bar by Orthodox and Protestant apologists. I have already discussed both cases in my Historical section and do not consider them as problematic as *Exsurge Domine*, for instance.

4. A more positive approach...

Infallibility is bound to be a delicate matter. I have already explained in my "Prologue and Thesis" that I do not believe in infallibility as it is often popularly understood and expected. The infallibility of the Church – or of its bishop which is almost equivalent – is soteriological in nature: the Church saves infallibility because whoever is truly joined to the Church and 'in Christ' is beyond the reach of death; God does not fail to save his elect.

But the issue of 'intellectual' or 'dogmatic' infallibility is more difficult: because of the cultural environment and of the limitations of human language, doctrinal formulations and confessions often seem to fail the high expectation of infallibility. We have analyzed this problem in the case of many Orthodox and Catholic documents.

There is one instance where it might be argued that a mechanism of infallibility could exist: (1) if the diocesan³ bishops of all the apostolic

¹ *Ex Omnibus*, Encyclical of Pope Benedict XIV promulgated on October 16, 1756

² Acts 5:19

³ This is the ancient and Orthodox norm: that only heads of Eucharistic communities are truly 'bishops' in the original sense of the word and eligible to vote at an Ecumenical Council.

Churches¹ agreed on a matter of faith and morals; (2) if there was no significant reaction of rejection from the people of God whom they represent and (3) if the universal primate proclaimed the decision after a reasonable period to allow (2) to be fulfilled. In this context, it would be hard to conceive that the *pleroma* of the Churches would fall in error. Admittedly, this somewhat idealistic model is quite different from the mechanism envisioned in *Pastor Aeternus*, but we have seen that Vatican I was admittedly “not successful” (Cardinal Ratzinger) in providing a usable system of dogmatic and moral infallibility.



Eastern Orthodoxy does recognize the exceptional doctrinal record of the Roman Church during the first centuries of Christianity and the fact that at least two popes of Rome did produce doctrinal statements worthy of the acclamation “Peter has spoken!” Hence, Orthodox theologians can certainly view Leo’s Tome and Agatho’s Letter to the Sixth Council as Petrine and infallible. On the other hand, the idea that Papal Infallibility can be presented as independent of any conciliar consent and as “the constant belief of the universal Church” is rejected.

Perhaps more convincingly, Orthodox theologians can argue that Papal Infallibility as defined by the bull *Pastor Aeternus* does not harmonize well with historical data, a problem also recognized in modern Roman Catholicism. The fact that no list of Ex-Cathedra statement has or in or likelihood will ever be produced further leads the reduction of this dogma to the level of confusing and non-testable rhetoric.

¹ Or perhaps their primates

SECTION V:
THEOLOGY –
OTHER OBSTACLES



SECTION V: OTHER OBSTACLES

I. THEOLOGICAL DIRECTIONS

1. *Economy and ontology*

The issues of ecclesiology, primacy and authority are certainly the most problematic differences between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. We have emphasized the fact that a genuine dialogue on secondary issues, such as the *filioque*, is impossible if the argument from authority is invoked along the line of "Rome has spoken, the case is closed."

At this point in our study, I suggest that we can discern a possible pattern of evolution for so-called Latin and Greek theology. If we consider the case of ecclesiology, we have seen that what the East considers 'economical' or 'functional' tends to be seen as 'ontological' and 'dogmatic' in the West. I have argued that this is the case with universal ecclesiology and primacy: the functional utility of a universal primate is understood as theological and dogmatic in Roman Catholicism. To an extent, the question of clerical celibacy can be examined in the same light: the functional ideal of having undivided clerics available to offer the Eucharist every day and to serve with the greatest possible freedom led to the quasi-dogmatization of celibacy in the West¹. On the other hand, the East tends to discourage celibate (non-monastic) vocations and yet exalts the monastic and recluse ideal.

When we turn to other theological issues, notably the *filioque*, it could be argued that the economic procession or 'missions' of the Spirit 'from the Son' or 'through the Son' has also been understood as an ontological truth in the West. Both Greeks and Latins agreed that the economy or missions of the Holy Spirit are from the Father through the Son, as is clear in

¹ This was not the only rationale; see the discussion of celibacy and continence below.

Scripture. In an outstanding article on the Trinity written by Paul Owen¹, this distinction is well explained:

First of all, mainstream Christians distinguish between the trinitarian economy of God, and the trinitarian ontology of God. What does that mean? These terms are an attempt to come to grips with two aspects of God's relationship to the world: his otherness (transcendence), and his presence in the world (immanence). God is not, in his essence, a part of the space-time continuum which we might designate the "created order." It is necessary to distinguish between the Life of God, which is grounded in Divine Sovereignty (Exodus 3:14), and the life of the contingent world.²

The question, then, is how the 'functional' operations of God in our world relate to the eternal, ontological question of the 'begotten-ness' and 'procession' of the Son and Spirit. We now consider this complex question in more details.

2. The Latin creed

Before continuing any further in our discussion, it might be useful to clarify what the *filioque* is about. It is simply a modification of the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople (381) as shown below:

Original Greek Version	Latin / English Version
And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of the Life, Who proceeds (<i>ekporevomenon</i>) from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is equally worshipped and glorified...	And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, Who proceeds (<i>procedit</i>) from the Father and the Son (<i>filioque</i>), Who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified...
τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον	<i>qui ex Patre Filioque procedit</i>

¹ Paul Owen is a former Mormon, now Anglican. In spite of his rejection of the Eastern position, Dr. Owen's three part *Reflections on the Doctrines of the Trinity* is an excellent survey which I shall quote extensively.

² *Reflections on the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity*, Paul L. Owen, accessed at <http://www.irr.org/MIT/trinity1.html>, originally published in the journal *Elements*.

ὅταν	δὲ	ἔλθῃ	ὁ	παράκλητος	ὃν	ἐγὼ	πέμψω
when	and	comes	the	Comforter	whom	I	will send
ὑμῖν	παρὰ	τοῦ	πατρὸς	τὸ	Πνεῦμα	τῆς	ἀληθείας
to you	from	the	Father	the	Spirit	—	of truth
ὃ	παρὰ	τοῦ	πατρὸς	ἐκπορεύεται			
who	from	the	Father	proceeds			

For the reader who is not conversant with the subtlety of this debate, it will be helpful to keep in mind the foundational text which is John 15:26:

Our discussion will center on the distinction between economy (manifestation in creation) and ontology (eternal divine life), as well as the following terms:

Greek	<i>ekporev-</i>	To proceed	Ontology
Greek	<i>proin-</i>	To proceed	Ontology/Economy
Greek	<i>pemps-</i>	To send	Economy
Latin	<i>procedit</i>	To proceed	Ontology/Economy

As we can see, *procedit* is the possible Latin equivalent of *ekporev-* and *proin-* (and even *pemps-*). This point will become very important as we proceed.

Hence, apart from the issue of the canonical legitimacy of this modification, the real question seems simple: is the underlying theology

correct? Because the *filioque* addition was done as a reaction against the Spanish Arians, let us briefly introduce the concept of ‘reactionary theology.’

3. Newton’s law of theology

Newton’s Law of motion tells us that “for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” This principle also applies to theology, where it could be said that for “every heretical push in one direction, there is often a over-reaction on the orthodox side.” This concept is applicable to Arianism and iconoclasm. Arius plunged into heresy by affirming that Christ was a creature made from nothing and that “there was a time when he was not,” but orthodoxy’s reaction was often to emphasize the divinity of Christ as “Our God” and to minimize the monarchy and priority in prayer due to the Father.

As we know, the *filioque* was introduced with a good intention: to counter Arianism in the West. Was it an overreaction? In the East, Patriarch Photius reacted against the *filioque* by strongly affirming that the Spirit proceeds only from the Father, which seems to exclude the “through the Son” position. Was that also an overreaction? Let us try to tackle this issue with reverence and care, keeping in mind St. Gregory’s warning:

What then is ‘procession’? Well, if you explain the Father’s ‘ingeneracy,’ I will give you a scientific account of the ‘generation’ of the Son and the ‘procession’ of the Spirit; and thus let us both go crazy by peering into the mysteries of God. Who are we to pry into such matters? We cannot understand what is in front of our noses, we cannot count the sand on the sea shore, the drop of rain, the days of endless time. Still less can we penetrate the depths of God, and give an account of his nature, which is so ineffable, which surpasses our powers of reason.¹

If the great theologian admitted his own trepidations and limitations, we too should be concerned at the thought of creating an unnecessary schism over what is beyond our reason.

¹ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, quoted in *The Latter Christian Fathers*, Henry Bettenson, translator, Oxford University Press, London, 1970, p. 114.

II. THE FILIOQUE CONTROVERSY

1. *"One God," East and West*

Because Paul Owen writes from a Western perspective, his presentation quickly reveals the root of the difference between the Greek and Latin perspectives:

Orthodox Christians believe that God is one eternal, personal and spiritual divine substance who exists in three modes of subsistence, or three self-distinctions.

Here, "Orthodox Christians" refers to 'mainstream (Western) Christians,' not to the Eastern Orthodox. In fact, the authentic Eastern Orthodox mind would disagree with the above statement which seems to confuse "personal" and "substance." The Greek Fathers would have written quite a different summary, something along the lines of:

Orthodox Christians believe in one God the Father, whose person is uncaused and unoriginate, who, because He is love and communion, always exists with His Word and Spirit.¹

Our Western theologian continues with an equally problematic statement:

Now when we come to the biblical evidence a decision has to be made. Does one start with the assumption that God is one, and then attempt to explain how God can be three; or does one begin with the knowledge that God is three, and then attempt to explain in what way God can be one? This decision is an important one, and as we will see, it is the basis of important differences of understanding among Christians of different traditions. Protestants and Roman Catholics, who tend to be under greater influence from the heritage of the Western tradition, generally start with the assumption of God's oneness. The Eastern Orthodox Church on the other hand follows the heritage of the East, and hence tends to begin with the knowledge of God's threeness... In the opinion of the present writer, the Western tradition is correct to begin with the assumption of God's oneness, and move from there to an explanation of God's threeness.

This statement makes the Orthodox shake their heads in disbelief: the Creed affirms "we believe in one God the Father... and in one Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit..." hence the Eastern tradition does start with God's oneness, a oneness anchored in the person of the Father.

¹ Note: This is not a quote from Paul Owen's article.

Here, Paul Owen is siding with the Western affirmation that the concept of the one substance (*ousia*) of God has priority over that of person (*hypostasis*). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* confirms:

The Western tradition expresses first the consubstantial communion between Father and Son, by saying that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*Filioque*)...¹

In his quotation of Hebrews 1:3, Paul Owen assumes – wrongly in my opinion – that “being the brightness of the glory and an exact representation of his essence” (*hos on apaugasma tes doxes kai charakter tes hypostaseos autou*) means “exact representation of the essential nature of God.” However, in the Greek Orthodox understanding, *hypostaseos* is better translated as “person.”²

2. *The font of Deity*

The article under consideration continues with a clear and helpful discussion of the essential difference of approach between East and West:

A second distinction that needs to be drawn lies between the views of the Eastern and Western theological traditions... What is the major point of difference between the Eastern and Western Church? It has to do with the understanding of the relationship of the Father to the Monarchy of the Godhead. Both East and West are agreed that the Father has a certain priority of position within the Trinity. The Father alone is unbegotten and non-proceeding. But does the Monarchy, the font of Deity, reside in the Father’s person, or in his Being? Is the Son begotten of the Father’s person, or his Being? Does the Spirit proceed from the Father’s person, or his Being? If, as the Eastern Church insists, the font of Deity resides in the Father’s person, then the Spirit clearly must proceed from the Father alone, since the Son does not possess the Father’s person. But if the font of Deity resides in the Father’s Being, then the conclusion may be drawn that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, since all are agreed that the Father and the Son are con-substantial, that is, that they are identical in essence. Largely due to the influence of Augustine, the Western Church gradually settled on the view that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, and eventually the words “and the Son” were added to the text of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.

The above summary deserves to be read with extreme care, since the real debate over the *filioque* is explained with great clarity. This is exactly what St. Photius had explained in his *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*:

If the Father is cause of the hypostases produced from Him not by reason of nature, but by reason of the hypostasis; and if, up to now, no one has

¹ CCC, 248

² NKJ and EOB have “person.” Most other translations have “being” or “substance”

preached the impiety that the Son's hypostasis consists of the principle of the Father's hypostasis then there can be no way the Son is cause of any hypostasis in the Trinity.¹

At this point, Paul Owen continues his presentation with great accuracy:

This argument has important theological ramifications. If the font of Deity is located in the Father's person, then the divine nature of the Son and the Spirit will of necessity be a derived divinity. In fact, it is a general tendency of the Eastern Fathers (Gregory Nazianzen excluded²) to speak of God the Father as the cause of the Deity of the Son and the Spirit. The issue at stake is whether or not each of the Persons of the Trinity can be spoken of properly as God in their own right (*autotheos*). Thomas F. Torrance writes:

When the Cappadocian theologians argued for the doctrine of one Being, three Persons (*mia ousia treis hypostaseis*) they did so on the ground that the *ousia* had the same relation to the *hypostasis* as the general or common to the particular. They pointed, for instance, to the way three different people have a common nature or *physis*. They absorbed the Nicene *ousia* of the Father (*ousia tou Patros*) into the *hypostasis* of the Father (*hypostasis tou Patros*), and then when they spoke of the three divine Persons as having the same being or nature, they were apt to identify *ousia* with *physis* or nature. Thereby they tended to give *ousia* an abstract generic sense which had the effect of making them treat *ousia* or *physis* as impersonal. Then when in addition they concentrated Christian faith directly upon the three distinct hypostases of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as they are united through their common action, they were charged with thinking of God in a partitive or tritheistic way, three Gods with a common nature, which of course they rejected. They sought to meet this charge by establishing their belief in the oneness of God through anchoring it in the Father as the one Origin or Principle or Cause, *Arche* or *Aitia*, of divine Unity, and they spoke of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as deriving their distinct modes of subsistence or coming into existence (*tropoi hyperxeos*) from the Father as the Fount of Deity (*pege theotetos*). But they went further and argued that the Son and the Spirit derive their being (*einai*) and indeed their Deity (*theotes*) from the Father by way of unique causation (*aitia*) which comprises and is continuous with its effects, and by that they meant the Father considered

¹ Par. 15

² Torrance (and Owen) are wrong on this point. St. Gregory of Nazianzus is very explicit: "The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have this in common; that they are uncreated, and they are divine. The Son and the Spirit have this in common; that they are derived from the Father." "They [the Son and Spirit] are not without [arche – origin or] beginning in respect of cause... They are not subject to time, since time originates from them." In Bettenson, pp. 116-117

as *Person*, i.e. as *hypostasis*, not *ousia*, which represented a divergence from the teaching of the Nicene Council.¹

Hence there is an element of ontological subordinationism which remains in the Eastern view, which in the mind of those inclined toward the view of the Western tradition leaves the door open to implicit Arianism... The West insists that the three eternal Persons share a common Deity — each Person is *autotheos*. The East maintains that the three eternal Persons share a common Divinity — the Father alone is Deity in a proper sense (*autotheos*).

Paul Owen is correct when he notes that the Western tradition tends to the conclusion that each Person is *autotheos*, but it should be clear that this has never been the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. This heresy of tri-theism was only proclaimed by John Calvin who denounced the eternal generation of the Son as “an absurd fiction.” Here, we are getting close to what is at stake with the *filioque*: is the Monarchy of the Father as only cause and origin of the Son and Spirit challenged by this addition to the creed? Roman Catholic theologians have tried to reassure the East that this is not the case. In its clarification on the *filioque*, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity affirms:

The Greek Fathers and the whole Christian Orient speak, in this regard, of the “Father’s Monarchy,” and the Western tradition, following St Augustine, also confesses that the Holy Spirit takes his origin from the Father “principaliter,” that is, as principle (De Trinitate XV, 25, 47, PL 42, 1094–1095). In this sense, therefore, the two traditions recognize that the “Monarchy of the Father” implies that the Father is the sole Trinitarian Cause (*αἰτία*) or Principle (*principium*) of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, in his article *Filioque: A Response To Eastern Orthodox Objections*, Roman Catholic apologist Marc Bonocore repeats several times that:

Both Greek East and Latin West confess, and always have confessed, that the Father alone is the Cause (Aition) or Principle (Principium) of both the Son and the Spirit.

In a remarkable essay entitled *The Filioque: Dogma, Theologoumenon or Error?*, Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos stresses the importance of this point:

¹ The Orthodox would strongly disagree with this claim that the Cappadocian approach “represented a divergence from the teaching of the Nicene Council.” The Council confessed “One God the Father” (a person), not in One God-Essence. Homoousios meant uncreated.

Similarly Moltmann observes that “the filioque was never directed against the ‘monarchy’ of the Father” and that the principle of the “monarchy” has “never been contested by the theologians of the Western Church.” If these statements can be accepted by the Western theologians today in their full import of doing justice to the principle of the Father’s “monarchy,” which is so important to Eastern triadology, then the theological fears of Easterners about the filioque would seem to be fully relieved. Consequently, Eastern theologians could accept virtually any of the Memorandum’s alternate formulae in the place of the filioque on the basis of the above positive evaluation of the filioque which is in harmony with Maximos the Confessor’s interpretation of it. As Zizioulas incisively concludes:

The “golden rule” must be Saint Maximos the Confessor’s explanation concerning Western pneumatology: by professing the filioque our Western brethren do not wish to introduce another *αἴτιον* in God’s being except the Father, and a mediating role of the Son in the origination of the Spirit is not to be limited to the divine Economy, but relates also to the divine *οὐσία*.

The reader should also understand that the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of icons is rooted in its Trinitarian theology: the ‘relative worship’ (or veneration) (*prokynesis*) of icons (derived images of God) is proper if the ultimate object of worship (*latreia*) is the uncreated Trinity and even more ultimately the uncaused and unoriginate Father of whom Christ is the perfect “icon,” the “character of his *hypostasis*.” Legitimate honor and veneration due to a created image of God (parents, kings, saints) becomes idolatry if it is by intention disconnected from the ultimate prototype which is for us the Trinity and in an ultimate ontological sense, the person of the Father.

Unlike Paul Owen (and Photius), not everyone is fully aware that the critical question is “Does the Spirit proceed from the Father’s person, or his Being? If, as the Eastern Church insists, the font of Deity resides in the Father’s person, then the Spirit clearly must proceed from the Father alone, since the Son does not possess the Father’s person.” In *Being as Communion*, Metropolitan John Zizioulas offer a masterful defense of the Orthodox insistence of the priority of the person of the Father:

Among the Greek Fathers the unity of God, the one God, and the ontological principle or “cause” of the being and life of God does not consist in the one substance of God but in the hypostasis, that is, the person of the Father. The one God is not the one substance but the Father, who is the “cause” both of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit. Consequently, the ontological “principle” of God is traced back, once again, to the person. Thus when we say that God “is,” we do not bind the personal freedom of God — the being of God is not an ontological “necessity” or a simple “reality” for God — but we ascribe the being of God to His personal freedom. In a more analytical way this means that God, as

Father and not as substance, perpetually confirms through “being” His free will to exist. And it is precisely His trinitarian existence that constitutes this confirmation: the Father out of love — that is, freely — begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit. If God exists, He exists because the Father exists, that is, He who out of love freely begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit. Thus God as person — as the hypostasis of the Father — makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the one God. This point is absolutely crucial. For it is precisely with this point that the new philosophical position of the Cappadocian Fathers, and of St Basil in particular, is directly connected. That is to say, the substance never exists in a “naked” state, that is, without hypostasis, without “a mode of existence.” And the one divine substance is consequently the being of God only because it has these three modes of existence, which it owes not to the substance but to one person, the Father. Outside the Trinity there is no God, that is, no divine substance, because the ontological “principle” of God is the Father. The personal existence of God (the Father) constitutes His substance, makes it hypostases. The being of God is identified with the person. What therefore is important in trinitarian theology is that God “exists” on account of a person, the Father, and not on account of a substance¹

Orthodox theology is especially clear on this emphasis on “the simplicity of the Most High” (Photius) because it has no fear of the absurd accusation of Arianism.

Before discussing the intent and historical context of the Latin *filioque*, let us conclude our brief review of important Trinitarian concepts. Returning to Paul Owen’s article, we encounter another useful clarification:

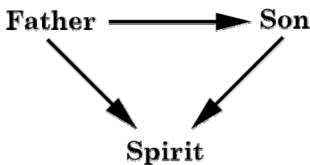
In contemporary theological and philosophical discussion, there are two heuristic approaches to understanding the Trinity. There is a “social” model, and there is a “psychological” or “modal” (not “modalistic”) model. Generally speaking, these two approaches can be traced back to the differences between the East and the West in their articulation of the nature of the “oneness” of the Godhead; but the current “social” model is also largely driven by perceived philosophical difficulties with the doctrine of the Trinity as articulated in Western manifestos such as the so-called Athanasian Creed. The “modal” or “psychological” model goes back to Augustine, and has been advocated by important thinkers in our century such as Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Donald Bloesch, Kelly James Clark and Thomas F. Torrance. The “social” model is more heavily indebted to the Cappadocians, and is represented by theologians such as Cornelius Plantinga, Leonardo Boff, Jürgen Moltmann, Richard Swinburne, Millard Erickson and Clark Pinnock...

In [the psychological model], the distinctness in union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is thought of as being something like (“analogous to”) the

¹ BAC, pp. 40-42

distinctness, say, of a person's intellect, heart, and will within the unity of the one person (St. Augustine).

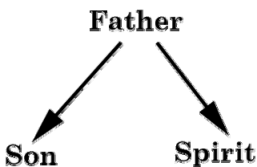
It is in the context of admittedly speculative reflection on the mystery of the Trinity that St. Augustine, while affirming the Monarchy of the Father, described the Holy Spirit as “the bond of love” between the Father and the Son. This is why Augustine taught that the Spirit proceeds “mainly” (*principaliter* means an original source and implies a secondary source) from the Father, but also from the Son, not only economically but indeed ontologically. The following illustration is a generally accepted way to express the Western-Augustinian emphasis:



Let us note, however, that the psychological imagery was also used the second-century apologists, notably Athenagoras of Athens:

The understanding and reason (*nous kai logos*) of the Father is the Son of God. But if, in your surpassing intelligence, it occurs to you to inquire what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that He is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal mind [*nous*], had the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos [*logikos*]; but inasmuch as He came forth to be the idea and energizing power of all material things...¹

Nevertheless, the overall Eastern tradition, because it stresses the Scriptural and pre-Nicene teaching of the Monarchy of the Father, prefers St. Ireneaus' pyramid vision of the Word and Spirit as “the two hands of God”:



¹ *Apology*, Chapter 10

Based on what has been said so far, it might be tempting to conclude that both models are absolutely incompatible; but many think that it is not the case.

The reason for this optimistic assessment is fivefold: (1) the Roman Catholic tradition has always affirmed (when pressed) that the Father is indeed “the principle without principle” of the Trinity; (2) that the intention of the *filioque* is from that of the Creed of 381; (3) the fact that in a specific sense, the expression “*qui ex Patre Filioque procedit*” is orthodox (Romanides); (4) that Rome has “refused the addition *kai to yiou* to the formula *ek tou patros ekporevomenon* in the Greek text” and (5) the expression “through the Son” (or variations thereof), especially with the verb *proinai* is Patristic and acceptable.

On the other hand, we will also discuss the boundaries of orthodoxy and consider certain problems with the Roman Catholic background.

3. *The Latin filioque: intent and concerns*

Let us consider point (2), “that the intention of the filioque is different from that of the creed of 381.” Orthodox theologians are aware that the West, confronted with lingering Arianism, was pursuing a different theological agenda with its modified creed. The *Clarification* published by the Vatican introduces the context of the *filioque* clause thus:

The doctrine of the *Filioque* must be understood and presented by the Catholic Church in such a way that it cannot appear to contradict the Monarchy of the Father nor the fact that he is the sole origin (*arche, aitia*) of the *ekporeusis* of the Spirit. The *Filioque* is, in fact, situated in a theological and linguistic context different from that of the affirmation of the sole Monarchy of the Father, the one origin of the Son and of the Spirit. Against Arianism, which was still virulent in the West, its purpose was to stress the fact that the Holy Spirit is of the same divine nature as the Son, without calling in question the one Monarchy of the Father.

Mark Bonocore (RC) is also helpful in this admission that:

So, to someone coming from this Eastern heritage – indeed, for any Greek-speaker who knows what the term “*ekporeusis*” implies (i.e., procession from a single source, principal, or cause), the addition of the Latin clause “*Filioque*” (“and the Son”) seriously challenges, if not totally destroys, the originally-intended meaning of this Creedal statement. And we Roman Catholics fully agree and admit this. The introduction of the Filioque is clearly a departure from the original intention and design of the A.D. 381 version of the Constantinopolitan Creed. However, it is not a departure from apostolic orthodoxy.

In other words, official Roman Catholicism teaches that the Latin *procedit* used in the Vulgate to translate the Greek *ekporeutai* had in fact a wider meaning, not only that of ‘having its cause and origin in,’ but “a wide implication.” In fact, it is explained that *procedit* was understood as equivalent to *proinai*, a concept which can be a source of confusion between economy and ontology.

Bonocore continues:

But, if the Western Church agrees with the East that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, then what does it mean by “Filioque” —that the Spirit proceeds “from the Father and the Son?” When the West speaks of the Spirit “proceeding” from the Father and the Son, it is referring to something all-together different than “procession” as from a single source (*aitia*). It is not advocating two sources or principals for the Spirit, or some kind of “double spiration,” as is all-too-commonly (wrongly) assumed by many Eastern Orthodox. Rather, it is using the term “proceeds” in an altogether different sense. And the best way to illustrate the two different senses or uses of the term “proceeds” (Greek vs. Latin) is through the following analogy:

If a human father and son go into their back yard to play a game of catch, it is the father who initiates the game of catch by throwing the ball to his son. In this sense, one can say that the game of catch “proceeds” from this human father (an “*aition*”); and this is the original, Greek sense of the Constantinopolitan Creed’s use of the term “proceeds” (*ekporeusis*). However, taking this very same scenario, one can also justly say that the game of catch “proceeds” from both the father and his son. And this is because the son has to be there for the game of catch to exist. For, unless the son is there, then the father would have no one to throw the ball to; and so there would be no game of catch. And, it is in this sense (one might say a “collective” sense) that the West uses the term “proceeds” (“*procedit*”) in the Filioque. Just as acknowledging the necessity of the human son’s presence in order for the game of catch to exist does not, in any way, challenge or threaten the human father’s role as the source or initiator (*aition*) of the game of catch, so the Filioque does not deny the Father’s singular role as the Cause (*Aition*) of the Spirit; but merely acknowledges the Son’s necessary Presence (i.e., participation) for the Spirit’s eternal procession from the Father to Someone else —namely, to the eternal Son. Father and Son are thus collectively identified as accounting for the Spirit’s procession. This is all that the Filioque was ever intended to address.

This type of analogy is of course puzzling, to say the least, for the Orthodox reader. It always seems that the West tends to define the Spirit in terms of what is common between the Father and Son, which may depersonalize the Spirit while affirming the Father and Son as the two real ‘co-partners’ and ‘co-monarchs.’ However, we can also perceive that in a certain sense, a carefully expressed *filioque*, with the right verb, can be an acceptable orthodox opinion.

This is the respected assessment of Metropolitan John (Zizioulas):

Another important point in the Vatican document is the emphasis it lays on the distinction between ἑκπόρευσις and *processio*. It is historically true that in the Greek tradition a clear distinction was always made between ἐκπορεύεσθαι and προεῖναι, the first of these two terms denoting exclusively the Spirit's derivation from the Father alone, whereas προεῖναι was used to denote the Holy Spirit's dependence on the Son owing to the common substance or οὐσία which the Spirit in deriving from the Father alone as Person or ὑπόστασις receives from the Son, too, as οὐσιωδῶς that is, with regard to the one οὐσία common to all three persons (Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor et al). On the basis of this distinction one might argue that there is a kind of *Filioque* on the level of οὐσία, but not of ὑπόστασις.

However, as the document points out, the distinction between ἐκπορεύεσθαι and προεῖναι was not made in Latin theology, which used the same term, *procedere*, to denote both realities. Is this enough to explain the insistence of the Latin tradition on the *Filioque*? Saint Maximus the Confessor seems to think so. For him the *Filioque* was not heretical because its intention was to denote not the ἐκπορεύεσθαι but the προεῖναι of the Spirit.

Since Zizioulas refers to St. Maximus the Confessor, it will be useful to hear from the respected Father how the *filioque* could have an orthodox meaning:

For the procession they [those at Rome] brought the witness of the Latin Fathers, as well, of course, as that of St Cyril of Alexandria in his sacred study on the Gospel of St John. On this basis they showed that they themselves do not make the Son Cause (αἰτία) of the Spirit. They know, indeed, that the Father is the sole cause of the Son and of the Spirit, of one by generation and of the other by ἑκπόρευσις — but they explained that the latter comes (προϋεῖναι) through the Son, and they showed in this way the unity and the immutability of the essence.”

Based on this clarification, if the verb is *proinai*, then “though the Son” is orthodox. Likewise, “and the Son” (understood as strict equivalent to “through the Son”) is also acceptable. But the point that is now clear is that “and the Son” cannot be added to the Greek verb *ekporev-* under any circumstance, while even “through the Son” is very problematic.

This being said, the Orthodox do not mean that the unilateral insertion of the *filioque* clause in the Creed was ultimately helpful or that it would have been acceptable to someone like St. Maximus. But if dialogue in truth and love is our goal, this approach shows that the issue is not unsolvable.

4. *From the Father through the Son?*

We now arrive at an expression that is acceptable on both sides because of its patristic use: that the Spirit proceeds (*procedit-proinat*) from the Father through the Son. It should also be said that this formula is not excluded by St. Photius' insistence that the Spirit proceeds (*ekporev-*) from the Father alone. Fr. Stylianopoulous explains:

Photios' famous formula, "the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone," intends not to deny the intimate relations between the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, but only to make utterly explicit that the Father alone causes the existence of both the Son and the Spirit, conferring upon them all his being, attributes, and powers, except his hypostatic property, i.e., that he is the Father, the unbegotten, the source, origin, and cause of divinity.

After reviewing several patristic quotations, Eastern Orthodox apologist Thomas Valentine concludes that "through the Son" is "the typical Eastern formula," but with this important caveat:

The word *dia* never means by in the sense of by means of, i.e. as an agent. It means through in a non-additive sense — *dia* is always non-additive, referring to a tunnelling or channelling effect, like water through a pipe. Many Church Fathers use *dia* as a way of expressing the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit — through speaking the Word, the Father exhales the Wind/Spirit (*pneuma* means both) just as a person speaking exhales wind/air when speaking words.

Fr. Stylianopoulous offers an encouraging conclusion on how close the two positions are, if they are properly understood and carefully expressed:

[Jean Michel] Garrigues [RC] speaks about "a dominant trend in the Eastern tradition to regard the mediation of the Son merely as a passive and quite non-causal condition of the procession of the Spirit from the Father alone" (p. 153). Obviously for Garrigues "passive" and "non-causal" are identical, whereas Staniloae [EO] shows that the Eastern tradition holds to an active, yet non-causal, participation of the Son in the Spirit's procession from the Father.

Fr. Stylianopoulous also discusses a number of expressions are suggested, not for inclusion in the Creed, but as acceptable formulations to a mystery that remains beyond our reason:

- the Spirit proceeds from the Father of the Son;
- the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son;
- the Spirit proceeds from the Father and receives from the Son;
- the Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests on the Son;
- the Spirit proceeds from the Father and shines out through the Son.

These formulas would probably be acceptable opinions within the realm of catholic orthodoxy, but should they be accepted in a dogmatic Creed? Most Eastern Orthodox would reject any idea of modifying the Creed of 381, sometimes for the wrong reasons¹, but also for very good ones.

There are two primary reasons for which the Orthodox insist that the Creed of 381 should not be modified, and these should be carefully considered by Roman Catholics. The first one is that the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople did become the common confession of faith, so much that Pope Leo III had it engraved on two plaques on silver and mounted in Rome. By altering the common Creed, even without evil or heretical intent, the West created what became a dogmatic difference in the very proclamation of Faith. The Arian menace was soon defeated, and the pastoral need for the *filioque* had disappeared long before the Great Schism. The second reason is that the *filioque* addition goes beyond what was written in the Scriptures and by the honored Fathers of the Second Council. There can be no doubt that the “Spirit proceeds from the Father” as is taught by our Lord in John 15:26, but this is as far as the Scriptures will go. Thomas Valentine (EO) offers a reflection worthy of consideration:

Unless one asserts that either the Lord Jesus Christ spoke a superfluous repetition or that Saint John distorted the Lord’s words and created a superfluous repetition, it is not possible to claim, as have some supporters of the Filioque, that *ἐκπορεύεται* has the same meaning as *πέμψω*. Not only are the words etymologically different with distinct meanings, but the phrase who from the Father proceeds uses *ἐκπορεύομαι* in the present tense (*ἐκπορεύεται*), indicating the proceeding of the Holy Spirit is not a future event, but a present reality having begun in the past and still in progress. Moreover, the fact that Saint John only uses *ἐκπορεύομαι* one other time (5:9) should make the reader-interpreter aware that Saint John may be indicating something special or unusual.

The combination of these facts makes clear that the proceeding of the Holy Spirit is something quite different than the sending of the Holy Spirit. Most English translations of the Holy Scriptures make the distinction between the Son’s promise that he will send the Holy Spirit from the Father and that the Holy Spirit is proceeding from the Father quite clear. The notable exception is the Vatican-approved New American Bible which badly distorts the passage.

¹ A ‘wrong reason’ would be to invoke canon 7 of Ephesus, as Mark Bonocore demonstrates in his previously cited article.

King James Version	But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me
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New American Standard	When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me
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New International Version	When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.
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Young's Literal Translation	And when the Comforter may come, whom I will send to you from the Father — the Spirit of truth, who from the Father doth come forth, he will testify of me
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New Jerusalem Bible	When the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness.
---------------------------	--

New American Bible	When the Paraclete comes, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father — and whom I myself will send from the Father — he will bear witness on my behalf.
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Hence, the reason of the Orthodox insistence that the *filioque* be removed from the Creed is in fact to foster ecclesial unity and to uphold of Scriptural terminology of the Ecumenical text.

5. *Revisionist theology?*

There is another valid reason for which Orthodox are loath to concede to an acceptable (or even positive) interpretation of the *filioque*, and that reason is the great difficulty in reconciling Rome's insistence that "[the

Father] is the sole origin (*arche, aitia*) of the *ekporevsis* of the Spirit” with the constant affirmation that the Spirit “proceeds by a communication of the same singular essence by one eternal spiration from the Father and the Son as from one principle.” Even though the Vulgate translated *ekporevomenon* by *procedit*, the official *Clarification* explains that in these affirmations, *procedit* does not mean *ekporevsis* but *proienai*, so that something different than causal origination is being discussed. This is a very subtle nuance, often lost on the masses, as we can imagine. The consistent wording of Latin theology is as follows:

The Father is from no one; the Son is from the Father only; and the Holy Spirit is from both the Father and the Son equally. *The 4th Lateran Council, 1215, A definition against the Albigenses and other heretics*

[We] confess that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, not as from two principles, but as from one; not by two spirations but by one. *The 2nd Council of Lyons, 1274, Constitution on the Procession of the Holy Spirit*

The Father is not begotten; the Son is begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. *The Council of Florence, 1438-45, Decree for the Jacobites*

The Council of Florence in 1438 explains: “The Holy Spirit is eternally from Father and Son. He has his nature and subsistence at once (*simul*) from the Father and the Son. He proceeds eternally from both as from one principle and through one spiration And, since the Father has through generation given to the only begotten Son everything that belongs to the Father, except being Father, the Son has also eternally from the Father, from whom he is eternally born, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 246*

The confusing and objectionable aspect of these dogmatic statements is that the Monarchy of the Father as “sole origin (*arche, aitia*)” of the Son and Spirit is never mentioned. Roman Catholic theologians assure us that there is a good reason for this: what is being discussed in those documents is not ultimate causality (since the issue is settled), it is the collective or shared dimension of the Spirit’s origin. As St. Maximos explained, the orthodox *filioque* is not about the *ekporevsis* but the *proienai*. The Eastern Orthodox concern, as we have seen in John Zizioulas, is that “the distinction between *εκπορεύεσθαι* and *προεῖναι* was not made in Latin theology, which used the same term, *procedere*, to denote both realities.” This is obvious in popular Roman Catholic defenses of the *filioque*, where the strong affirmation of the unique causality of the Father is absent and where no mention is made of the difference between *εκπορεύεσθαι* and *προεῖναι*. A typical example is the *Catholic Answers* tract on the *filioque*:

Scripture reveals that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The external relationships of the persons of the Trinity mirror their internal relationships. Just as the Father externally sent the Son into the world in time, the Son internally proceeds from the Father in the Trinity. Just as the Spirit is externally sent into the world by the Son as well as the Father (John 15:26, Acts 2:33), he internally proceeds from both Father and Son in the Trinity. This is why the Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6) and not just the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20).

With such a presentation, it not surprising that the Orthodox reject that version of *filioque* as confusing and heretical. On the other hand, the recent high-level clarifications are useful and constructive.

The Orthodox impression is that historically, “principle” (*principium*) was presented as equivalent to *aitia*, and “proceed” (*procedit*) equivalent to *ekporevsis*. This seems to have been the intent of the council of Florence, where the Greeks were asked to recognize “the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son as from one “principium” (arche) and from one cause (aitia).”¹

As a result, the Latin insistence on the *filioque*, affirming both the ‘single cause’ and the ‘common or collective cause’ seemed somewhat schizophrenic. It can certainly be admitted that Photios’ simple ‘pyramid scheme,’ which admittedly seems to ignore the unity of Father and Son in the Spirit, did not lead to such acrobatics of theological nuancing.

6. But what are we talking about?

At this point in our study, if the reader has not yet decided to give up on understanding this controversy altogether, we can offer Jaroslav Pelikan’s witty ponderings:

If there is a special circle of the inferno described by Dante reserved for historians of theology, the principal homework assigned to that subdivision of hell for at least the first several eons of eternity may well be the thorough study of all the treatises—in Latin, Greek, Church Slavonic, and various modern languages—devoted to the inquiry: Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father only, as Eastern Christendom contends, or from both the Father and the Son (ex Patre Filioque), as the Latin Church teaches?

Perhaps one reason for the mystery and abstract complexity of this issue is that few people understand what (or better who) the Holy Spirit is all about. In the Book of Acts, we read:

¹ CE, Entry: Council of Florence

Paul said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit!' And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began to speak with tongues and to prophesy.¹

Today's problem is not that Christians do not know that "there is a Holy Spirit," the problem is that few would be able to explain who the Spirit is and what he accomplishes. Indeed, very few theologians or apologists who discuss the issue of the *filioque* engage the question of what we mean by Father, Son and Holy Spirit. St. Augustine (whose 'work in progress' *De Trinitate* was published against his will) was among those who, for better or worse, attempted to understand the trinitarian mystery of the Godhead with imaginative and controversial analogies.

I would like to suggest, carefully and without any doctrinal claim, that the scriptural descriptions of the Holy Spirit points to the following definition:

The Holy Spirit is the divine-uncreated, hypostasis, power² and mind that manifests what is true and existing.

This definition makes sense when we consider the role of the Holy Spirit at the Lord's baptism, the epiclesis of St. Basil and the fact that "no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."³ Hence, the "Spirit of Truth" is the revealer of what is true, the One who "knows the deep things of God."⁴ The relationship of the Spirit with God (or the Father, in an absolute sense) and the Word seems clear: the Father is the primordial and causal mind with the purpose and identity of love and communion. The Word or Son is the expression, the self-aware agent that executes and communicates the Father's transcendent mind. This is the theology of the New Testament:

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made time and space. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his person, sustaining all things by his powerful word.⁵

¹ Acts 19:2, 6

² This is the dynamic and kenotic aspect to the Spirit in the sense that His mission is not to impose His hypostasis but to reveal and glorify what He indwells. See Zechariah 4:14 NJB (Not by might and not by power, but by my spirit' -- says Yahweh Sabaoth)

³ 1 Corinthians 12:3

⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:10

⁵ Hebrew 1:1-3

This is why the Orthodox and patristic tradition insists, as Fr. Romanides often repeats, that the Angel-Messenger of YHWH is the pre-incarnate Logos. The incarnate Word is the spoken mind of the Father who is love and who calls us to communion. But the Word is revealed to other minds as such (Lord and Savior) only by the work of the Holy Spirit. In summary, the Trinity expresses the idea of message, messenger and revealer, or mind, word and meaning.

Within this framework, we can say that the meaning proceeds from the mind and rests in the word, but the meaning truly originates from the mind, and does not depend on the word. Yet, the meaning proceeds from the mind through the word. Even more importantly, this approach does not subordinate the meaning to the word and allows for the symmetry that is often lacking in Western theology: the word also proceeds from the mind according to the meaning¹. The Word and Spirit are intertwined and complementary in their ontology and economy: the Spirit manifested the anointed Word and likewise the Word pours out the Spirit. This is why the Eastern tradition insists on the invocation of the Holy Spirit after the words of institution are recited. The supremacy of the conscious Father-Mind is thus established, as well as the co-inherence or mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*) of the Word and Spirit.

Hence, meaning proceeds (ontologically) from the mind only, independently of the word; this is the Photian intuition. Moreover, meaning proceeds from the mind to rest in the word and through the word. If there is a certain collective origination of the meaning from the mind and word, isn't there also a collective origination of the word from the mind and meaning? This is what the idea of *perichoresis* suggests.

We should also consider the implications of the gift of tongues on the relationship between meaning and word, spirit and mind. Augustine's presentation of the Spirit as bond of love between Father and Son was expressed in his Father-Mother-Child analogy, which was used to defend the idea of a principal cause (Father) and a collective origination for the Child-Spirit. Of course, this very problematic analogy would need to be balanced with the more 'Biblical' one: Spirit (*ruah*) is feminine in Hebrew²

¹ This is a very Semitic concept.

² Likewise, *sophia* is feminine in Greek, and we notice that Irenaeus for instance talked about the Word (Son) and Wisdom (Spirit) of God. In the New Testament, the Wisdom of God is normally associated with Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:24). This theme of a 'feminine Spirit' has been developed and popularized in Roman Catholic circles by Scott Hahn. See also Acts of Thomas in ANF 8, p. 541

and the Child would seem to be Jesus, not the Spirit¹. In summary, we have to be extremely careful with any terminology or imagery that does not faithfully echo the biblical and patristic presentation.

There is also a subtle distinction that - God is merciful! - can only be a daring opinion: if the Spirit manifests God to other minds (us), does He also manifest God to God Himself in a reflexive way? If so, the economy of God to our minds would be analogous to the ontology of God to his own mind, a *theologoumenon* that cannot be dogmatized in any way.

7. The fear of Arianism

Before reaching a conclusion and summary, I would like to mention that the 'shadow of Arianism' - and the fear thereof - may be more of a factor than we realize. For whatever reason, what we call the Western tradition has tended to theologize on the opposite extreme of Arianism. As we have mentioned, the early tendencies of the Roman Church were on the Modalistic side, and it is in Reformed / Protestant Western Christianity that we find such aberrations as 'Oneness' theology and the triple *autotheos* of John Calvin.

It is revealing that the issue of Arianism is addressed several times in Mark Bonocore's extensive *Response to Eastern Orthodox Objections*. At one point, the Roman Catholic apologist writes:

[The *filioque*] was included in the Creed by the Western fathers at Toledo in order to counter the claims of the 6th Century Spanish (Germanic) Arians. These Arians were of course denying this essential and orthodox truth - that is, the Son's eternal participation in the Spirit's procession.

But Arianism² had nothing to do with the question of the Spirit's procession: the only truth debated with the Arians was the uncreated nature and eternality of the Logos. What Bonocore calls an "essential and orthodox truth" so dear to the West is in fact a complex and delicate subject of discussion. His *Response* continues:

It is of course quite disturbing (from the Western perspective) that modern Eastern Orthodox (i.e., Photian) theology comes very close to advocating this same Arian view by refusing to incorporate the Son's participation in the Spirit's eternal procession in any way.

¹ See, for instance, the last prayer of St. Polycarp: "O Lord God Almighty, Father of thy beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through Whom we have received full knowledge of thee..."

² At least in the East. It is possible that the Spanish Arians emphasized other aspects of the Son's non-eternality.

However, the Photian position does no such thing, and if it did, it would simply be the affirmation that the ontological procession of the meaning of the mind has its total cause and origin in the mind, independently from the word.

Fr. Romanides also noticed this lingering concern with Arianism in the writings of St. Augustine:

Augustine was completely obsessed by the Arian argument that proof that the Logos of the Father is created is the fact that He appeared to the Prophets and Patriarchates of the Old Testament and the prophets and Apostles of the New Testament.

Indeed, Cappadocian-Orthodoxy is sometimes perceived with concern by Westerners. This is what Paul Owen expressed very clearly:

Hence there is an element of ontological subordinationism¹ which remains in the Eastern view, which in the mind of those inclined toward the view of the Western tradition, leaves the door open to implicit Arianism...

Hence, Metropolitan John Zizioulas felt compelled to insist:

Orthodox theology is especially clear on this emphasis on “the simplicity of the Most High” (Photius) because it has no fear of the absurd accusation of Arianism.

Eastern Orthodoxy insists that the teaching of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils is correct in affirming that the unity of God is in the *autotheos* Father who eternally begets His Word and spirates His Spirit, so that their divinity is indeed derived. But this language (confirmed by the Roman Catholic magisterium with some reluctance) makes our Western colleagues uncomfortable. As a result, their ability to refute the neo-Arianism of Jehovah’s Witnesses is in fact weakened by the implicit embracing of the triple *autotheos* implied with the *filioque* emphasis. Roman Catholic author Ben Finger discusses the tension between the intent of the Creed of 381 and the historical Western struggle with its monarchic theology:

This term [*autotheos*] in initial use was by [Valentine] Gentile [during the post-Reformation era] who proposed that the Father alone is affirmed in Himself as deity and the deityship of the Son and Spirit were derived

¹ This assertion is actually untrue: God the Father is love, this is the eternal expression of his Being, which is why the Father is always with his Word and Spirit, being as communion. We might as well argue that the ontology of the Father as love-communion is placed under the ontological subordination of the Son and Spirit since without them the Father cannot be who He is.

from Him¹. Thus in Gentile's teaching the Son and Spirit are of a different essence² than the Father by possessing the capability of *autotheos*. Robert Bellarmine, a leading apologist for the Roman Catholic in the sixteenth century, defended Calvin by arguing that Calvin in using *autotheos* was attempting to defend true doctrine and it was only an issue of *modus loquendi*. Bellarmine proposed that Calvin erred in his manner of speech, particularly in the Institutes I.13-29 and in his treatise against Gentile, when using the term *autotheos*. Bellarmine furthermore criticizes Calvin for his critique of "God of God" as being a hard saying in conjunction with *autotheos*. Bellarmine suggests that the reason why Calvin proclaims the Son as being *autotheos* is because the Son and the Spirit are of the same essence as the Father and is driven to this in defense of the claims of Gentile. Bellarmine in the end finds Calvin to be orthodox upon this issue and only erred in the manner of speaking.

Hence, Calvin's triple *autotheos* is close to the theology of the West, even though this terminology was rejected.

Likewise, in dealing with John 14:28 ("The Father is greater than I am"), Western theologians are reluctant to bring up the Monarchy of Father and the derivative divinity of the Son as the first and best explanation (this was the exegesis offered by all the great Eastern doctors:

The Son says not, "My Father is better than I," lest we should conceive him to be foreign to his nature, but "greater," not indeed in greatness nor in time, but because of his generation from the Father himself. (Athanasius, Orations against the Arians 1.58)

Since the Son's origin (*arche*) is from the Father, in this respect the Father is greater, as cause and origin. Wherefore also the Lord said thus, "My Father is greater than I," clearly inasmuch as He is Father. Yea, what else does the word Father signify unless the being cause and origin of that which is begotten of Him?² (Basil, Against Eunomius 1.25)

Superior greatness belongs to the cause, equality to the nature.... To say that [the Father] is greater than [the Son] conceived as man is certainly true, but no great thing to say. For what marvel is it if God is greater than man? (Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 30.7)

If any one say that the Father is greater in so far as He is the cause of the Son, we will not gainsay this. But this, however, does not make the Son to be of a different essence. (John Chrysostom, Homily 70)³

¹ This is authentic Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox doctrine, as we have seen.

² This is where things became heretical. The "essential" language of the Fathers dealt with the uncreatedness of God, not with causality.

³ See also Alexander of Alexandria (Ep. to Alex.). Augustine and Ambrose, it is true, insisted that the Son was referring to his humanity.

In contrast, discussing the imaginary problem posed by this text, the bulletin of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lincoln offers this typical 'Augustinian' answer:¹

Jesus was speaking of his coming ascension into heaven and thus He was talking about His created human nature, when He is recorded to have said in the Gospel according to St. John, "The Father is greater than I." As man, the Father is greater, but as God, He and the Father are one (John 8:21- 58; Matthew 16:16-17; Matthew 26:63-66).²

The true Arian or the sincere seeker always realizes that this 'interpretation' of John 14:28 is weak: of course, the Father is greater than the Son in his human nature: such an obvious and meaningless statement would have no place in Our Lord's discourse. What is wrong, in the Western mind, with the explanation provided by Gregory the Theologian? It is my contention that the *filioque* theology of the Latin tradition (with its mental representation as a ▼) has a hard time affirming the patristic Monarchy of the Father's person (with its mental representation as a ▲). In that sense, it is not the Byzantine-political model which is at stake in the mind of Eastern Orthodoxy as Mark Bonocore suggests, it is the theology and intent of the Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council. The Latin Creed begins by following the original at every line. However, without any warning sign, as Mark Bonocore admits, "the introduction of the Filioque is clearly a departure from the original intention and design of the A.D. 381 version of the Constantinopolitan Creed."

Is it not conceivable that the *filioque* is the symptom of lingering Modalism and 'crypto-triple autotheism'? It is sometimes heard (in Protestant circles) that the Father and Son simply decided, in their eternal counsel, to take on different roles in the economy of salvation, or to paraphrase Ellen White³: 'If the Father had decided to become incarnate instead of the Son, we would never have known the difference.' This heretical drift, presented under the label of 'historical trinitarianism' is especially noticeable among Evangelical Protestants.

There is a real concern, then, that Western trinitarianism, whose historical banner is the *filioque*, has abandoned the Fathers of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils along with their careful and balanced biblical

¹ See also: http://www.newadvent.org/library/almanac_thisrock92.htm

² Reprinted from December 17, 1999. *Catholic Answers* does provide the Monarchy of the Father explanation as a second possibility.

³ 'Prophetess-founder' of the Seventh Day Adventist movement.

theology. The reader should be aware that these elements are crucial and often ignored.

8. *In summary*

Many leading Orthodox theologians agree that a statement of faith could be produced with an orthodox *filioque*, as was done by St. Maximos. However, its insertion in the common liturgical Creed, which alters the original intention of the Fathers regardless of the language, can not be accepted by the Orthodox. A compromise might be that if the Creed is recited in Latin, the *filioque* could remain if footnoted with an adequate clarification¹.

The following table will perhaps help us summarize the complex information discussed so far. We will focus on the four verbs: to send (*pemps-*), to come out (*ekporev-*) and to proceed (*proinai*) and (*procedit*).

<i>Ekporev-</i>	
Economy	Ontology
Not used	Procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son (1)
Not used	Procession of the Spirit from the Father through the Son (2)
Not used	Procession of the Spirit from the Father only (3) “ <i>ek mon tou Patrou</i> ”

- (1) Rejected by all
- (2) Very problematic, May be viewed as a *theologoumenon* by the Orthodox
- (3) Common doctrine, this is the recommended and normative formula

¹ The footnote would have to indicate that (1) this is an alteration of the original creed and (2) that *procedit* is means *proinai*, not *ekporev-*.

<i>poinai / procedit</i>	
If Economy	If Ontology
Mission of the Spirit from the Father <u>and</u> the Son (1)	Procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son (4)
Mission of the Spirit from the Father <u>through</u> the Son (2)	Procession of the Spirit from the Father through the Son (5)
Mission of the Spirit from the Father only (3)	Procession of the Spirit from the Father only (6)

- (1) Latin doctrine, acceptable to the Orthodox
- (2) Common doctrine
- (3) Never taught by anyone
- (4) Latin doctrine, acceptable to the Orthodox if 'and' = 'through'
- (5) Common doctrine
- (6) Normally preferred by the Orthodox.

<i>Pemps-</i>	
Economy	Ontology
Mission of the Spirit from the Father <u>and</u> the Son (1)	Not used
Mission of the Spirit from the Father <u>through</u> the Son (2)	Not used
Mission of the Spirit from the Father only (3)	Not used

- (1) Common doctrine, preferred on the Latin side
- (2) Common doctrine
- (3) Never taught by anyone



Hopefully, this short study has shown that a constructive dialogue has taken place on this difficult and controversial topic. If the Eastern Orthodox insistence that the text of the Creed be left unchanged and that the Monarchy of the Father be strongly affirmed, there is room for an agreement on a *procedit* (*proinat*) *filioque* theology leading to the resolution of what should not be “a Church-dividing issue.”

III. APPARITIONS AND PRIVATE REVELATIONS

It is certainly beyond the scope of this study to offer a full-fledged review of the importance of apparitions and private revelations in the doctrinal, liturgical and devotional life of Roman Catholicism. It is important to understand, though, that the sense of ‘non-identity’ experienced by Orthodox Christians vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism (and vice-versa) is partly due to the influence of such events.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart, for example, finds its origin in the apparitions received by St. Marguerite Marie Alacoque (†1690). It is not my intention to offer any opinion on specific apparitions or the merits of this particular devotional image. What needs to be understood is that the combination of ever-evolving Western art and devotions is a cause of concern to many Eastern Orthodox, who have themselves been greatly influenced by Westernized ‘iconography.’ The question, ‘what kind of music and art should we have in the Church’ is extremely important, as it is to a large extent how we express our faith and identity.

A few other influential apparitions should be mentioned: the rue du Bac and Lourdes, both connected with the theology of the Immaculate Conception, as well as Fatima, connected with the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the conversion of Russia. More recently, the controversial and popular apparitions of Medjugorje have been a

source of great debate within Roman Catholicism. Again, it is not my intention to discuss these events in detail, only to indicate the presence of influential factors outside 'traditional theology.' As the *Catholic Encyclopedia* notes, "Most liturgists rightly attribute the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and its special adoration to the establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi," which had its origin in a vision received by St. Juliana of Mont Cornillon in 1246.

The apparitions of La Salette¹, Lourdes, Rue du Bac and Fatima can certainly be interpreted by some as divine endorsement of Roman Catholic dogma. The connection between apparitions and devotions is clear in the dialogues of Fatima:

Mary: You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace. The war is going to end; but if people do not cease offending God, a worse one will break out during the pontificate of Pius XI. When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given you by God that he is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father.

To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of Reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, various nations will be annihilated. In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she will be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world. In Portugal, the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved; etc... Do not tell this to anybody. Francisco, yes, you may tell him.

When you pray the Rosary, say after each mystery: O my Jesus, forgive us, save us from the fire of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those who are most in need.

Regardless of what one thinks about the events of Fatima, it is clear that devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and additions to the rosary are part and parcel of the message. The question of "Russia's conversion" is also a very sensitive topic. Many Roman Catholics who accept the divine origin of the apparitions believe that the Virgin Mary has taken side with the Church of Rome.

¹ No longer favored. The apparition used the expression "the Vicar of my Son."

Apparitions are an important aspect of the Roman Catholic spiritual experience, and their theological message cannot be ignored. Theologians should be aware that Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism cannot be effectively reconciled if the topic of devotions and apparitions is not frankly discussed, and hopefully harmonized with sound theology. As we will now discuss, the possible tensions between apparitions (on both sides) and theology is apparent in the case of the doctrine of purgatory.

IV. PURGATORY & INDULGENCES

1. *Orthodox concerns, Orthodox purgatory?*

Do Orthodox Christians believe in purgatory? It is one of those questions where one could rightly answer ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ depending on what is precisely meant by ‘purgatory.’ It is certain that Eastern Orthodox theologians do not use (and do not like) the word purgatory, mainly because they are concerned with its legalistic implications, the historical connection with the doctrine of indulgences and other possible misunderstandings. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* entry for Purgatory illustrates this concern:

I. CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Purgatory (Lat., “purgare,” to make clean, to purify) in accordance with Catholic teaching is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God’s grace, are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions...

Venial Sins

All sins are not equal before God, nor dare anyone assert that the daily faults of human frailty will be punished with the same severity that is meted out to serious violation of God’s law...

VI. INDULGENCES

The Council of Trent (Sess. XXV) defined that indulgences are “most salutary for Christian people” and that their “use is to be retained in the Church.” It is the common teaching of Catholic theologians that:

- indulgences may be applied to the souls detained in purgatory; and
- that indulgences are available for them “by way of suffrage.”

Hence, the Eastern Orthodox problem with ‘purgatory’ is not so much the idea of mercy after death as the legal concepts, terminology and dogmatization used to express it. This point is important if our goal is to

move away from divisive issues and toward a genuine unity of mind and expression.

We can certainly affirm that Orthodox Christians hope and believe that prayers for the dead are, however mysteriously, effectual. But it is also very important to admit that this conviction is based more on apparition stories than on specific scriptural evidence. The beloved *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great are famous for such stories, but there are many similar examples in contemporary Orthodox literature. Let us consider the following example from the popular *Prologue from Ochrid*:

On the Efficacy of Prayers for the Dead

Love is almighty. It can, among other things, soften the judgment on the souls of departed sinners. The Orthodox Church deliberately emphasizes this, and strives to offer prayers and alms for the dead. Most rich in all spiritual experience, the Church knows that prayers and alms for the dead help them in the other world. St Athanasia the Abbess (April 12th) commanded her nuns to prepare a table for the poor and needy for forty days after her death. The nuns observed this only for ten days, then stopped it. The saint then appeared, accompanied by two angels, and said to the nuns: 'Why have you not carried out my instructions? Know that by alms and the prayers of the priest for the souls of the departed during the forty days, the mercy of God is invoked. If the departed souls are sinful, they receive through these alms God's forgiveness of their sins; and, if they are sinless, then they are efficacious for the forgiveness of those who do the alms.' She is, of course, thinking here of alms and prayers linked with a great love for the souls of the departed. Such alms and prayers are indeed of help.¹

Eternal Mysteries beyond the Grave is another popular book with countless examples of 'purgatorial experiences' and it is published by a traditionalist Russian Orthodox monastery that cannot be accused of zealous sympathy for Roman Catholicism:

A certain priest was particularly diligent in praying for the dead whose names were given to him to be remembered at the liturgy... It so happened that he fell into some sin which threatened him with losing his priestly rank. This matter reached Philaret, the Metropolitan of Moscow. As the Metropolitan was about to sign a resolution stating that the priest should be removed from his duties, he suddenly felt his hand grow heavy... In the night, he dreamt of seeing a great crowd assemble under his windows. In the crowd, there were people of all ages and walks of life. The crowd was agitated and finally addressed to the Metropolitan some kind of plea.

"What do you need?," the bishop asked. "And who are you?"

¹ Vol. 3, p. 15

“We are the departed souls and have come to you to plead for our priest. Do not remove him from his office.”

Philaret, greatly impressed from this dream, was unable to forget it after he woke up. He had the accused priest brought before him. When the priest came, the Metropolitan asked him: “What good deeds have you done? Tell me?” “None, my Lord,” the priest answered; “I deserve being punished.” “Do you pray for the departed?” asked the Metropolitan. “Why yes, my Lord, always; it is a rule with me always to remember all whose names are handed to me...”

The Metropolitan limited himself to transferring the priest to another parish, having first explained to him who had interceded for him.

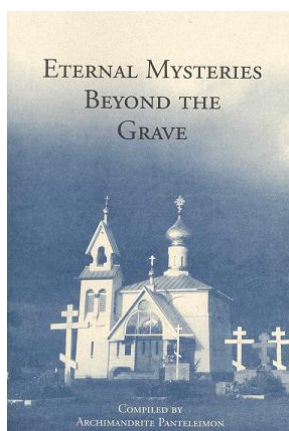


Image 3: Popular expressions of Eastern Orthodoxy contains various perspective on life after death, including the controversial ‘toll-house’ theory and many accounts indicative of something similar to purgatory (although the word is never used). *Eternal Mysteries Beyond the Grave* (by a traditionalist Russian Orthodox publisher) contains many such accounts, including several famous stories from the writings and sermons of Pope Gregory the Dialogist.

[Another story, a few pages later]

One of the novices at Mt. Athos related the following to a monk of the Holy Mountain, the well-known Father Seraphim:

“I became a monk because I saw in a dream the future destiny of sinners. This happened after I had been greatly weakened by an illness which lasted two months. I saw two youths who entered my room, took me by the hands and said: “Follow us.” I no longer felt my illness. I got up, looked back at my bed, and saw my body lying there quietly. Then I understood that I had left the earthly life and had to appear in the other world... As the angels showed me the flaming places appointed for various sins, they added: ‘If you will not set aside your sinful habits, you too will have your punishment here!’

“One of the angels took up from the flames a man as black as coal. He was burnt as a coal and bound in chains, hand and foot. Both angels approached the sufferer, unbound him, and his blackness disappeared with the chains. He became as pure and light as an angel. The angels clothed him in a brilliant cloak which looked like light.

“What does this change mean?,” I dared to ask. “This sinful soul,” the angels answered, ‘was separated from God for its sins and had to burn

eternally in these flames. Meanwhile, this soul's parents kept giving alms for it, remembered it at liturgy and had panikhidas said for it, and now for the sake of the parents' prayers and those of the Holy Church, God has mercy on the soul and had completely pardoned it. It now is freed from eternal torments and will stand before the face of its Lord and be joyful with His saints.¹

Such stories remind us that popular Orthodox theology has a version of purgatory that is hardly distinguishable from its Roman Catholic counterpart. These accounts may not be very sound theologically², but their influence should not be underestimated. The fact that Christians have always prayed for the dead comes with the unshakable certainty that the practice is indeed efficacious.

2. *Prayers for the dead*

Under the entry "Prayers of the dead," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* offers an excellent summary of the biblical and patristic origins of this common practice:

A custom which, springing from natural and laudable affection, is found among very diverse peoples. It has a connection, in thought at least and often in fact, with that variety of sacrifice called vicarious, in which intercession is believed to be potential for the release of another from the consequences of that other's misdeeds. Its existence among the Jews in the second century before Christ is proved by II Macc. xii. 43-45, in which passage it is stated that not only prayer but sacrifice for the dead was offered by Judas, and the manner of statement shows that the deed was not unusual and was reckoned praiseworthy. But no Old Testament passage can be quoted in favor of the custom.

There can be little question that from Judaism the practice passed over to the Christian Church... Combined with the vogue given by Jewish custom and the affection and hope which reached beyond the grave, this passage gave sanction to the practice in the early Christian Church. Tertullian is the earliest Christian writer who makes reference to prayers for the dead as customary... Similar testimony is given by Arnobius, Cyprian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Augustine, Chrysostom, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the apostolic Constitutions (where the liturgical form is given). By some of these Fathers the custom was regarded as of apostolic institution. That the practice was strengthened by the idea of the solidarity of the Church as including the living and the dead is not unlikely, and a lingering influence of the classical Hades as a sort of middle state may have had its influence. The general practice of the early Church is further evinced by mortuary

¹ *Eternal mysteries beyond the grave*, Archimandrite Panteleimon, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York, 1996, pp. 187-189

² The second story indicates a transfer from being doomed to eternal torments to the joy of the saints, a possibility greatly at odds with the "chasm" language of Luke 16.

inscriptions. In view of all this it is not surprising that the prayer for the dead entered the liturgies, appearing in those of St. Mark, St. James, the Nestorian, Ambrosian, and Gregorian, and the Gallican. The development of the doctrine of Purgatory, which in order of time followed the custom, fixed more firmly, if possible, the custom, and there developed in the West the Office (or Mass) for the Dead and the *Missa de sanctis*, the former at least as early as the sixth century. The offering of these prayers was from the earliest times particularly connected with the Eucharist.¹

In other words, even scholarly Protestants agree that ‘praying for the dead’ is the ancient and apostolic practice of the Church. The underlying belief, of course, is that “love covers a multitude of sins²” and that “the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”³

There is no question, then, that prayers for the dead are the common apostolic Tradition of East and West, with the assumption that such prayers are God-pleasing and effectual. This being said, the issues become more specific:

- (1) Is there a purifying fire?
- (2) Is there a place or state of ‘final cleansing’ before the age to come?
- (3) Is this place different than *hades* and paradise?

As we have seen, Eastern Orthodoxy does not normally use the word ‘purgatory’ because it seems to imply complete identity of views with Roman Catholicism on this topic. It is important to realize that Eastern Orthodoxy is anchored in the mind and vocabulary of the great Fathers of the third, fourth and fifth century, especially Basil and Chrysostom. When it comes to the mysteries of ‘life after death,’ the Greek Orthodox tradition also retained their language: ‘*hades*,’ ‘paradise,’ ‘Abraham’s bosom,’ ‘a place of rest and refreshment.’ In the West, ‘*hades*’ ended up equated with ‘hell’ and ‘paradise’ became ‘heaven,’ a situation which tended to confuse the intermediate state with the age to come. At a popular level, the idea was (and still is) that when you die, you either go to ‘heaven’ or ‘hell,’ and since the majority do not seem to fit in either category, ‘purgatory’ seems to be a much-needed third option. In this system, the concept of resurrection becomes somewhat superfluous. In order to understand the magnitude of this confusion, let us see how hell can become almost indistinguishable from heaven.

¹ *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Philip Schaff, Vol. IX: Petri – Reuchlin (Entry: Prayers for the dead)

² 1 Peter 4:8

³ James 5:16, NRS

In the Hebrew/Greek perspective of death, the body went to the grave and the soul/spirit went to *scheol/hades*. *Hades* was the common abode of the dead, but two conditions existed there. The lower *hades* was a place of darkness and torment marked by anxiety, separation from God, as well as the inability to participate in His Presence. Upper *hades* was the abode of the righteous and it was called 'paradise' or 'Abraham's bosom.' This popular geography of the underworld, explicitly endorsed in Luke 16 and 23:43, does not seem to leave much room for a purifying fire that would allow for a progression from lower paradise to upper paradise, since no crossing over was possible from the condition of the rich man to that of Lazarus¹. In this case, the imagery of fire is connected with torment, not purification.

According to the teachings of the early Fathers, *hades* was effectively conquered by the resurrection of Christ, so that the state of the souls was transformed by participation in the light of the God-Man. This is alluded to in Hebrews 11:40 and 12:22:

Yet all these, though approved because of their faith, did not receive what had been promised. God had foreseen something better for us, so that without us they should not be made perfect... [Now], you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect...

The Paschal exclamation "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life" did not mean that a universal resurrection of the bodies had taken place: the message was that the sting and power of death had been abolished by the shattering descent of the Author of Life². The light of Christ was now shining even in *hades*/paradise and the saints could enjoy the expectation of the glory to come. But even after Christ, *hades* was still understood as the common destiny of all:

Now we must speak of *hades* in which the souls of both the righteous and the unrighteous are detained... But the righteous (who will obtain the incorruptible and unfading kingdom) are indeed presently detained in *hades*, but not in the same place as the unrighteous... they are brought to a

¹ "Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." Luke 16:26

² This is perhaps (in their case) what we could call "the first (spiritual) resurrection."

locality full of light and they perpetually enjoy the contemplation of the blessings that are in their view.¹

In other words, the souls of the reposed do not go to heaven or hell (in the sense of a final destination), they go to lower-*hades* or paradise-*hades*, a temporary intermediate state where the fullness of blessedness² is yet to come.

3. *From hades to purgatory*

A major problem is that *hades* was translated *infernium* in the Latin Vulgate, which gave us 'hell' – no pun intended – in the King James Version. And yet, *hades* also included paradise, which St. Paul equates with the third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:2. As a result, we have the confusing sequence:

hades = *infernium* = hell; but

hades = paradise = heaven

It is important to note that Greek Christian theology strongly retained the Hebrew emphasis on the functional unity of soul and body with its emphasis on the resurrection of the body³. The Creed of 381 confesses "the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come" as the basic Christian hope, not the temporary intermediate state. This language also implied that the intermediate state is never the full enjoyment of the age to come, because human beings are meant to be a unity of soul and body. This also means that apart from the unity of body and soul which constitutes the person, the spiritual condition of the person is fixed. St. Cyprian of Carthage, a Latin-speaking Father, did not wish to give the impression that the afterlife was a place of repentance:

In *hades*, there is no repentance.

When you have departed this life... there is no possibility of making satisfaction.

Those who have sacrificed [to idols] should be assisted at death [if repentant], for there is no confession in *hades*.

¹ Hippolytus of Rome, quoted in DECB, p. 195. See all quotations under the same entry.

² That is, the resurrection of the body.

³ The Greek Fathers were not dualistic Hellenists. They affirmed that the soul does not die with the body but that it is not immortal by nature, only by grace. They also taught that without the body, the person is conscious but 'maimed' until the restoration of the psycho-somatic unity.

These pastoral warnings did not mean that others could not intercede for the lapsed, but they left little room for a post-mortem purification through fire, at least for a serious sin such as idolatry. For those who had committed minor sins, the question was: what if they die before having completed their penance? This is specifically where Latin theology found a need to articulate the concept of purgatory. Because it was related to the idea of penance and satisfaction, the definition of purgatory reflects this problem and is naturally connected with the concept of indulgences. In 1439, the council Florence decreed:

If they have died repentant for their sins and having love of God, but have not made satisfaction for things they have done or omitted by fruits worthy of penance, then their souls, after death, are cleansed by the punishment of Purgatory...the suffrages of the Faithful still living are efficacious in bringing them relief from such punishment, namely the Sacrifice of the Mass, prayers and almsgiving and other works of piety which, in accordance with the designation of the Church, are customarily offered by the Faithful for each other.

More recently, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defined purgatory as follows:

1030 All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

1031 The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire.

As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire.

Biblically, the doctrine of purgatory is typically argued on the basis of such texts as 2 Maccabees 12:43–45, Matthew 12:32, 1 Corinthians 3:15, Hebrews 12:14 and Revelation 21:27. The reasoning is that since nothing impure and unholy can enter the presence of God, most Christians will have to undergo a “final purification” after death. The only text that uses the imagery of fire in the context of salvation *in extremis* is 1 Corinthians 3:12–15:

If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire (itself) will test the quality of each one's work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone's work is

burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire.

The New American Bible text provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has a footnote which admits:

The text of 1 Cor 3:15 has sometimes been used to support the notion of purgatory, though it does not envisage this.

This honest disclaimer does not mean that the concept of a purifying fire cannot be substantiated on scriptural and patristic grounds, as we shall now discuss.

4. *Our God is a consuming fire*¹

In Scripture, the imagery of fire is connected with the presence of God: it destroys what is unholy and illumines what is akin to its fiery nature:

[As] wax melts before the fire, let the wicked perish before God. But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy.²

This is the Orthodox concept of glorification and participation: the love and holiness of God are compared to a consuming fire that is both the glory of saints and the torment of the ungodly.

Another relevant biblical theme is the purification of the prophet Isaiah by the burning coal which is understood as a foreshadowing of the Eucharist, especially in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom:

(After partaking of the chalice, the priest wipes it, kisses it, and says): This has touched my lips, taking away my transgressions and cleansing my sins.³

O You who graciously gave Your flesh to me as food, who are a fire consuming the unworthy: Consume me not, O my Creator, but rather pass through all the parts of my body, into all my joints, my heart, my soul; burn, O good Lord, the thorns of my transgressions, cleanse my soul and purify all my thoughts. Ever shelter, guard, and keep me in Your love. Chasten me, purify me, and control all my passions. Adorn me, teach me, and enlighten me always. Show me how to be a tabernacle of Your Holy Spirit, and in no wise the dwelling place of sin; that from me, Your

¹ Hebrews 12:29

² Psalm 68:2-3 (Paschal Liturgy)

³ "And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!' Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.'" Isaiah 6:5-7

habitation, and because of the communion of Your holy mysteries, every evil deed and passion may flee as from fire.¹

The association between purification by fire² and purification by blood³ is especially noteworthy. In both cases, it is agreed that we are not dealing with physical fire and blood. In this sense, I do not think that the Orthodox tradition is opposed to the metaphorical image of purification by blood or fire inasmuch as these are signs of God's work of mercy through the work of Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

The problem with purgatory is the exclusive focus on the image of fire in a legal framework of punishment and satisfaction. Another concern is the implicit idea that 'purifying fire' is in fact created and distinct from the eternal eschatological fire of *gehenna*, an idea that would be at odds with the intuition of Eastern Orthodox theology which sees fire as the uncreated energies of God. Finally, the presentation of purgatory as a third place distinct from paradise and (lower) *hades* was unacceptable to the Greeks:

We confess and accept two places for the souls of the dead, paradise and *hades*, for the righteous and sinners, as the holy Scripture teaches us. We do not accept a third place, a purgatory, by any means, since neither Scripture nor the holy Fathers have taught us any such thing. However, we believe that these two places have many abodes... None of the teachers of the Church have handed down or taught such a purgatory, but they all speak of one single place of punishment, *hades*, just as they teach about one luminous and bright place, paradise. But both places also have different abodes as we said; and since the souls of the holy and righteous go indisputably to paradise and those of the sinners go to *hades*, of whom the profane and those who have sinned unforgivably are punished forever and those who have offended forgivably and moderately hope to gain freedom through the unspeakable mercy of God. For on behalf of such souls, that is of the moderately and forgivably sinful, there are in the Church prayers, supplications, liturgies, as well as memorial services and almsgiving, that those souls may receive favor and comfort. Thus when the Church prays for the souls of those who are lying asleep, we hope that there will be comfort for them from God, but not through fire and purgatory, but through divine love for mankind...

If this rejection of purgatory means a rejection of a created fire of punishment and a third place apart from paradise and *hades*, the rest of the

¹ Post-communion prayer of Simeon Metaphrastes

² "Everything that can withstand fire, shall be passed through fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless it shall also be purified with the water for purification; and whatever cannot withstand fire, shall be passed through the water." Numbers 31:23

³ Hebrews 9:13-14; Ezekiel 43:20

encyclical leave rooms for an acceptable solution which needs to meet at least these characteristics:

- (1) purgatory is carefully defined as a state within paradise¹,
- (2) the metaphor of purifying fire is presented as the uncreated love and energy of God²,
- (3) the connection with the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ is strongly affirmed.³

This third is very important and somewhat confusing. The Roman Catholic doctrine is that purgatory deals with the ‘temporal consequences of sins already forgiven.’ In other words, although a person’s sins have already been forgiven through the blood of Christ, something remains that needs to be eradicated by means of the purgatorial fire. In this framework, Christ is not involved in this final purification; the ‘fire’ does not deal with the remission of sins and seems to work apart from the “blood of his cross.”

Eastern Orthodoxy is uncomfortable with this speculative concept. While it is true that a forgiven sin may have earthly consequences (as in the case of King David), the evangelical metaphor of a forgiven debt is closer to the Orthodox perspective. Yet, the forgiven slave (or son) is in a different category, at least temporarily, then the slave who receives a reward. There might be certain ‘fatherly discipline or chastisement’ that is not to be confused with divine forgiveness.

Hence, the ‘Orthodox purgatory’ is first concerned with the pious hope and belief that Christ’s blood can wash away the sins of our departed loved ones. The imagery of God’s love as fire is part of the same theme. Beyond that, the thought that forgiven sins need further “purification by fire” is vague and has historically been rejected.

¹ If ‘purgatory’ is to be expressed as a devotional opinion supported by apparitions, we should also deal with the indication that prayers for the departed are also effectual in the case of those who seem to be entirely lost, not just ‘short on penance’.

² Punishment is often associated with a legalistic application of a penalty. In this context, chastisement by a loving Father can be a more accurate and helpful presentation.

³ Romans 8:1; Revelation 1:5; Hebrews 9:22. As we have seen, “The offering of these prayers was from the earliest times particularly connected with the Eucharist.” The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom has “wash away O Lord, by your blood, the sins of those who have been remembered.”

On the other hand, the 'Latin purgatory' is mainly concerned with the temporal consequences of sins already forgiven¹. This is where purgatorial fire intervenes. Yet, it seems to be disconnected from the saving work of Christ and distinguished from the love or discipline of God the Father. As such it is a mysterious and problematic concept with even more limited scriptural and patristic foundations.

5. *What kind of God?*

These discussions about 'legalism,' 'satisfaction' and 'punishment' often lead of a polarization between two caricatures of Eastern and Western theology. A good example is the following text by Alexander Kalomiros (EO):

The "God" of the West is an offended and angry God, full of wrath for the disobedience of men, who desires in His destructive passion to torment all humanity unto eternity for their sins, unless He receives an infinite satisfaction for His offended pride. What is the Western dogma of salvation? Did not God kill God in order to satisfy His pride, which the Westerners euphemistically call justice? And is it not by this infinite satisfaction that He deigns to accept the salvation of some of us? What is salvation for Western theology? Is it not salvation from the wrath of God? Do you see, then, that Western theology teaches that our real danger and our real enemy is our Creator and God? Salvation, for Westerners, is to be saved from the hands of God! In reality, the opposition between Orthodoxy and Western Christianity is nothing else but the perpetuation of the opposition between Israel and Hellas.

This is a typical overreaction that applies to all things considered 'Western.' The fact is that all of these concepts (wrath of God, torment, justice, offending a God from whom one has to be protected) are solidly biblical². Certainly, the Fathers addressed these texts and balanced this language with other equally biblical approaches. The point is that theology depends on words and concepts that only express one aspect of the truth. It is certainly possible to conclude with Dr. Kalomiros that the burning fire of hell (or purgatory) is in fact the all-holy and all-love presence of the uncreated Trinity, but our eagerness to present a loftier vision of God should not lead us to a hasty rejection of other forms of expression, especially those used by our Lord (i.e. worms, darkness, lashes, prison).

Solving the problem of purgatory cannot be done in isolation from the complex theological framework that influences our interpretation of

¹ In that sense, Matt. 12:31-32 is not relevant to the Latin position.

² 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 14:11; Romans 3:5; Nehemiah 1:7

Scripture, but it does seem that an agreed doctrinal statement would be much easier to produce now than ever before.

6. *Indulgences*

The idea of indulgences is historically and theologically related with that of purgatory. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* explains:

The word indulgence originally meant kindness or favor; in post-classic Latin it came to mean the remission of a tax or debt... In the special sense in which it is here considered, an indulgence is a remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, the guilt of which has been forgiven.

The distribution of the merits contained in the treasury of the Church is an exercise of authority (*potestas iurisdictionis*), not of the power conferred by Holy orders (*potestas ordinis*). Hence the pope, as supreme head of the Church on earth, can grant all kinds of indulgences to any and all of the Faithful; and he alone can grant plenary indulgences. The power of the bishop, previously unrestricted, was limited by Innocent III (1215)...

We have already quoted the entry for Purgatory from the same source which mentions the applicability of indulgences to ‘the poor souls in purgatory.’

The connection between purgatory and indulgences came about as follows: purgatory was understood as the place where those who “have not made satisfaction for things they have done or omitted by fruits worthy of penance are cleansed by the punishment of purgatory.” In the early Church, Christians who fell into sin incurred long periods of excommunication, and the penance was generally expressed in years. But what if a Christian expressed extreme repentance for the sins committed, for instance through severe fasting or almsgiving? Wouldn’t the Church grant to such a person a shortening of penance? This is how the idea of days came about in the Latin West: lapsed Christians could obtain faster reintegration into the communion of the Church by various means, such as the intercession of confessors and special acts of penance. As we all know, this idea became hopelessly distorted and abused in the course of the centuries, so much that indulgences became ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back’ for Martin Luther. In the case of penitent Christians who died before the completion of their penance (*epitimia*), the idea was that

indulgences could also be applicable to them, by procuration, in order to make up for what had not been accomplished on earth.¹

In the Greek East and in modern Orthodoxy, canonical penalties for serious sins were understood as pastoral guidelines and often expressed in therapeutic terms, both for the community and the penitent. The Western systematization of days and the concept of a treasury of superabundant merits that could be transferred from one person to another by the power of the keys is quite alien to the spirit of Eastern Orthodoxy. This is not to say that a bishop or priest would not shorten one's time of excommunication in special cases or that good deeds cannot be understood as applicable to others. But the underlying theology would be expressed in terms of 'the ontological unity of the human race,' not in terms of (congruent or strict) merits.

As a result, the concept of purgatory-indulgences as it was formulated at the councils of Florence and Trent is hard to reconcile with the spirit of Eastern Orthodoxy. Since Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church no longer expresses indulgences in terms of days, which is in itself an admission that the older system was inadequate, to put it mildly. The popular *My Prayer-Book* compiled by Fr. Lasance contained a large number of indulgenced prayers based on the official 1943 *Raccolta*. For instance, St. Ignatius Loyola's prayer *Suscipe Domine* had the following note:

His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII, by a rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences, May 26, 1883, modified by the Sacred Penitentiary apostolic, Dec. 4, 1932, granted to all the Faithful who, with at least contrite heart and devotion, shall recite this prayer, and indulgence of three years, each time.²

The very next prayer, which counts only twenty-four words, was endowed with no less than "500 days, once a day." It seems fair to say that the indulgence system had reached a frightening level of absurdity that could easily have been interpreted as an easy fast-track from grave sins to paradise.

In current practice, long periods of excommunication are seldom applied in modern Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. This makes

¹ Most Roman Catholics were confused by this concept. The majority of the people believed that an indulgence for 50 days meant 50 fewer days in purgatory, but the theory was that 50 days of the person's earthly penance were being remitted.

² *My Prayer-Book*, F. Lasance, Benziger, Chicago, 1944, p. 285

the whole concept of indulgence even more difficult to implement with meaning and authenticity.

V. CLERICAL CELIBACY

1. *A matter of ecclesiastical discipline...*

The sensitive topic of clerical celibacy has already been mentioned several times in the course of our study. It will be remembered that what is often understood as a simple matter of discipline was (and still is) perceived as a major point of contention. Celibacy¹ was explicitly addressed as a divisive issue the council of Trullo (692), in the correspondence of Patriarch Photius and indeed in the bull of excommunication of Cardinal Humbert in 1054. Finally, the question, or indeed the “scandal” of married clergy (from a Latin perspective) became a full-fledged nightmare in the relations of Rome with its ‘Uniate’ communities.

In theory, there is really nothing to argue about: Rome and the Latin tradition favor the discipline of a continent and unmarried priesthood while the East feels that in general, married presbyters are better suited for non-monastic service to a parish. The official position of the Roman Catholic Church is that celibacy is not intrinsic to the priesthood and that this disciplinary, non-dogmatic matter could be revised. A recent *National Catholic Register* column noted:

Pope Benedict XVI’s choice as the church’s top official for priests has said that celibacy “is not a dogma,” and that the Catholic church “can reflect” on the subject. The explosive character of the issue, however, was reflected in a “clarification” issued in the name of the cardinal by the Vatican Press Office on Dec. 4. Cardinal Claudio Hummes, 72, of São Paulo, Brazil, was nominated Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy on Oct. 31. He made the comments as he left for Rome in an interview with the Brazilian publication *Estado de São Paulo*. “Even if celibates are part of our history and of Catholic culture, the church can reflect on the question of celibacy, because it’s not a dogma but a disciplinary norm,” Hummes said. Hummes, a Franciscan, recalled that several Apostles were married, and that the discipline of priestly celibacy in the Western church developed several centuries after the institution of the priesthood itself. “The church is not stationary, but an institution that changes when it has to change,”

¹ Actually, enforced continence for married clerics.

Hummes said. "The church must first discuss if it is necessary to reconsider the norm of celibacy."¹

On the Eastern Orthodox side, it is sometimes forgotten that those who were called *hierews* and *sacerdos* by the Fathers (i.e. the bishops) are also under a discipline of clerical celibacy². According to the canons, Orthodox bishops are elected from the monastic ranks, but in practice, celibate priests are often chosen as well. As a result, it is disingenuous to say that the question of clerical celibacy is only a Roman Catholic issue, especially because the Eastern discipline of episcopal celibacy has also been challenged by respected Orthodox bishops³ and theologians. The issue of diaconal celibacy should also be considered. If the rationale for celibacy, especially in the West, was Eucharistic and connected to the 'proximity to the altar,' we can understand why deacons were under the same discipline as priests and bishops. Hence, the issue of marital continence and celibacy is extremely complex and multi-faceted.

2. ...or Apostolic Tradition?

At this point, it might be tempting to dismiss the entire issue as 'not an actual cause of separation between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy' because it is just a matter of discipline, and one that is currently under review anyway. However, I am convinced that the question of celibacy was in fact a major cause of tension between East and West, and that this issue remains extremely divisive. On the one hand, the Eastern Orthodox world looks at the imposition of priestly celibacy on the Uniate communities with the same reaction as St. Photius: a great sense of not wanting to be in any shape or form under the control of the Roman Church. On the other hand, there is a strong traditionalist movement within Catholicism that sees the debate over celibacy as a liberal ploy to destroy the identity and essence of the Roman Catholic priesthood⁴. This movement is supported by a current of thought that sees priestly celibacy not just as a discipline but indeed as an apostolic tradition. Among the few documents posted on the official Vatican web site on this topic, the overwhelming majority are strongly in favor of such a theory. We find for

¹ December 4, 2006 – by John L. Allen, Jr.

² Presbyters only came to be called priests (in the sense of 'sacrificer') and 'fathers' with the development of the parish as a Eucharistic community detached from the physical presence of the bishop.

³ For instance, Metropolitan Elias of Mount Lebanon.

⁴ Orthodox Christians would agree that there are reasons for this fear: the liberal agenda concerning celibacy operates with entirely different motivations than Eastern Christianity.

instance a lengthy article by a Roman Cholij¹ who relies heavily on Fr. Cochini's study: *The apostolic origins of priestly celibacy*. The title leaves no doubt as to the position being advocated, and this view, at least tacitly endorsed by the Vatican, is a factor that must be reckoned with.

This perspective will certainly surprise and challenge many, including the majority of Eastern Orthodox clergy who assumed that the Eastern discipline is the closest to the apostolic model. It must be understood, then, that the Latin insistence on priestly continence (which led to celibacy) has very profound roots, and that the underlying issues need to be squarely faced. If continence and celibacy are indeed an apostolic command, or even if this position becomes dominant in Roman Catholic circles, the effect on Catholic-Orthodox reconciliation cannot be ignored. Archbishop Vsevolod of Scopelos (EO) is very lucid on the importance of this issue:

Very recently, there are disturbing signs of a new effort in Rome itself to claim that sacerdotal celibacy is "an apostolic tradition," and to suggest that the married priests of the Eastern Churches are not fully canonical. This seems to have begun with the book of Christian Cochini, *Origines apostoliques du célibat sacerdotal* and to have continued with special reference to the Eastern Churches in a tendentious book of Roman Cholij. The latter book carries a ringing endorsement from Alfons Cardinal Stickler, Librarian and Archivist of the Holy Roman Church. From such one-sided works, the attempt to present sacerdotal celibacy as an apostolic tradition then began to appear in Vatican documents, such as Pope John Paul II's *Pastores Dabo Vobis* of 25 March 1992 and the *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* issued January 1993 by the Vatican Congregation of the Clergy, which actually asserts that "the Church, from apostolic times, has wished to conserve the gift of perpetual continence of the clergy and choose the candidates for Holy Orders from among the celibate faithful." If this attempt succeeds – and may God not permit it – it would have the gravest consequence for the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue.²

Over the past few years, the 'apostolic tradition' view has gained tremendous support in conservative Roman Catholic circles, including those connected with the ministry of convert-apologists. For instance, Fr. Ray Ryland, a married priest and convert from the Episcopal Church to Catholicism, wrote an article for *Crisis Magazine* entitled *The Gift: A Married Priest Looks at Celibacy*, in which he asserts:

¹ Interestingly, Fr. Cholij is a Ukrainian Catholic, which indicates the reception of this view among the uniate leadership.

² WAAB, pp. 288-289

The fact is, priestly celibacy¹ is an apostolic institution.²

Interestingly, Fr. Ryland can quote from the Vatican-publisher *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* for official support, with the added note that “the celibate faithful” would include married men who with their wives had vowed to observe perpetual continence after ordination. This married Roman Catholic priest concludes:

While I’m deeply grateful that the Church has made an exception for certain former Protestant clergy like me, the exception is clearly a compromise...

I earlier noted that the advocacy of optional celibacy for priests reflects two basic errors. One is historical—a failure to recognize that priestly celibacy is an apostolic tradition. The other error lies in the ambiguity of the word “discipline” to characterize the Church’s rule of celibacy. True, the requirement of priestly celibacy is not part of the deposit of Faith. In a sense it is part of the Church’s discipline. But it is quite unlike all her other disciplines. Take the Church’s rules about fasting before receiving the Eucharist; about allowing meat on Friday if one otherwise fulfills the obligation of penance; about being allowed to register in a parish when one lives outside the parish bounds. These have been changed with no theological consequences.

Theoretically, if he so chose, the pope could set aside the rule of priestly celibacy overnight. But if he did, it would have a profound, negative effect on the Church’s understanding of herself and of the priesthood.

We are far from Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* which had stated:

If the legislation of the Eastern Church is different in the matter of discipline with regard to clerical celibacy, as was finally established by the Council of Trullo held in the year 692, and which has been clearly recognized by the Second Vatican Council, this is due to the different historical background of that most noble part of the Church, a situation which the Holy Spirit has providentially and supernaturally influenced.

We Ourselves take this opportunity to express Our esteem and Our respect for all the clergy of the Eastern Churches, and to recognize in them examples of fidelity and zeal which make them worthy of sincere veneration.³

3. *Theological and historical overview*

Let us then review some of the historical and patristic evidence for the position advocated in Fr. Cochini’s landmark study.

¹ Fr. Ryland means continence, as he explains in his article.

² October 5, 2006, accessed at <http://www.crisismagazine.com/october2006/ryland.htm>

³ *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Priestly Celibacy; Pope Paul VI, 1967, par. 38

The key to understanding this issue is not so much celibacy as it is continence. Nobody denies that there were married clergymen in the early post-apostolic Churches – the question is that of the nature of their conjugal relationship after ordination. If it is agreed that those who were ordained could not, by apostolic command, maintain physical relations with their wives, then the evolution of continence into celibacy makes sense. The ‘law of continence’ (*lex continentiae*) was undoubtedly normative in the West long before the Great Schism. The council of Elvira (Spain, 300-306), in a disputed canon, decided that:

[M]arriage be altogether prohibited to bishops, priests, and deacons, or to all clerics placed in the ministry, and that they keep away from their wives and not beget children; whoever does this, shall be deprived of the honor of the clerical office.¹

The same principle was expressed in no ambiguous terms in a letter of St. Leo of Rome to the Bishop of Narbonne:

The law of continence is the same for the ministers of the altar, for the bishops and for the priests; when they were (still) lay people or lectors, they could freely take a wife and beget children. But once they have reached the ranks mentioned above, what had been permitted is no longer so.²

A council held in Carthage in 390 confirmed this discipline for the Churches of North Africa and stressed the antiquity and apostolic origin of this law:

It is fitting that the holy bishops and priests of God as well as the Levites, i.e. those who are in the service of the divine sacraments, observe perfect continence, so that they may obtain in all simplicity what they are asking from God; what the Apostles taught and what antiquity itself observed, let us also endeavor to keep. The bishops declared unanimously: It pleases us all that bishop, priest and deacon, guardians of purity, abstain from conjugal intercourse with their wives, so that those who serve at the altar may keep a perfect chastity.³

It is noteworthy that on the Eastern side, the seventh century council *in Trullo* also claimed apostolic credentials for its repudiation of this discipline:

Since we know it to be handed down as a rule of the Roman Church that those who are deemed worthy to be advanced to the diaconate or presbyterate should promise no longer to cohabit with their wives, we,

¹ Canon 33

² *Epist. ad Rusticum Narbonensem episcopum*, Inquis, III., Resp. PL 54, 1 204a

³ Canon 3

preserving the ancient rule and apostolic perfection and order, will that the lawful marriages of men who are in holy orders be from this time forward firm, by no means dissolving their union with their wives nor depriving them of their mutual intercourse at a convenient time.

If therefore anyone shall have dared, contrary to the apostolic Canons, to deprive any of those who are in holy orders, presbyter, or deacon, or subdeacon of cohabitation and intercourse with his lawful wife, let him be deposed. In like manner also if any presbyter or deacon on pretence of piety has dismissed his wife, let him be excluded from communion; and if he persevere in this let him be deposed.

Within the limited scope of this study, I would like to discuss the rationale behind the law of continence, the apostolic credentials of both positions, as well as the history of continence and celibacy in the East.

4. *“Those who serve at the altar”*

Regardless of any alleged apostolic origin, the canons of Carthage make it clear that continence is connected with proximity of the altar and the Old Testament laws of ritual purity applicable to the Levitical priesthood. The analogy between the threefold order of high priest-priest-Levite and bishop-presbyter-deacon was common, as can be verified in 1 Clement, Athanasius, etc. This imagery was especially popular in North Africa where it was even suggested that baptism should take place on the eighth day as the Christian equivalent to circumcision. If the ancient priesthood was bound by a law of temporary marital continence, was it not fitting that New Testament ‘priests’ should be committed to even higher ideals? And if the liturgical sacrifice was to be offered daily, the Levitical rules of abstinence before temple service made it impossible for clergy to ever have conjugal relations. Even the council *in Trullo* upheld the ideal of abstinence before service at the altar, but the fact that the Divine Liturgy was normally a weekly event did not prevent clerics from “mutual intercourse at a convenient time.”¹

Without passing judgment on the propriety of this transference of the Old Testament law to the New Covenant, we can understand how the Western ideal of the daily mass would require a continent or celibate clergy. We can also see that only those who were close to the altar, including deacons, would be bound by this ritual law. In this regard, it is somewhat inconsistent on the part of Roman Catholicism to have restored

¹ It is sometimes argued that Trullo changed the wording of the Carthaginian canons to limit the requirement of continence (for married clergy) to days of service at the altar, which was indeed the Old Testament law for Levitical priests.

a permanent married diaconate that is exempt from a canon cited as an authoritative witness to apostolic tradition.

This marriage of Old Testament Levitical law and New Testament Christianity is especially hard to accept for Protestants who wonder how this 'anti-Pauline' drift could have taken place so quickly. Reformed theologian James White suggests that the lack of knowledge and recognition of the Epistle to the Hebrews limited its ability to act as an antidote against this 'Levitzation' of Christianity.

Another important fact was the prevalent (and more biblical) understanding that virginity was the highest expression of Christian life. In the biblical context, this was never meant to exclude married man from service or to present conjugal relations as a necessary evil. Yet, the exaltation of the virginal and monastic ideals often turned into an extremely negative view of marriage. St. Augustine (perhaps by reason of his Manichean background and unmarried paternity) and St. Jerome were influential representatives of this position. In his *Westminster Handbook to Patristics*, Fr. John McGuckin (EO) comments:

Jerome was so effusive in his praise of virginity that he regarded marriage as only good for one thing, the production of more virgins in the ascetical life. His views caused furor in the Church of Rome among the married aristocrats, which was partly responsible for him leaving the capital to settle in Palestine.¹

The struggle with dualistic and unreasonably ascetic forms of Christianity is as old as the Pauline Epistles.² The issue of celibacy (in general) continued to be addressed by the bishops of the early Church. Writing in the middle of the second century, Dionysus of Corinth "discussed marriage and celibacy at length":

He urges Pitynus, the bishop, not to make celibacy compulsory for the brethren but to remember the weakness of many.³

St. Paul, an ardent promoter of virginity and celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, was nevertheless concerned that heretical extremes were a strong temptation. The Epistle to the Hebrews, whose voice was so weak

¹ *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, John McGuckin, WJK, Louisville, Kentucky, 2004, p. 57. The Catholic Encyclopedia of 1910 concurs: "Jerome recognizes the legitimacy of marriage, but he uses concerning it certain disparaging expressions which were criticized by contemporaries and for which he has given no satisfactory explanation."

² 1 Timothy 4:1

³ HE, p. 159

for so long, reminded its readers that “honorable {is} the marriage in all, and the bed undefiled”¹. In the East, this tradition of exalting virginity while honoring marriage was exemplified by St. John Chrysostom:

Marriage was not instituted for wantonness or fornication, but for chastity². Listen to what Paul says: “Because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” These are the two purposes for which marriage was instituted, to make us chaste, and to make us parents. Of these two, the reason of chastity takes precedence.³

The question was twofold: is marriage holy and undefiled, yet possibly ritually impure as regards the service of the altar? If so, should Levitical abstinence be temporary (as in the Old Testament) or permanent?

5. *The Scriptural paradigm and the Levitical model*

The only scriptural texts directly relevant to the issue at hand are found in the pastoral writings of St. Paul. The only ‘apostolic requirements’ on record for the office of presbyter/bishop and deacon are clearly spelled out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2:

This is a sure word: if a man aspires to the office of overseer (bishop), he desires a good work. The overseer (bishop) must be irreproachable, husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, modest, hospitable and a good teacher. He must not be a drinker, not someone violent or greedy for money. He should be gentle, not irritable or envious. He should be someone who rules his own house well, keeping his [own] children in subjection with all reverence. (Indeed, if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how can he take care of the Church of God?)

Deacons, in the same way, must be reverent, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine and not greedy for money. They should keep the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. Let them also be tested first; then let them serve if they are blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers but self-controlled and faithful in all things. Deacons should be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.⁴

I left you in Crete for this reason: that you would set in order the things that were lacking and appoint presbyters in every city, as I directed you, someone who is blameless, the husband of one wife, whose children believe and who are not accused of loose or unruly behavior. Indeed, the overseer (bishop) must be beyond reproach, as God’s steward; not self-pleasing, not easily angered, not someone who abuses wine, not violent and not greedy

¹ Hebrews 13:4, YLT

² The Greek word conveys the idea of ‘wholesomeness’.

³ MFL, p. 85

⁴ 1 Timothy 3:1-13 EOB

for dishonest gain. Instead, he should be hospitable, a lover of what is good, sensible, just, holy, self-controlled; holding fast to the sure word which is harmony with what has been taught, so that he may be able to exhort in the sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.¹

Indeed, the apostle concludes:

To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted.²

St. Paul's instructions have never been understood as meaning that one must be married to qualify for ordination, as was obvious in the case of Timothy himself. Assuming that most candidates would be converts with families, the apostle indicated the 'canonical boundaries' of eligibility. Clearly, the great missionary favored celibacy which he understood as "a gift":

Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. This I say by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.³

A few verses later, St. Paul also writes:

For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

The apostolic advice, then, was filled with his wisdom and pastoral sense: that married couples, regardless of their role in the Church, should "not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again."

It is quite possible that the "perhaps by agreement for a set time... to devote yourself to prayer" is applicable to the liturgical cycles, but in the New Testament, the word 'priest' (*hierēus*) is never applied to the ministers of the New Covenant. The letter to the Hebrews does not seem to leave much room for a Levitical type of system in the Church, although there

¹ Titus 2:5-9 EOB

² Verse 15

³ 1 Corinthians 7:5-8

are oblique references to “sacrifices¹” and “an altar².” This epistle, which was an attempt to discourage Jewish Christians from returning to the old sacrificial system, was not widely received in the early Church and its influence was limited. Be that as it may, the Eucharist was always understood as a memorial sacrifice, offered by a priestly people, which meant that even though the term *hiereus* was not used in the New Testament in a ministerial sense, the concept was there. The early Christians were especially fond of applying Malachi 1:11 to the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church³. As a result, the fusion of *episkopos-presbyteros* and *hiereus* was accomplished soon after the destruction of the Temple. Hence, the book of Revelation⁴ can use the term *presbyteroi* to describe what is unmistakably a sacrificial office.

6. A glance at the Fathers

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss every point of patristic evidence relevant to this topic. Let us then focus on the Levitical associations and on directly applicable statements.

1 Clement does not explicitly apply the Levitical language to the Christian ministers, although it is possible to argue that it was the author’s intention to do so. St. Athanasius, on the other hand, is very clear:

You shall see the Levites [priests] bringing loaves and a cup of wine, and placing them on the table. So long as the prayers of supplication and entreaties have not been made, there is only bread and wine. But after the great and wonderful prayers have been completed, the bread has become the Body, and the wine the Blood, of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

This possible connection between the “bread of the presence” and the Eucharistic bread, brings us back to Matthew 12:4 and 1 Samuel 21:4. The story tells us that David’s men were allowed to partake of the consecrated bread was “only if the young men have kept themselves from women.”

This Levitical paradigm⁶, turned *omnibus* (permanent) at Carthage, had a profound influence on Latin discipline, and was under serious

¹ In a non-propitiatory sense, Hebrews 13:16.

² Hebrews 13:10

³ “For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.”

⁴ Revelations 4:1-10

⁵ *Sermon to the Newly Baptized*

⁶ Abstinence on the day of service for priests, abstinence for seven days for the High Priest prior to *Yom Kippur*

consideration in the East. The idea that those who served at the altar should temporarily abstain from marital relations was implicitly retained at the council *in Trullo*, but the Old Testament ritual law was not extended to a permanent requirement.

In the West, St. Ambrose rebuked those who would follow the biblical discipline of temporary abstinence: relying extensively on the Levitical model, he exhorts his clergy with these words:

But you know that the ministerial office must be kept pure and unspotted, and must not be defiled by conjugal intercourse... I am mentioning this, because in some out-of-the-way places, when they enter on the ministry, or even when they become priests, they have begotten children. They defend this on the ground of old custom¹, when, as it happened, the sacrifice was offered up at long intervals.²

This radicalization of the intent of Scripture is obvious in Ambrose's treatise: where the apostle called for moderation as regards wine consumption, the bishop of Milan writes:

We note how much is required of us. The minister of the Lord should abstain from wine...

Pope Gregory the Great was painfully aware that the enforcement of permanent continence on all those who served at the altar, including subdeacons, was a problem, to put it mildly, for those who were married. It is in this context that the adoption of vows of life-long celibacy would slowly become the absolute norm in the Latin tradition.

In the East, the testimony of Clement of Alexandria (†215) is without ambiguity; after commenting on the texts of St. Paul noted above, and expressing his veneration for a life of chastity, he adds:

All the same, the Church fully receives the husband of one wife whether he be presbyter, deacon or layman, supposing always that he uses his marriage blamelessly, and such a one shall be saved in the begetting of children.³

Hence, the rule of continence for clerics was sometimes endorsed, sometimes denounced. Commenting on the "husband of one wife" clause, Eusebius of Caesarea writes:

¹ This quote seems to support the Eastern view: the older custom was both to offer 'the sacrifice' at long intervals (once a week) and to observe limited continence on the day before.

² *De officiis ministrorum*, Book 1, 258 (c. 391 AD)

³ *Stromateiae*, III, xiii

It is fitting, according to Scripture, 'that a bishop be the husband of an only wife.' But this being understood, it behooves consecrated men, and those who are at the service of God's cult, to abstain thereafter from conjugal relations with their wives.¹

St Epiphanius (†403), a monk-bishop known for his "zeal for the monastic life" and who had close ties with the Church of Rome, was among those who promoted the ascetic ideal on all, including subdeacons:

Holy Church respects the dignity of the priesthood to such a point that she does not admit to the diaconate, the priesthood or the episcopate, nor even to the subdiaconate, anyone still living in marriage and begetting children. She accepts only him who if married gives up his wife or has lost her by death, especially in those places where the ecclesiastical canons are strictly attended to.²

Fr. Cholij is wise in concluding that:

Caution, of course, has to be exercised in not reading into these texts more than they contain, and one has to recognize that local practices do not necessarily imply a general rule. Furthermore, other texts need to be considered, such as Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* III, 12; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 12, 25; Athanasius, *Letter to Dracontius* which do not obviously suggest the possibility of a general rule. Indeed, since the end of the nineteenth century such texts have been used to demonstrate the existence of an early general law of continence in the East. Polemical or confessional interests aside, it can be said that modern tools of scholarship, not available in the past, have allowed doubt to be cast on the certainty of these conclusions too.³

Once embarked on the path of merging the veterotestamental Levitical system with the New Testament model of elder/overseer/deacon, the Church had to redefine rules of ritual purity and impurity. For many centuries, communicants received the Eucharistic bread in their hands, which meant that the entire Christian people 'touched and ate of the holy things.' It is possible that all the faithful were called to abstain on the day before receiving communion, and this remains the operative guideline in the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The high priest, priest, Levite class system of the Old Testament was found to be a good match for the threefold order of bishop, presbyter, deacon – notwithstanding the strong language of the letter to the Hebrews. To this day, Orthodox bishops are honored with the song "To our high-priest and master grant O Lord many years!" Hence, a strict rule of continence was meant to reflect the higher

¹ *Demonstratio Evangelica*, I, 9

² *Adv. Haer.*, 48, 9; 59,4; *Expositio Fidei*, 21. Epiphanius recognized that this ideal was not applied everywhere.

³ *Priestly celibacy in patristics and in the history of the Church*, op. cit.

and more perfect sacrifice of the New Covenant, and this rule was increasingly expected from all three orders of clergy, since they were more directly involved in the service at the altar, and this eventually included subdeacons.

While recognizing the fulfillment of the Old Covenant in the New, many question how this 'Levitization' of the Church can be harmonized with the writings of St. Paul and the spirit of the New Testament. It is perhaps indicative that 'Bible-only Christians' reach all sort of conclusions based on their varied interpretations of the Scriptures, but never conclude that those ordained should be under obligation to abandon marital relations. Jerome, in his extreme eagerness to exalt virginity and disparate marital relations, went so far as to present the pagan ideal of clerical continence as some kind of model.

[Before] the light of our religion shone upon the world, wives of one husband ever held high rank among matrons, that by their hands the sacred rites of Fortuna Muliebris were performed, that a priest or Flamen twice married was unknown, that the high-priests of Athens to this day emasculate themselves by drinking hemlock, and once they have been drawn in to the pontificate, cease to be men.¹

It was unavoidable that after years of pro-ascetic ascendancy, a strong counter-reaction would take place, which was indeed the case in the Persian Churches where clerical continence was completely rejected. The story of Paphnutius' intervention at Nicea, legendary or real, is another sign that the imperial East was increasingly aware that Epiphanius' ideal that those ordained were "forbidden entirely to live with their wives and to beget children" was disputably apostolic as well as a cause of contention and sin. The words of St. Paul of "because of fornications, let every man have his own wife" and "marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled²" would then be taken into account to define the policy that endures to this day in the Eastern Churches.

7. *The testimony of the councils*

As we have seen, the first attempt to canonize the ideal of clerical continence is generally traced back to the council of Elvira (306-311) whose president was probably the great Hosius of Cordova. Because of the intense struggle over this issue that developed in the West during the following centuries, it is also possible that canon 33 could be a later

¹ *Against Jovinianus* (Book I)

² The same adjective (ἁμίαντος) is applied in Hebrews to Jesus Christ as the all holy high priest (Hebrews 7:26; 13:4)

addition. This is, for instance, the opinion of Archbishop Peter L'Huillier (EO):

As for canon 33 attributed to the council held in Elvira, today, Grenada, around 306-311, which made a law to this effect, it is part of the group of canons added at a later time. Only the first twenty-one canons were issued by the above mentioned council.¹

The same doubts exist regarding the canons of the council of Arles of 314, but there is no question that the issue of continence was widely discussed and debated. In the East, the council of Ancyra (also 314) explicitly allowed the deacons, under certain conditions, to get married after ordination and thereafter to maintain their married relations:

They who have been made deacons, declaring when they were ordained that they must marry, because they were not able to abide so, and who afterwards have married, shall continue in their ministry, because it was conceded to them by the bishop. But if any were silent on this matter, undertaking at their ordination to abide as they were, and afterwards proceeded to marriage, these shall cease from the diaconate.²

The local councils, including that of Neo-Caesarea, never discussed the issue of married clerics having children, all the while laying down strict canonical penalties for immorality. It is clear, then, that the rule of continence for those who served at the altar was a matter of variable discipline.

We now arrive at the much misunderstood canons and discussions of Nicea. Canon 3 is sometimes understood as an imposition of continence on all clerics by a few untrained Roman Catholic apologists. But this view is not held by serious scholars on both sides. Peter L'Huillier comments:

The Nicene canon does not mention the legitimate wife among the women who may properly live with a cleric; must we deduce that the fathers of the first ecumenical council wanted to impose celibacy or a separation from their wives on the members of the clergy? Such an interpretation is totally excluded... In fact, the question [of continence] in all probability was not even touched on at Nicea. The anecdote reported by Socrates, taken up again by Sozomen and Gelasius of Cyzicus, about the favorable intervention on behalf of maintaining the ancient marriage discipline for the clergy made by a certain Paphnutius, bishop of the Upper Thebaid, is probably only a legend fabricated in the East at the beginning of the fifth century. It constituted one form of censure in the face of attempts by Rome to impose permanent celibacy on clerics in holy orders. As for canon 33 attributed to the council held in Elvira, today, Grenada, around 306-311, which made a law to this effect, it is part of the group of canons added at a

¹ TCAC, pp. 35-36

² Canon 10

later time. Only the first twenty-one canons were issued by the above mentioned council. Under these conditions, it is certain that the fathers of Nicea had no other intention than to forbid celibate clerics to live with women under suspicious conditions.¹

What really happened at Nicea? Was there an actual bishop Paphnutius whose speech put an end to any temptation to regulate the conjugal life of married clerics?

It is almost certain that the Fathers of Nicea did consider a legislation regulating clerical marriages, as would be expected if Hosius was a supporter of the *lex continentiae*. Yet, no such canons were passed, which confirms the widely held view that such a project was abandoned by the Council. Socrates the Historian (c. †450) is worth quoting in full on this matter:

Paphnutius was bishop of one of the cities in Upper Thebes: he was a man so favored divinely that extraordinary miracles were done by him. In the time of the persecution he had been deprived of one of his eyes... I shall now explain another thing which came to pass in consequence of his advice, both for the good of the Church and the honor of the clergy. It seemed fit to the bishops to introduce a new law into the Church, that those who were in holy orders, I speak of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, should have no conjugal intercourse with the wives whom they had married while still laymen. Now when discussion on this matter was impending, Paphnutius having arisen in the midst of the assembly of bishops, earnestly entreated them not to impose so heavy a yoke on the ministers of religion: asserting that 'marriage itself is honorable, and the bed undefiled'; Hebrews 13:4 urging before God that they ought not to injure the Church by too stringent restrictions. 'For all men,' said he, 'cannot bear the practice of rigid continence; neither perhaps would the chastity of the wife of each be preserved:' and he termed the intercourse of a man with his lawful wife chastity... And these sentiments he expressed, although himself without experience of marriage, and, to speak plainly, without ever having known a woman: for from a boy he had been brought up in a monastery, and was specially renowned above all men for his chastity. The whole assembly of the clergy assented to the reasoning of Paphnutius: wherefore they silenced all further debate on this point, leaving it to the discretion of those who were husbands to exercise abstinence if they so wished in reference to their wives.²

This statement would seem to settle the matter now as it did then, if it was not for the fact that the Paphnutius story is now under suspicion of being a legend invented by Socrates himself, and repeated on his authority

¹ TCAC, pp. 35-36

² *Church History*, Book I, chapter 11

by subsequent Church historians. The popular online edition of the 1910 *Catholic Encyclopedia* now contains a rare Editor's note:

Editor's note: More recent scholarship has strengthened the case for the legendary character of the Paphnutius story, and its possible origin in Novatianist circles. According to Winkelmann (1968), Stickler (1970) and Heid (1997), it seems unlikely that this Paphnutius ever attended the council, much less made the speech attributed to him. See Christian Cochini, *The apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy* and Stefan Heid, *Celibacy in the Early Church*.

On the Eastern Orthodox side, we have seen that such an eminent authority as Archbishop Peter L'Huillier considers the story "probably only a legend fabricated in the East at the beginning of the fifth century." It should be admitted, though, that the reasons for rejecting the 'Paphnutius intervention' are rather weak: the improbability of his presence at the Council, and the suspected sympathy of Socrates for the Novatians who opposed the *lex continentiae*. Yet, Socrates Scholasticus is recognized as a reliable and intellectually honest historian, whose esteem for the Novatians was based on their moral integrity but who remained a faithful member of the catholic Church. The fact the Novatians, a very conservative group who even held to the Quatrodeciman calendar, rejected the *lex continentiae* is in fact a strong argument against its apostolic origin. The word is out, then, on the authenticity of the Paphnutius story, but the discourse ascribed to the holy ascetic is worth listening to with attention and as a reflection of the mind of the Byzantine East.

Years after Nicea, the council of Gangra (c. 325-c. 381) had to reaffirm the dignity of the married presbyterate, obviously because some among the people felt that the Eucharistic offering might be defiled by the bonds of marriage:

Canon 4: If any one shall maintain, concerning a married presbyter, that it is not lawful to partake of the oblation when he offers it, let him be anathema.

The Apostolic Constitutions (c. 390) represent the same spirit:

6. Let not a bishop, a priest, or a deacon cast off his own wife under pretence of piety; but if he does cast her off, let him be suspended. If he go on in it, let him be deprived.

51. If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or indeed any one of the sacerdotal catalogue, abstains from marriage, flesh, and wine, not for his own exercise, but because he abominates these things, forgetting that "all things were very good," Genesis 1:31 and that "God made man male and female," Genesis 1:26 and blasphemously abuses the creation, either let

him reform, or let him be deprived, and be cast out of the Church; and the same for one of the laity.¹

After reviewing this evidence, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1910 concludes that:

[Whether] through imperial influence or not the Council of Trullo, in 692, finally adopted a somewhat stricter view. Celibacy in a bishop became a matter of precept. If he were previously married, he had at once to separate from his wife upon his consecration. On the other hand, this council, while forbidding priests, deacons, and subdeacons to take a wife after ordination, asserts in emphatic terms their right and duty to continue in conjugal relations with the wife to whom they had been wedded previously.²

We now return to the West to consider the legislation of the law of continence, especially in Latin North African. From Tertullian's admiration of the number of those in sacred orders who had embraced continence, we arrive at the previously-mentioned council of Carthage of 390. The "endeavor" to live out the *lex continentiae* was then upheld and solidified by the North African bishops in 419:

Aurelius the bishop said: When at the past council [of 390] the matter on continence and chastity was considered, those three grades, which by a sort of bond are joined to chastity by their consecration, i.e. bishops, presbyters, and deacons, so it seemed that it was becoming that the sacred rulers and priests of God as well as the Levites, or those who served at the divine sacraments, should be continent altogether (*omnibus*), by which they would be able with singleness of heart to ask what they sought from the Lord: so that what the Apostles taught and antiquity kept, that we might also keep.³

The same regulations were issued in Rome and in the West, although it is admitted that neither celibacy nor continence were fully enforced until the Gregorian reforms of the eleventh century.

8. *The mind of St. John Chrysostom*

Because St. John Chrysostom is considered, along with Basil and Gregory, as the expression of the Mind of the East, it behooves us to consider what the great commentator had to say about this subject. In his homily on 1 Corinthians 7, he notes:

Therefore he says... "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." "For if," says he, "you enquire what is the excellent and greatly superior course, it is

¹ Canon XLVII.6

² *Entry: Celibacy of the Clergy*

³ *Code of Canons of the African Church*

better not to have any connection whatever with a woman: but if you ask what is safe and helpful to your own infirmity, be connected by marriage."

But since it was likely, as also happens now, that the husband might be willing but the wife not, or perhaps the reverse, mark how he discusses each case. Some indeed say that this discourse was addressed by him to presbyters. But I, judging from what follows, could not affirm that it was so: since he would not have given his advice in general terms. For if he were writing these things only for the presbyters, he would have said, "It is good for the teacher not to touch a woman." But now he has made it of universal application, saying, "It is good for a man;" not for presbyters only... And in saying, "Because of fornications, let every man have his own wife" by the very cause alleged for the concession he guides men to continence.¹

These comments indicate that some were wondering if the question of celibacy and continence was especially relevant for clergy, but John makes no conclusive comments. His exegesis of 1 Timothy 3 is much more revealing:

"A bishop then," he says, "must be blameless, the husband of one wife." This he does not lay down as a rule, as if he must not be without one, but as prohibiting his having more than one... Why does he say the husband of one wife? Some indeed think that he says this with reference to one who remains free from a wife. But if otherwise, he that has a wife may be as though he had none. (1 Cor. vii. 29.) For that liberty was then properly granted, as suited to the nature of the circumstances then existing. And it is very possible, if a man will, so to regulate his conduct. For as riches make it difficult to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, yet rich men have often entered in, so it is with marriage. But why does he say, speaking of a bishop, that he should be "not given to wine, hospitable," when he should name greater things? Why said he not that he should be an angel, not subject to human passions? Where are those great qualities of which Christ speaks, which even those under their rule ought to possess? Why are not these things required by Paul? Plainly because few could be found of such a character, and there was need of many bishops, that one might preside in every city.

But because the Churches were to be exposed to attacks, he [St. Paul] requires not that superior and highly exalted virtue, but a moderate degree of it; for to be sober, of good behavior, and temperate, were qualities common to many.

This is rightly said, as he was certain to be reproached by them, and for the same reason perhaps he said, "the husband of one wife," though elsewhere he says, "I would that all men were even as I myself!" (1 Cor. vii. 7.), that is, practicing continence. That he may not therefore confine them

¹ *Homily XIX on 1 Corinthians 7*

within too narrow a limit, by requiring an over-strict conversation, he is satisfied to prescribe moderate virtue.¹

This text is consistent with St. Paul and Chrysostom's own views on the superiority of celibacy, the option of temporary abstinence, as well as the honorable state of marital relations, which he calls "moderate virtue." For the great archbishop, St. Paul was realistic and pastorally wise: it was indeed possible for a married bishop to "regulate his conduct" to continence, but it was not required. Commenting on the parallel text of Titus 2,

If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly. Why does he bring forward such a one? To stop the mouths of those heretics, who condemned marriage, showing that it is not an unholy thing in itself, but so far honorable, that a married man might ascend the holy throne...

At no point does Chrysostom suggest that married clerics are bound by a law of continence. His advice, which he insists applies to all, is quite practical and direct:

Wherefore [St. Paul] says, "Defraud not one another, unless it be by consent for a season, that you may give yourselves unto prayer." It is prayer with unusual earnestness which he here means. For if he is forbidding those who have intercourse with one another to pray, how could "pray without ceasing" have any place? It is possible then to live with a wife and yet give heed unto prayer. But by continence prayer is made more perfect. For he did not say merely, "That you may pray;" but, "That you may give yourselves unto it" as though what he speaks of might cause not uncleanness but much occupation... But this I say by way of permission, not of commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself; in a state of continence."

"Howbeit each man has his own gift from God, one after this manner, and another after that." Do you see the strong sense of Paul how he both signifies that continence is better, and yet puts no force on the person who cannot attain to it; fearing lest some offence arise?²

In this, Chrysostom seems like an echo of the words attributed to Paphnutius at Nicea. It should be noted, though, that Palladius the historian reports that the list of charges against Antoninus of Ephesus included "sixth, that after separating from his married wife, he had taken her again, and had had children born to him by her." It seems that in spite of famous examples (such as Gregory Nazianzen's father), it was now expected that bishops would separate from their wife after consecration. It

¹ *Homily X on First Timothy*

² *Homily 19 on 1 Corinthians*

is probably for this reason that Synesius († about 430), when elected bishop of Ptolemais (Egypt), conditioned his ordination to his ability to remain truly married.¹

Antoninus died before John became involved with the affairs, hence no conclusion can be inferred as to his position on this matter, since simony was the only issue that was really dealt with at the subsequent synod.

9. *The Gregorian Reform and beyond*

Historians generally agree that the *lex continentiae omnibus* of the Latin West came under intense criticism as the decay of the Roman Patriarchate reached frightening proportions. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* summarizes:

A terrible picture of the decay both of clerical morality and of all sense of anything like vocation is drawn in the writings of St. Peter Damian, particularly in his "Liber Gomorrhianus." The style, no doubt, is rhetorical and exaggerated, and his authority as an eyewitness does not extend beyond that district of Northern Italy, in which he lived, but we have evidence from other sources that the corruption was widespread... Undoubtedly during this period the traditions of sacerdotal celibacy in Western Christendom suffered severely but even though a large number of the clergy, not only priests but bishops, openly took wives and begot children to whom they transmitted their benefices, the principle of celibacy was never completely surrendered in the official enactments of the Church.

It is under the strong pontificate of Pope Gregory VII (Hilderbrand) that the Latin Church addressed the matter with a firm adoption of life-long celibacy as the best solution for all:

With Pope St. Leo IX, St. Gregory VII (Hildebrand), and their successors, a determined and successful stand was made against the further spread of corruption. For a while in certain districts where effective interference appeared hopeless, it would seem that various synodal enactments allowed the rural clergy to retain the wives to whom they had previously been married. See, for example, the Councils of Lisieux of 1064, Rouen in 1063 and 1072, and Winchester, this last presided over by Lanfranc, in 1076. In all these we may possibly trace the personal influence of William the Conqueror. But despite these concessions, the attitude of Gregory VII remained firm, and the reform which he consolidated has never subsequently been set aside... The point is of importance because the evidence seems to show that in this long struggle the whole of the more

¹ Declaring: "God, the law, and the consecrated hand of Theophilus (bishop of Alexandria), have given me a wife. I say now beforehand, and I protest, that I will neither ever part from her, nor live with her in secret as if in an unlawful connection; for the one is utterly contrary to religion, the other to the laws; but I desire to receive many and good children from her" (Epist. 105 ed. Basil., cited in the original Greek in Gieseler).

high-principled and more learned section of the clergy was enlisted in the cause of celibacy.

The council of Trent, in its *Doctrine on the Sacrament of Orders* (1563) stipulated that although celibacy was not a divine law, the Church had the authority to impose celibacy as a discipline, which is to this day the practical position of both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

The strict standard adopted by the Roman Catholic Church became so identified with the essence of a vocational priesthood that it is almost incompatible with the Eastern tradition. The imposition of celibacy on many Uniate communities, which endures to this day, is a reminder that the idea of a married priesthood is quite intolerable¹ for traditional-minded Roman Catholics, whereas the pressure to abolish the discipline is often promoted as part of a liberal agenda that is at odds with both authentic Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

The mind of the Roman Catholic magisterium on priestly celibacy today was recently reemphasized in 1992 the synodal document *Pastores dabo vobis*, where Pope John Paul II affirmed that “the Synod does not wish to leave any doubts in the mind of anyone regarding the Church’s firm will to maintain the law that demands perpetual and freely chosen celibacy for present and future candidates for priestly ordination in the Latin rite.”

10. Summary

However contrary this may be to the modern mind, Fr. Ryland has a point: a married clergy can be seen as “compromise,” a ‘lower ideal.’ This unpopular affirmation is simply based on the scriptural model of service and dedication. St. Paul viewed the married state as a holy icon of Christ and His Church², but also as “a concession³,” or what St. John Chrysostom calls “moderate virtue.” It must be recognized with the Apostle that not all have received the gift of celibacy or continence which certainly opens the door for undivided service to the Kingdom. At the same time, there is a safe harbor in the holy and undefiled marriage bed that is well understood,

¹ In an EWTN interview hosted by Dn. Bill Steltemeier on the subject of celibacy, the guest (a Roman Catholic priest) actually stated that ‘a married priesthood is equivalent to bigamy’.

² Ephesians 5:22-33

³ “This I say by way of concession, however, not as a command. Indeed, I wish everyone to be as I am, but each has a particular gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.” (1 Corinthians 7:6-7)

especially in today's world. The disciplinary practice of East and West have borne the fruits that can be expected from both disciplines, some glorious, some more problematic.

The Church has always seen in dedicated virginity a living icon of the age to come, a radiant witness to radical discipleship to our Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly, celibate vocations, for those who have received this gift, should be fostered, and those who embrace this vocation should live in a context that is helpful and supportive. The trouble with the Latin model of the vocational priesthood is that it presupposes that the highest forms of service in the Church are now reserved to those who have also received the gift of celibacy. There are many gifted preachers who found themselves discouraged from entering the Roman Catholic Communion because ministerial service is reserved to the celibate caste.

The restoration of the permanent diaconate¹ in the wake of Vatican II – without requirements of marital continence – has addressed this problem with significant success. It seems quite obvious, though, that in post-Vatican II liturgics, 'proximity to the altar' is granted to just about anyone, so that the Levitical model endorsed by the councils of Carthage is in fact abandoned, along with the Temple worship paradigm of the *Novus Ordo*. The Eastern discipline of the altar, which includes Levitical continence on the day prior to serving the Divine Liturgy² – seems consistent with the ancient spirit of the ancient Eastern Christianity.

It is to be hoped that the Spirit will guide our Churches to what is closest to "the Mind of Christ."

VI. THE REALITY OF DIVORCE

1. Dealing with reality and the Word of God

It is well-known that Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox deal with the issue of 'failed marriages' quite differently. Both traditions affirm the indissoluble character of this sacrament and yet both have to address the pastoral reality of divorce and remarriage. In 1993, three prominent German bishops (RC) issued a joint pastoral letter which stated:

¹ Roman Catholic married deacons are able to do many things that priests do (counseling, baptisms, weddings, preaching), except for offering the Eucharist and granting sacramental absolution.

² And permanent continence for the bishop who is seen as a parallel to the ancient High Priest.

The church cannot assume the right to disregard the word of Jesus regarding the indissolubility of marriage,” the bishops wrote, “but equally it cannot shut its eyes to the failure of many marriages. For wherever people fall short of the reality of redemption, Jesus meets them in mercy with understanding for their situation.

Indeed, a study conducted in the United States in 1999 revealed that:

Twenty one percent of adult American Catholics have experienced a divorce. This is equal to the rate experienced by Lutherans, Atheists and Agnostics. It is lower than mainline Protestants at 25%, much lower than Baptists at 29%, and a great deal lower than non-denominational Protestants at 34%.¹

These tragic statistics have made the handling of such cases extremely difficult. Strict observance of the gospel teachings would call for a complete ban on all possibilities of divorce and remarriage except² for immorality. Even then, only the innocent party should be allowed to receive the blessing of the Church for a second marriage.

The sad reality is that both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy generally fail to impose meaningful penances for adultery, so that it would be ‘easy’ to cause the destruction of one’s own marriage through immorality and after a short time of ‘penance,’ to enter into a new ‘marriage’ and retain communicant status in the Church. But in point of fact, the Roman Catholic interpretation of Scriptures does not allow for any grounds for divorce apart from ‘unlawfulness.’

The key texts are Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:9:

I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (except for cause of fornication³) and marries another commits adultery.

Roman Catholic translations have quite a different rendition:

I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery. (NAB)

Commenting on Matthew 5, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops explains:

The Old Testament commandment that a bill of divorce be given to the woman assumes the legitimacy of divorce itself. It is this that Jesus denies. (Unless the marriage is unlawful): this “exceptive clause,” as it is often called, occurs also in Matthew 19:9, where the Greek is slightly different.

¹ Source could not be confirmed

² See below

³ Greek: *parektos loyou porneias*

There are other sayings of Jesus about divorce that prohibit it absolutely (see Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; cf 1 Cor 7:10, 11b), and most scholars agree that they represent the stand of Jesus. Matthew's "exceptive clauses" are understood by some as a modification of the absolute prohibition. It seems, however, that the unlawfulness that Matthew gives as a reason why a marriage must be broken refers to a situation peculiar to his community: the violation of Mosaic law forbidding marriage between persons of certain blood and/or legal relationship (Lev 18:6-18). Marriages of that sort were regarded as incest (*porneia*), but some rabbis allowed Gentile converts to Judaism who had contracted such marriages to remain in them. Matthew's "exceptive clause" is against such permissiveness for Gentile converts to Christianity; cf the similar prohibition of *porneia* in Acts 15:20, 29. In this interpretation, the clause constitutes no exception to the absolute prohibition of divorce when the marriage is lawful.

Without discussing the merits of this translation-interpretation, we can see that this approach leads to a different approach: What degrees of family relationship are acceptable? If a marriage is found to be "unlawful" (for whatever reasons), does it not mean that it never was a marriage in the first place? The Roman Catholic approach also stresses the oath (*sacramentum*) or contractual aspect of matrimony, which means that apart from kinship, consent is the determining factor in determining the "lawfulness" of this agreement. Thus, the validity or lack thereof of a given sacramental act is the crucial criterion. If the sacramental marriage was performed validly and lawfully, the bond cannot cease to exist until one of the spouses dies. As long as there are no grounds to suggest that a marriage was invalid, the Roman Catholic Church would say with St. Jerome:

A husband may be an adulterer or a sodomite, he may be stained with every crime and may have been left by his wife because of his sins, yet he is still her husband, and, so long as he lives, she may not marry another.¹

Conversely, a couple may have lived together for many years after a liturgical marriage and raised several children, but if it should be proven that there was some impediment to the validity of their marriage in the first place, it will be declared that the (sacramental) marriage never existed.

Hence, the concept of annulment² (the marriage was not lawful and never existed) became the Latin model to deal with conjugal problems.

¹ Letter 55:3

² "A decree of nullity, commonly called an annulment, is a decision concerning a specific marital relationship, stating that this union was not a marriage according to the teachings of the Catholic Church." (Diocese of Arlington)

2. Annulments

Based on the above considerations, it could be stated, without much exaggeration, that the essential aspect of the marriage contract in Roman Catholic theology is the illegality (and sinfulness) or entering into such a contract with anyone else. Hence, the *Code of Canon Law* of 1983 declares:

(1) Marriage is brought about through the consent of the parties, legitimately manifested between persons who are capable according to law of giving consent; no human power can replace this consent.¹

In a sense, this approach does uphold the indissolubility of the marriage bond, yet at the risk of ‘divorcing’ sacramental reality and real life.



Historically, the problem of divorce was never widespread and affected only the ruling class. In the West, the arbitrary rule of five degrees of relationship made it very difficult to enter into a “lawful” marriage with anyone, a situation that also made it easier to obtain annulments when needed.

In today’s context, consent is the weak spot of the marital contract and an open door to obtain a fast-track annulment, especially if both parties find it convenient to agree that their consent was defective. In a section entitled “*What are some possible grounds for annulment?*” the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arlington admits that the reasons to seek an annulment are rather broad:

Among the signs that might indicate reasons to investigate for an annulment are: marriage that excluded at the time of the wedding the right to children, or to a permanent marriage, or to an exclusive commitment. In addition, there are youthful marriages; marriages of very short duration; marriages marked by serious emotional, physical, or substance abuse; deviant sexual practices; profound and consistent irresponsibility and lack of commitment; conditional consent to a marriage; fraud or deceit to elicit spousal consent; serious mental illness; or a previous bond of marriage.

Hence, annulments are granted on the basis of a juridical process which seems to reduce marriage itself to the state of a legal status potentially disconnected from reality. Yet, it is important to stress that Roman Catholic authorities always stress that ‘an annulment is not a divorce’ and

¹ Canon 1057

that 'no one has the right to an annulment.' In spite of this, the statistics are concerning:

The United States is especially noted for the number of annulments its church tribunals issue. In 1968, 338 annulments were granted in the United States — today the figure is around 40,000, approximately 70 percent of the total worldwide. More than 80 percent of U.S. requests for annulments are approved (in Italy, by way of comparison, only 37 percent are granted). Nevertheless, even in the United States the number of annulments falls far short of the number of Catholic divorces, meaning that most divorced people never attempt the process.¹

The intention to uphold the indissolubility of marriage can certainly be praised, but there are also serious problems both with the interpretation of the biblical data and with the historical implementation of this approach. Let us now discuss the Eastern Orthodox approach of this difficult issue.

3. *The Orthodox approach*

There is no doubt that the Eastern Orthodox approach is, typically, less legalistic and more pastoral. Nevertheless, the possibility of obtaining a second or third marriage on grounds other than *porneia* raises the question of faithfulness to the specifics of the commandments of Christ. Many Roman Catholic writers decry this more 'pastoral' approach as implying that marriage is "dissoluble at will." Jesuit scholar G. H. Joyce gave a conservative Roman Catholic appraisal of the Orthodox practice:

It is completely plain that in the Greek Orthodox Church, marriage has completely lost that character of indissolubility which, according to our Lord's express teaching, belongs to it by divine law... To all intents and purposes it is dissoluble at will. We have here a signal that unless the law of indissolubility is maintained in all its strictness, it will be swept away altogether.²

On the Orthodox side, William Zion comments:

Joyce, writing before the days of Roman Catholic ecumenism, suggests that the very nature of the Greek schism lay in this abandonment of the norms of Christ for the laws of emperors. For Joyce, it is a simple case of the popes standing for Christ's position on divorce and the Eastern Church surrendering to secular and ultimately pagan norms.

The details of how the Orthodox tradition approaches the subject can be found in the legislation of Justinian, in the canons of the councils *In Trullo* and that of Constantinople held in 920. These sources allow a

¹ National Catholic Reporter, Oct 29, 1999 by John L. Jr. Allen

² *Christian Marriage*, G. W. Joyce, Sheed and Ward, New York, 1933, p. 375

subsequent marriage to someone who has divorced his previous spouse for what is considered a legitimate reason.

This is where Eastern Orthodoxy admits the tension between the Gospel and its pastoral practice. Hence, the Synod of the Russian Orthodox can declare in an official document:

The Church insists that spouses should remain faithful for life and that Orthodox marriage is indissoluble on the basis of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ... The Lord pointed to adultery as the only permissible ground for divorce, for it defiles the sanctity of marriage and breaks the bond of matrimonial faithfulness...

The Byzantine laws, which were established by Christian emperors and met with no objection of the Church, admitted of various grounds for divorce. In the Russian Empire, the dissolution of lawful marriages was effected in the ecclesiastical court.

In 1918, in its Decision on the Grounds for the Dissolution of the Marriage Sanctified by the Church, the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, recognised as valid, besides adultery and a new marriage of one of the party, such grounds as a spouse's falling away from Orthodoxy, perversion, impotence which had set in before marriage or was self-inflicted, contraction of leprosy or syphilis, prolonged disappearance, conviction with disfranchisement, encroachment on the life or health of the spouse, love affair with a daughter in law, profiting from marriage, profiting by the spouse's indecencies, incurable mental disease and malevolent abandonment of the spouse. At present, added to this list of the grounds for divorce are chronic alcoholism or drug-addiction and abortion without the husband's consent.

For the spiritual education of those contracting a marriage and consolidation of marital bonds, the clergy are urged before celebrating a Marriage to explain in detail to the bridegroom and bride that a marital union concluded in church is indissoluble. They should emphasize that divorce as the last resort can be sought only if spouses committed actions defined by the Church as causes for divorce. Consent to the dissolution of a marriage cannot be given to satisfy a whim or to «confirm» a common-law divorce. However, if a divorce is an accomplished fact, especially when spouses live separately, the restoration of the family is considered impossible and a church divorce may be given if the pastor deigns to concede the request. The Church does not at all approve of a second marriage. Nevertheless, according to the canon law, after a legitimate church divorce, a second marriage is allowed to the innocent spouse. Those whose first marriage was dissolved through their own fault a second marriage is allowed only after repentance and penance imposed in accordance with the canons.¹

¹ *The Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*

In this important statement, the bishops frankly discussed the Gospel principle in the light of the tragic need to recognize the practical dissolution of the marriage bond. Yet, one can only wonder how a shift can be made from “except for reason of *porneia*” to “contraction of leprosy or syphilis, prolonged disappearance, conviction with disfranchisement, etc.”

Because the Eastern tradition recognizes that this situation is evil (as war is evil, yet sometimes unavoidable), strict canonical penalties are imposed on those who claim that a second marriage is ultimately a lesser of two evils and a necessity for their salvation. The most visible penalty is that the liturgical rite for a second marriage is a very penitential, not joyful event.

The Orthodox discipline is strongly connected with the canons of St. Basil the Great who specified long periods of excommunication (typically six years) for men who had remarried after a divorce, and considered this second marriage to be adultery. Yet, the remedy for this situation was penance, not the requirement that the man return to his previous spouse or remain altogether continent. Moreover, St. Basil could write that this procedure had been “ruled and regulated by our Fathers,” indicating that he was only making explicit an established practice.

Furthermore, canon 8 of the Council of Nicea specified that the Novatians desiring to reintegrate the catholic Church would have to agree to hold communion with those who have been “married a second time.” The discipline of the Novatians indicates that these *digamoi* must have been those remarried while their first spouse was still alive.

Fr. Schmemmann tried to demonstrate how the Orthodox practice can be placed in the wider context of theology and ecclesiology.

On the one hand, the Orthodox Church explicitly affirms the indissolubility of marriage; yet, on the other hand, she seems to accept divorce and has in her canonical tradition several regulations concerning it. How can these apparently contradictory positions be reconciled? Is it an uneasy compromise between the maximalism of theory and the minimalism of practice, the famous “economy” which the Orthodox seem to invoke so often in order to solve all kinds of difficulties?

[This] is not a compromise but the antinomy of the Church's life in this world. The marriage *is* indissoluble, yet it is being dissolved all the time by sin or ignorance, passion and selfishness, lack of faith and lack of love. Yes, the Church acknowledges the divorcer, but she *does not divorce*. She only acknowledges that here, in this concrete situation, this marriage has been

broken, has come to an end, and in her compassion she gives permission to the innocent party to marry again¹. It is sufficient, however, to study only once the text of the rite of the second marriage to realize immediately the radical difference of its whole “ethos.” It is indeed a penitential service, it is intercession, it is love, but nothing of the glory and joy of that which has been broken remain.²

We can perhaps see a parallel in the early Church’s agony over whether or not to reconcile those who, after baptism, had fallen into grave sins: apostasy, fornication, or murder. Those who held to a strict understanding of baptism could claim Hebrews 6:4-6 as their scriptural authority. As we know, the Churches of East and West provided for a severe yet ultimately merciful canonical mechanism for reconciliation even in such cases. For this reason, many Orthodox also express concern at Latin system of annulments: “Rome simply denies the reality of the first marriage and the sin that brought about its demise”³. Another concern is that the Roman Catholic approach of marriage is comparable to the Evangelical doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” Believing that salvation is granted once and for all to those who confess their belief in Jesus Christ, they explain (away) apostasy as evidence that the apostate never truly believed in the first place. But this was not the approach of the early Church who acknowledged that sin could break what is unbreakable: the union of husband and wife and union of Christ and the believer.

In modern times, the period of penance resulting from a failed marriage may be much shorter than the six years of the canons. It is the bishop’s responsibility to determine what length of penance is most appropriate. For example, Bishop Tikhon of San Francisco (EO⁴) communicated the following instructions to his clergy:

In an Orthodox marriage, God Himself is the Agent of the marriage: “What GOD hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”

The Orthodox person who effects a divorce sins thereby, except in the cases outlined in the Scriptures and Canons, for example, in a case of adultery, or the taking of monastic vows by husband and wife when the husband is elected to the episcopate.

In an Orthodox marriage, it is only the husband or wife who are agents of a divorce, and the Church does not divorce anyone...

¹ This is a bit of wishful thinking on Fr. Alexander’s part, as we have read in the official declaration of the Russian Orthodox Church.

² *Zion*, p. 223. Italics in the original.

³ *Zion*, p. 226

⁴ Retired in 2006

The first, main, and the primary purpose of marriage is the salvation of the persons being married¹. And the basis of a second marriage, whether of a divorced person or a widowed one, is the same, but it is based on the apostolic injunction, "Better to marry than to burn."

PROCEDURES:

Based on the above premises:

The person coming to the parish priest petitioning for the blessing of a second marriage must attest to the following:

He or she has exhausted, by his or her own persistent and untiring efforts, all means of reconciliation with the spouse God gave him or her, and that spouse has, in spite of his or her protestations and representations and efforts at reconciliation, sued for divorce and obtained it.

He or she has repented of the sin of divorce, and this was an involuntary sin, except in cases having a scriptural or canonical basis, where it may be, but not necessarily, a voluntary sin, based on a refusal to forgive.

He or she has lived some time in this divorced state and now fears for his or her own salvation if he or she does not marry the person whom he or she now intends to marry.

Hence, both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy have been forced to deal with the tragic reality of divorce in ways that are less than satisfactory for those who have the ideal of a greater faithfulness to the letter and spirit of the Lord's commandment.

4. A final note

The issue of divorce vs. annulment does not frequently come up in Eastern Orthodox - Roman Catholic dialogue because both sides are aware that their system is imperfect, often abused, and vulnerable to criticism.

Perhaps it is the desire not to cast out anyone – even the most sinful and lukewarm – that has led our Churches to sometimes lax and problematic pastoral solutions. Confronting this situation with love and integrity may also be a call to a theological *metanoia*: our Lord is not a weak savior who endlessly knocks on the door of our hearts and begs for our love. The voice of the prophets is needed today as much as ever: let us repent! The question is not only "what will I do with Jesus Christ," it is first and foremost "what will the Lord do with us." Divorces and annulments – fraudulent or legitimate – will always be the tragic reality of

¹ This sentence was capitalized in the original.

our fallen world, but may we never transform God's mercy into an unjustifiable validation of adultery.

VII. THE BIRTH CONTROL ISSUE

1. *Rome: From Augustine to NFP*

The authoritative yet admittedly non-infallible¹ Roman Catholic teaching on the question of birth control is found in Paul VI's celebrated and controversial encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (On Human Life, 1968). The document is very clear:

We must once again declare that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun, and, above all, directly willed and procured abortion, even if for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as licit means of regulating birth. Equally to be excluded, as the teaching authority of the Church has frequently declared, is direct sterilization, whether perpetual or temporary, whether of the man or of the woman. Similarly excluded is every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible.

In practice, the Roman Catholic Church endorses only one method of 'birth limitation' called NFP (Natural Family Planning). This is a fairly new development: most scholars agree that the Latin tradition has seen a significant evolution of its teaching on marital sexuality. Indeed, some have argued that the Papal sanction of NFP is, in itself, a clear departure from the old Augustinian position that:

Indeed when that natural practice slips beyond the bounds of the marriage contract, that is, beyond what is needed for procreation, with a wife it is a venial sin, but with a mistress it is a mortal sin. [...] Sexual union that is necessary for the purpose of having children is blameless, and it alone is part of marriage. If it goes beyond that necessity, it is no longer ruled by reason but by sensuality. Nevertheless, it is proper for married persons to accord this to their spouses, so that the spouses will not commit a mortal sin of adultery, though it is not proper to require it for themselves.²

¹ See our discussion of Infallibility in the present study which refers to an article by Fr. Brian Harrison published in *Living Tradition* (accessed at <http://www.rtforum.org/lt/lt43.html>)

² *The Excellence of Marriage*

Many reasons have been suggested to explain Augustine's bleak view of marital intercourse, but it is clear that the bishop of Hippo would not have been an endorser of NFP.

At this point, it is important to notice that the most authoritative Vatican teaching on birth control prior to *Humanae Vitae* was *Casti Connubii* (1930) by Pope Pius XI. In this encyclical, the pope quotes St. Augustine's treatise with approval but stops short of adopting his conclusion that 'marital relations are sinful if the intent is not procreation.'

Most Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox are made uncomfortable by the fact that Augustine was not the only Father who held to such a view:

To have marital relations other than to procreate children is to do injury to nature. (Clement of Alexandria: *The Instructor of Children*, 2:10:95:3)

Does he imagine that we approve of any sexual intercourse except for the procreation of children? (Jerome: *Against Jovinian*, 1:19).

[About the Gnostics] They exercise genital acts, yet prevent the conceiving of children. Not in order to produce offspring, but to satisfy lust, are they eager for corruption. (Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 26.5.2)

We have already encountered the view of Jerome and Epiphanius in our discussion of clerical continence, but the fact that Clement expresses this view is significant.¹

Commenting on St. Ambrose's opinions, Uta Ranke-Heinemann writes (RC):

Ambrose doesn't say that marriage should be fled like a sin, but avoided like a burden (On Widows 13, 81). In connection with I Corinthians Ambrose does mention the therapeutic nature of marriage: "In saying that it was better to marry than to burn, the Apostle was evidently recommending marriage as a remedy for protecting all those who would otherwise be endangered" (On Widows 2, 12). But the actual purpose of marriage, according to Ambrose, is procreation. Hence he vehemently condemns intercourse with pregnant women... Ambrose likewise forbids intercourse among older couples²: "Every thing has its time . . . Thus certain times have been assigned to marriage too, at which the generation of children is fitting. So long as the vigor of youth continues, so long as

¹ Also Justin Martyr, although in more general terms: "From the first we have either entered marriage with the sole purpose of raising children, or we have renounced getting married and remain wholly continent." (*Apology*, 29)

² Ambrose's suggestion that older (or infertile) couples should cease from having marital relations seems hard to reconcile with the story of Abraham and Sarah or Zachariah and Elizabeth

there is hope for the blessing of children the desire for commerce between the sexes is permissible. But for older spouses, age itself draws the boundaries for performing the works of marriage, and the suspicion of incontinence, which is and deserves to be a source of shame, bids them cease from the act. Even young spouses usually cite the desire for children as their justification, thinking that in this way they can make excuses for the fire of their youth with the wish for offspring. How much more ignominious would it be for older people to engage in an act that even young ones are embarrassed about admitting. Still more, even young married persons who mortify their heart in abnegation from the fear of God, often renounce those works of youth as soon as they have conceived.”¹

St. Jerome had an even more negative perspective on marriage. Hence, his ‘words of consolation’ for married women seem altogether aberrant:

I do not deny that holy women are to be found among the wives, but only when they have stopped being mates, when they imitate virginal chastity even in the constraining position that the married state brings with it.²

Most Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologians would substantially agree with Ranke-Heinemann’s conclusion that:

As theology increasingly became the business of bachelors, sin was more and more placed in the realm of sex. With the growth of its sexual neurosis, with its commitment to making lay people into monks, Christianity distanced itself from its Jewish roots in the Old Testament and from Jewish life in general. Virginal Christianity condemned carnal Judaism...

Hence, Pope Pius XI was not entirely amiss when he invoked an “uninterrupted Christian tradition” on this issue. In his discussion of the traditional understanding of Christian morality, Eastern Orthodox ethicist Fr. Stanley Harakas admits that:

The Orthodox Church remains faithful to the biblical and traditional norms regarding premarital sexual relations between men and women. The only appropriate and morally fitting place for the exercise of sexual relations, according to the teachings of the Church, is marriage. The moral teaching of the Church on this matter has been unchanging since its foundation...

The possible exception to the above affirmation of continuity of teaching is the view of the Orthodox Church on the issue of contraception. Because of the lack of a full understanding of the implications of the biology of reproduction, earlier writers tended to identify abortion with contraception. However, of late a new view has taken hold among Orthodox writers and thinkers on this topic, which permits the use of

¹ *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 1, 43

² *Against Helvidius*, 21

certain contraceptive practices within marriage for the purpose of spacing children, enhancing the expression of marital love, and protecting health...

Roman Catholics often quote this honest statement to prove that Eastern Orthodoxy has 'caved in with the Protestants' on the issue of marital sexuality and birth control. Yet, we find that to an extent, a similar evolution has occurred in Roman Catholic theology, not to mention in actual practice.

Carey J. Winters (RC) is among those who acknowledge and bemoan the changing teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on this matter:

The traditional Church," writes Dr. Rama Coomaraswamy, "taught *de fide* that: 'The primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of offspring, while its secondary purposes are mutual help and the allaying ... of concupiscence. The latter are entirely subordinate to the former.'" ("The Problem with the Other Sacraments). This, he explains, was so declared by the Holy Office with the approval of Pius XII (AAS 36, 1944, 103). As long as the Church's teaching on the ends of marriage remained intact, NFP, with its clear contraceptive intent, would remain, at best, suspect. To inject natural contraception into the loyal Catholic family, it therefore became necessary to change the Church's *de fide* teaching.

It will be observed in the ensuing discussion that the shift away from procreation as the primary end of marriage directly parallels the dramatic rise in conciliar church approval of natural contraception. In the space of a few decades, barrier-free but intentionally contraceptive behavior shed its centuries-old stigma of mortal sin and became something tantamount to a required virtue.

Until recently, the Roman Catholic Church insisted that couples should have "grave reasons" to use NFP but in the frank words of Fr. Richard Hogan, "The [Roman Catholic] Church has relaxed the "serious reason" language as a prerequisite for the use of NFP.

This places us in an awkward and potentially dangerous position: we loudly proclaim our faithfulness to the Fathers and yet, both Churches have eventually chosen to ignore the teachings of some of them on marriage and sexuality. It is important to note, however, that there are other voices that help us discern the broader consent of the Fathers. For instance, St. John Chrysostom wrote:

It was for two reasons that marriage was introduced so that (1) we may live in chastity [*sophrosyne*] and (2) so that we might become parents. Of

these the most important reason is chastity (...) especially today when the whole inhabited world [*he oikoumene*] is full of our race.¹

This is the view that has ultimately prevailed in both Church communions. It does not mean that we should casually ignore the more rigorous teachings of the other Fathers. They remain a call to self-examination and to what may very well be the higher path.

2. *Marriage and the Mind of God*

To most modern Christians, it seems obvious that the limited or negative view of marriage expressed by some of the Fathers is at odds with the testimony of Scripture. Yet, the Scriptural paradigm cannot be taken for granted and a brief ‘bullet point’ review is in order.

(1a) The biological purpose of marriage is the procreation of children...

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it...”²

(1b) ... But personal wholeness (*sophrosyne*) is equally essential.

And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”³

(2) Fertility is a reward, not a disease:

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is His reward.⁴

¹ Quoted in *For the Health of Body and Soul: An Eastern Orthodox Introduction to Bioethics* by Stanley S. Harakas. However, St. John Chrysostom strongly criticizes those who use potions and incantations or other means to avoid having children. He writes: “Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit? Where there are medicines of sterility? Where there is murder before birth? What is a curse, do you seek as though it were a blessing? In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife.” (*Homily 24 on Romans*). Also, “all men know that they who are under the power of this disease [the sin of covetousness] are wearied even of their father’s old age [wishing him to die so they can inherit]; and that which is sweet, and universally desirable, the having of children, they esteem grievous and unwelcome. Many at least with this view have even paid money to be childless, and have mutilated nature, not only killing the newborn, but even acting to prevent their beginning to live.” (*Homilies on Matthew*, 28:5)

² Genesis 1.27-28a

³ Genesis 2:18

⁴ Psalms 127:3

(3) Since not all are called or able to remain celibate, marriage is the proper context for the expression of sexuality, without sin or guilt:

It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. ... For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.¹

(4) Marital intimacy is blessed and blameless:

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love.²

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed (is) undefiled...³

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife...⁴

(5) Marriage is a holy mystery, indeed a sacramental reality that portrays the unity of Christ with his bride the Church:

Therefore, my brethren, you (Christians) also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to Him (Jesus Christ) who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.⁵

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.⁶

(6) Married couples should not abstain from this gift without good cause and consent because physical dissatisfaction may lead to adultery:

Because of cases of immorality every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his duty toward his wife, and likewise the wife toward her husband... Do not deprive each other, except perhaps by mutual consent for a time, to be free for prayer, but then return to one another, so that Satan may not tempt you through your lack of self-control. This I say by way of concession, however, not as a command. Indeed, I wish everyone to be as I am, but each has a particular gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.⁷

St. Paul is right: there is no doubt that sexuality is a vital, powerful and potentially destructive force. One only has to consider the contents of

¹ 1 Corinthians 7:1,2,9

² Proverbs 5:18-19

³ Hebrews 13.4a

⁴ 1 Timothy 3:2

⁵ Romans 7:4

⁶ Ephesians 5:31-32

⁷ 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

popular magazines, television programs and the Internet to realize that evil spirits will never stop using this natural yet fallen instinct for the destruction of the Good. Even within marriage, there is always a risk of distortion: selfishness and lust can easily replace holy and self-giving love. Christians must therefore be on their guard and contend to “keep the marriage bed undefiled.”

3. *Eastern Orthodoxy: Dangers in the grey zone*

We have seen that the Roman Catholic teaching on marital sexuality has evolved from its extreme Augustinian roots but remains clear on one point: no artificial birth control. Within Eastern Orthodoxy, the evolution has been surprisingly symmetrical, with a large number of clergy and laity advocating a strict rejection of all forms of birth control (except abstinence). It should be noted, however, that most Orthodox Churches tolerate a wider range of birth-control options, as long as three conditions are met:

(1) The method is non-abortive

The constant and universal teaching of Orthodoxy and Catholicism is that abortion is murder:

XII. 2. Since the ancient time the Church has viewed deliberate abortion as a grave sin. The canons equate abortion with murder. This assessment is based on the conviction that the conception of a human being is a gift of God. Therefore, from the moment of conception any encroachment on the life of a future human being is criminal.¹

With this “dividing line” in mind, the official statement of the Russian Synod goes on to address the problem of contraception:

XII. 3(a). Among the problems which need a religious and moral assessment is that of contraception. Some contraceptives have an abortive effect, interrupting artificially the life of the embryo on the very first stages of his life. Therefore, the same judgments are applicable to the use of them as to abortion. But other means, which do not involve interrupting an already conceived life, cannot be equated with abortion in the least.

(2) The motive must be responsibility, not selfishness:

XII. 3(b). In defining their attitude to the non-abortive contraceptives, Christian spouses should remember that human reproduction is one of the principal purposes of the divinely established marital union (see, X. 4). The deliberate refusal of childbirth on egoistic grounds devalues marriage and is a definite sin.

¹ *Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*, XII-2, (2000)

(3) A blessing should be obtained from one's spiritual father:

XII. 3(b). One of the ways to be responsible for their birth is to restrain themselves from sexual relations for a time. However, Christian spouses should remember the words of St. Paul addressed to them: «Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time...» (1 Cor. 7:5). Clearly, spouses should make such decisions mutually on the counsel of their spiritual father. The latter should take into account, with pastoral prudence, the concrete living conditions of the couple, their age, health, degree of spiritual maturity and many other circumstances. In doing so, he should distinguish those who can hold the high demands of continence from those to whom it is not given (Mt. 19:11), taking care above all of the preservation and consolidation of the family.

In summary, the only difference of teaching between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy lies in the possible use of non-abortive methods of birth control, such as barrier methods.

It should be clear, however, that the greater part of the Orthodox Communion has indeed modified its older stance on the overall issue of birth-control. A striking illustration of this phenomenon can be seen in the successive revisions of *The Orthodox Church* by Timothy (Bishop Kallistos) Ware, a widely-cited and authoritative source on Eastern Orthodoxy. In his 1963 edition, the author wrote:

Artificial methods of birth control are forbidden in the Orthodox Church.¹

However, the revised 1984 version was amended to read:

The use of contraceptives and other devices for birth control is on the whole strongly discouraged in the Orthodox Church. Some bishops and theologians altogether condemn the employment of such methods. Others, however, have recently begun to adopt a less strict position, and urge that the question is best left to the discretion of each individual couple, in consultation with the spiritual father.

Finally, the 1993 version declares:

Concerning contraceptives and other forms of birth control, differing opinions exist within the Orthodox Church. In the past birth control was in general strongly condemned, but today a less strict view is coming to prevail, not only in the west but in traditional Orthodox countries. Many Orthodox theologians and spiritual fathers consider that the responsible use of contraception within marriage is not in itself sinful. In their view, the question of how many children a couple should have, and at what intervals, is best decided by the partners themselves, according to the guidance of their own consciences.

¹ TOC (1963), p. 302

As long as the term contraception means ‘non-abortive’ methods of birth-control, this statement is accurate. Yet, this does not mean that Eastern Orthodoxy disagrees with the spirit of *Humanae Vitae*: in 1968, Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople had sent the following message to Pope Paul VI:

We assure you that we remain close to you, above all in these recent days when you have taken the good step of publishing the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. We are in total agreement with you, and wish you all God’s help to continue your mission in the world.¹

Hence, the common ground is that only NFP can be approved. In addition to NFP and for pastoral reasons, most Orthodox Churches do not condemn non-abortive methods of birth control. Indeed, even a recent Vatican-issued letter of instructions to confessors seems to acknowledge the existence of this pastoral grey zone: natural methods are endorsed while potentially abortive methods are singled out as “a specific and more serious moral evil.”²

Both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism are faced with a pastoral crisis of immense proportions, especially in a Westernized world that has totally embraced a ‘contraceptive-abortive mentality’ which is part of the wider ‘culture of death’ denounced by Pope John Paul II. In this context, the pro-life response of our leaders has been unequivocal and courageous.³ Roman Catholics often deplore the existence of a dangerous ‘grey zone’ in the current guidelines of the Orthodox Church to its faithful, and this needs to be taken seriously. The prevailing concern within Orthodoxy is the struggle with abortion (rampant in Russia – as well as Poland), including abortive methods of birth control. This being said, there is great need to remind the faithful that most birth control pills are in fact abortive and therefore unacceptable.⁴



While no official numbers can be quoted, it appears that NFP is in fact more popular among Eastern Orthodox than among Roman Catholics:

¹ Source: *Towards the Healing of Schism*, E.J. Stormon (1987), p. 197. As similar endorsement was expressed by the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece, among others.

² *Vademecum for Confessors*, Pontifical Council for the Family, 2.5

³ I especially have in mind the ministry of Metropolitan Herman of the Orthodox Church of America.

⁴ See, for instance: <http://www.epm.org/articles/bcp5400.html>

“How many Catholics practice NFP?” My answer for the last decade has been, “About three percent.”¹

In 1995, the percentage of Catholics using contraception was higher than for the non-Catholic population, 70% vs 64.2%. This is actually a bit better on the Catholic side than it was in 1988 when the rates were 73% and 60.3% respectively.

Certainly, the Roman Catholic magisterium cannot be blamed for lack of clarity of this matter: its lack of success in term of *receptio* by the Faithful is not what is under discussion. The fact that Eastern Orthodoxy does not have a centralized magisterium accounts for the current quest to articulate a firmly biblical and apostolic response to this crisis. It is clear, however, that Orthodox Christians take the writings of the Fathers very seriously, which is why even when the local leadership is silent on the matter, the stricter and more traditional position is often prevalent.

In summary, both traditions have come to accept the view that marital relations without the intention to conceive and without abortion are not the highest good, but by no means evil or sinful, because the purpose of marital unity is not just procreation but chastity.

4. *A personal conclusion*

This topic should be challenging to all those who desire perfect obedience to the Lord’s commandments and attunement with the mind of Christ. This discussion should lead us to reflect on two points: (1) that the Fathers were human beings, sometimes radical in their ideas, sometimes plain wrong, and that we must try to discern the “consent of the Fathers” with great care, and (2) that we should ever be challenged by the Lord’s calling to the highest good of radical discipleship.

VIII. THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

1. *The dogma*

In 1854, Pope Pius IX proclaimed that:

We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free

¹ Source could not be confirmed

from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.

Hence, if anyone shall dare—which God forbid!—to think otherwise than as has been defined by us, let him know and understand that he is condemned by his own judgment; that he has suffered shipwreck in the Faith; that he has separated from the unity of the Church; and that, furthermore, by his own action he incurs the penalties established by law if he should dare to express in words or writing or by any other outward means the errors he thinks in his heart.¹

What had been for centuries a controversial opinion finally became dogma: a belief considered revealed by God and necessary for salvation.

2. *Orthodox reactions*

Since 1854, no Orthodox Council has formally condemned the teaching in itself but there can be no doubt that Eastern Orthodoxy rejects the unilateral proclamation of this dogma and the Papal ban on continuing the discussion on this complex matter. For instance, the *Patriarchal Encyclical of 1895* declares:

XIII. The one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of the seven Ecumenical Councils teaches that the supernatural incarnation of the only-begotten Son and Word of God, of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary, is alone pure and immaculate; but the Papal Church scarcely forty years ago again made an innovation by laying down a novel dogma concerning the immaculate conception of the Mother of God and ever-Virgin Mary, which was unknown to the ancient Church (and strongly opposed at different times even by the more distinguished among the Papal theologians).

At the outset, it is important to stress that the immaculateness of Mary from conception (her being *panagia* in scope and time) is a theological opinion within the Orthodox tradition. Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) explains:

The Orthodox Church calls Mary all-holy, immaculate, free from actual sin. The Orthodox Church has never made any formal and definitive pronouncement on the matter of the Immaculate Conception. In the past, individual Orthodox theologians have made statements that, if not definitively affirming the Doctrine of Immaculate Conception, at any rate closely approach it. But since 1854, the great majority of Orthodox reject it as unnecessary; as implying a false understanding of original sin; as suspecting the doctrine because it seems to separate Mary from the rest of the descendants of Adam and Eve, putting her in a different class.

¹ *Ineffabilis Deus*, Apostolic Constitution issued on December 8, 1854

However, if an individual Orthodox today felt impelled to believe it, he could not be termed a heretic for doing so.¹

This quote is from the 1993 edition, and this respected hierarchy was never asked to amend this statement by the synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

It is my personal observation that many Orthodox Christians of Protestant background are often irritated by this moderate assessment by a bishop of such great authority and influence. Many want certainty in truth (dogma, be it reactionary dogma) and they want to inflate the difference with the 'nemesis' of Roman Catholicism. Indeed, it is unavoidable that many would still carry a large amount of subconscious baggage against anything 'Catholic.' The challenge is that many have become self-appointed theologians and spokesmen for Eastern Orthodoxy. Also symptomatic is the level of discomfort with using the name 'Catholic Church'² (to refer to 'the Orthodox Church'), even though this is the name that the Patriarchs and Councils have always used – from Nicea to the famous *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs* of 1848.

On the issue of the Immaculate Conception, a clear example of this attitude can be found in Clark Carlton's otherwise excellent *The Way – What every Protestant should know about the Orthodox Church*:

The Orthodox Church flatly rejects the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception...³

Compare this with Bishop Kallistos' statement that "The Orthodox Church has never made any formal and definitive pronouncement on the matter of the Immaculate Conception." What Orthodox synod or indeed Ecumenical Council can Carlton appeal to in order to make such a dogmatic statement? None. It is ironic that Carlton had previously chided Protestants for "consistently [exhibiting] a rather cavalier attitude toward the canon of Scripture, in spite of the self-identification as 'People of the Book'"⁴. And yet, are we not often 'exhibiting a rather cavalier attitude toward the bishops, councils and synods of the Church, in spite of the self-identification as "People of the Councils?"' This call to self-examination should be taken seriously.

¹ TOC, pp. 259-260

² Or 'catholic' Church.

³ TW, p.118

⁴ TW, p.29

3. *Original Sin*

Let us now consider another typical statement, directly connected to the issue of Mary's Immaculate Conception:

[The] immaculate conception is based on a faulty understanding of original sin.¹

Clark Carlton explains (with a footnote reference to a private theologian, not to a council or synod):

For the Orthodox, man does not inherit the guilt of Adam's sin, but rather the effect of that sin, namely a nature enslaved to corruption and death.²

This is supposed to be in sharp contrast with Latin theology:

If one interprets Original Sin as the 'guilt' for Adam's transgression inherited through biological reproduction, then the notion that the Virgin Mary should have been purified of this taint at her conception in preparation for bearing Christ in the flesh is perfectly reasonable.³

The problem is twofold. One, Rome does not⁴ teach inherited personal guilt, as is obvious in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

403 Following St. Paul, the Church has always taught that the overwhelming misery which oppresses men and their inclination towards evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with Adam's sin and the fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the "death of the soul." Because of this certainty of faith, the Church baptizes for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin.

404 How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam "as one body of one man." By this "unity of the human race" all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand... It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called "sin" only in an analogical sense: it is a sin "contracted" and not "committed" - a state and not an act.

405 Although it is proper to each individual, original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted...

¹ TT, p. 157

² TT, p. 155

³ TW, p. 118

⁴ Or at least no longer teaches

In other words, original sin is a legal and ontological state of slavery of death and sin, not a personal guilt. On the other hand, “one of the major pronouncements of the Orthodox faith, and an important source of Church teaching”¹ teaches:

And forasmuch as infants are men, and as such need salvation; needing salvation, they need also Baptism. And those that are not regenerated, since they have not received the remission of hereditary sin, are, of necessity, subject to eternal punishment, and consequently cannot without Baptism be saved; so that even infants ought, of necessity, to be baptized.

And the effects of Baptism are, to speak concisely, firstly, the remission of the hereditary transgression, and of any sins whatsoever which the baptized may have committed. Secondly, it delivers him from the eternal punishment, to which he was liable, as well for original sin, as for mortal sins he may have individually committed.²

Here, we have an Orthodox council endorsing what is very close to “inherit guilt.” Now, one may have the theological opinion that the Orthodox synod of Jerusalem is a good example of the ‘Latin captivity of the Eastern Church’³ but it is unfair to condemn Catholicism and exculpate Orthodoxy by dismissing this document as irrelevant and offer one’s opinions as ‘the constant teaching of the Orthodox Church.’

Those that seek understanding and dialogue realize that original sin is a difficult subject. There is not always a clear distinction, both in Greek and Hebrew, between the ideas of fault, guilt, burden and curse. There is also a close relationship between a legal status, ontology and personal relationships, as is the case with marriage. Finally, we should also keep in mind that the Fall is an event of cosmic proportion: the soil is cursed and the whole of creation is “subject to futility” and “groaning in labor pains.” This is why Eden cannot be replicated: Christ, although without sin, still had to live in a fallen world.

What most Orthodox theologians would agree on is that the Augustinian idea that original sin is transmitted through the concupiscence of biological reproduction seems to be an important aspect of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. On this basis, most Orthodox understand that such a view of conception makes the Roman formulation both unavoidable and problematic. Yet, the Eastern Fathers generally did not share Augustine’s view on this matter, which is why the Eastern

¹ Expression used by Fr. George Mastrantonis, document available on the official web site of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (Patriarchate of Constantinople)

² The Confession of Dositheus, *Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem* (A.D. 1672)

³ I would be the first to agree with this assessment.

Orthodox tradition sees the conception of the Theotokos as something intrinsically holy (without God's intervention) because the marriage bed is in itself "holy and undefiled."

4. *The real issue: why dogmatize?*

Nevertheless, the fact remains that generally speaking, modern Orthodox theologians are very critical of the dogma of 1854 and we can readily see that its official formulation is foreign to the Eastern tradition. Carlton does offer a very good insight on the Orthodox mindset:

Fr. John Meyendorff was fond of saying that Orthodoxy is the only religion that does not require one to believe anything that is not true. This may seem like a rather backhand compliment, but it contains a profound truth. The Orthodox Church only dogmatizes that which is essential to man's salvation. The Church does not dogmatized matters of opinion (*theologoumena*).¹

I could not agree more with this statement, as long as the Orthodox do not dogmatize in reverse by 'flatly rejecting' whatever Rome has sought fit to proclaim. An important concern with the dogmatization of this idea is that the soteriological motive for the dogmatization of the Immaculate Conception is, at best, weak.²

5. *Theological Study*

Setting aside the issue of dogmatization, what can we say about the teaching itself? Both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism agree that Mary is "immaculate, most pure, most holy, most glorious" and even 'sinless' (free of actual sin)."

Yet, academic rigor compels us to admit that this sinlessness of Mary is a devotional development which was not taught by such luminaries as St. John Chrysostom³ and possibly St. Gregory the Theologian.⁴ Indeed, one of the most ancient prayers of the Divine Liturgy calls Jesus "the only sinless one."⁵

¹ The Truth, p. 164

² Moreover, it is specifically about Mary, not about God or Christ (unlike the first seven Ecumenical Councils).

³ *Homilies on John* 21. PG 59. 130ff

⁴ *Orations*, 38:13

⁵ This is a silent prayer: Having beheld the resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus, the only Sinless One. We venerate Your cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify You holy resurrection. You are our God. We know no other than You, and we call upon Your name. Come, all faithful, let us venerate the holy resurrection of Christ. For

This leads to a dilemma regarding what is meant by ‘the sinlessness of the Theotokos:’ is it sinlessness from conception or only from the Annunciation onward? If there was purification by the Spirit at the Annunciation, did the Mother of our Lord fail in any way during the course of her earthly life or is this a ‘relative’ sinlessness of the highest order, as suggested by St. Ambrose?

These are sensitive issues. There are many Orthodox who argue in favor of a complete sinlessness of Mary while affirming that:

(1) Original guilt does not exist,

(2) She was not exempt from original sin defined as “mortality” and “propensity to sin.”

We have already seen that (1) is moot: all parties agree that there is no direct personal guilt. The ontological unity of the human race in the first Adam who was the ‘federal head’ of the human race implies a mysterious participation in his original sin. Regarding (2), some qualifications need to be made. The point that the Orthodox are trying to make is that Mary’s “yes” was free, not coerced. Also, there is little doubt that the Theotokos did die, but this was a ‘falling asleep in the Lord,’ never an exposure to the powers of the devil.¹

In this approach, while Christ is recognized as being immune from any “propensity to sin” (although theoretically tempted by sin), both He and his mother end up being free from actual sin because she was at some point “purified” and made “full of grace.” Following the example of several Eastern Fathers, many Orthodox writers prefer to place the ‘purification’ of the Theotokos at the Annunciation rather than at Conception. St. Sophronius of Jerusalem (c. 638) exclaimed: “Many Saints appeared before you, but none was filled with grace as you; no one has been purified in advance as you have been.” The question is when?

If Mary was ‘purified’ at the Annunciation, the question would be “of what?” If the answer is (1) “of actual sins” or (2) “of the propensity to sin,” we have to deal with problematic consequences. Answer (1) is a rejection of Mary’s actual lifelong sinlessness and (2) implies that Mary had propensity to sin but still overcame it, which would make her greater than Christ who had no such propensity. In other words, the pious belief in

behold, through the cross joy has come to all the world. Blessing the Lord always, let us praise His resurrection. For enduring the cross for us, he destroyed death by death.

¹ Hebrews 2:13-16

Mary's absolute sinlessness seems to entail a perpetual "fullness of grace" which is basically identical with the idea of an exemption from original sin from the very beginning of her existence. This is why Fr. Meyendorff recognizes that Byzantine piety leads to a belief that can be equated with the Immaculate Conception:

The Mariological piety of the Byzantines would probably have led them to accept the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary as it was defined in 1854, if only they shared the Western doctrine of original sin.

But Meyendorff was well aware that the Eastern tradition varied greatly from Chrysostom and Basil to Nicholas Cabasilas. Byzantine piety represented a doctrinal development connected with the idea of possibly 'erring on the side of caution.'

6. *Liturgical expressions*

The Eastern tradition has always considered the Conception of the Theotokos to be a miraculous event. Joachim and Anna, elderly and barren, were given a child by the power of God's blessings on account of their prayers. The Orthodox Churches celebrate her Nativity on the 8th of September, but the feast of Mary's Conception was advanced to 9th December.¹

If the principle of *lex Orandi, lex Credendi* is to be applied to this issue, it seems that Orthodox hymnography presents Mary as truly *panagia* (all-holy), entirely free from sin and stain ("immaculate") from the point of her conception. The liturgical texts for December 9 exclaim:

This day, O faithful, from saintly parents begins to take being the spotless lamb, the most pure tabernacle, Mary.

Having conceived the most pure dove...

The unique all-immaculate is today made manifest to the just by the angel. He who announced the conception of the all-immaculate virgin gave our human race news of a great joy. The prelude of God's grace falls today on humanity in the conception of the all-immaculate.²

¹ The Roman Catholic Church observes the feast on December 8, exactly nine months before her nativity. The Eastern shift of one day seems to emphasize the unusual nature of this conception.

² From the Office of Matins, the Third Ode of the Canon for the feast; From the Office of Matins, the Stanzas during the Seating, for the same feast; From the Office of Matins, the Sixth Ode of the Canon

The impression is that the Virgin Mary was indeed immaculate from the very point of her conception. Moreover, the ‘annulment of the curse’ is also proclaimed before the Annunciation, for example in the Tropar of the Nativity of the Theotokos:

Your Nativity, O Virgin, has proclaimed joy to the whole universe! The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, has shone from you, O Theotokos! By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing. By destroying death, He has granted us eternal life.

In his Orthodox catechism *The Faith*, Carlton quotes St. Irenaeus, St. Ephrem and St. Andrew of Crete to show the unique role of the Theotokos as ‘fervent intercessor.’ Irenaeus’ quote is especially significant:

Eve, by her disobedience, brought death upon herself and on all the human race. Mary, by her obedience, brought salvation... Eve had to be recapitulated in Mary¹ so that a virgin might be an intercessor for a virgin, and by the obedience of a virgin, undo and overcome the disobedience of a virgin.²

Since the earliest days, the Church has understood Mary to be the ‘Woman,’ the ‘New Eve,’ the ‘New Mother of the Living,’ the ‘New Ark of the Covenant’ and the perfect icon of the Church.

Tertullian was able to use the New Eve comparison all the while implying the sinfulness of Mary, but these typologies form the basis for the idea that Mary was like Eve before the fall. Yet, Mary still had to live in the context of our ‘fallen cosmos,’ which is why she had to suffer some of the consequences of Adam’s sin, including death). This view found widespread acceptance, especially in the Eastern Church.

St. Andrew of Crete is the “Poet of the Theotokos” *par excellence*:

When the Mother of Him who is beauty itself is born, [human] nature recovers in her person its ancient privileges, and is fashioned according to a perfect model truly worthy of God.

St. Severus of Antioch (†538) concurs:

She (Mary) formed part of the human race and was of the same essence as we, although she was pure from all taint and immaculate.

The Byzantine theologians were even more outspoken on the issue. Nicholas Cabasilas, the great disciple of St. Gregory Palamas wrote:

¹ Likewise, Irenaeus teaches that Adam had to be recapitulated in Jesus. The parallel is obvious. The image of Mary as the new eve is also found in Justin and possibly in the *Epistle to Diognetus*.

² Quoted in *The Faith*, p. 122

Earth she is because she is from earth. But she is a new earth, since she derives in no way from her ancestors and has not inherited the old leaven. She is a new dough and has originated a new race.

Hence, the liturgical witness of the Orthodox tradition echoes the extreme reverence and piety that developed during the so-called Byzantine golden age, but the totality of the patristic witness yields no strict consensus in favor of either absolute sinless or immaculateness from the womb.

7. *Who shall touch the ark?*

Both East and West gradually understood the implications of the biblical parallelism between the Ark of the Covenant and “the Mother of my Lord.”¹ The occasional speculations on Mary’s failings found in Chrysostom or Basil were soon replaced by a more guarded language, especially after the Council of Ephesus confirmed her popular title of Theotokos. From now on, it was safer to affirm that she was *panagia* (all-holy) and most blessed. This, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics agree, is the most reverent and prudent attitude.

Yet, there is the impression, shared by many Orthodox theologians, that affirming the Immaculate Conception of Mary or a similar idea will “deny all her virtues”² and make her not “an example” but an “exception.” These are legitimate concerns³, but as we have seen, these are not overwhelming biblical, patristic and liturgical arguments.

It is also possible that subconsciously, the real reason for this impulse to “flatly reject” the immaculateness of the Theotokos from her conception is that the Roman dogma is associated with two problematic ideas: the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff and the apparitions (Lourdes, Rue du Bac) that have ‘confirmed’ its truth. We have already addressed the issue of Infallibility – it is anything but a problem for the Orthodox. What about ‘Lourdes’ and the ‘Rue du Bac’? These events are simply irrelevant to the debate.

This is one area where it is possible to respect the piety of East and West and yet avoid rigid dogmatization, both for the sake of charitable

¹ Luke 1:43

² St. John Maximovitch, quoted in *The Truth*, p.156

³ This concern is understandable but fails to convince: the Theotokos was “full of grace” while most of us are not. Does this diminish her virtues? Christ was the perfect example of saying ‘Thy will be done’ to God the Father. Yet, does his being sinless and ‘fully anointed’ obliterate the Lord’s greatness and denies his virtues?

ecumenism and also because intellectual honesty forces us to admit that these Marian beliefs do not find any consensual support during the first five centuries of Christianity. As a result, reconciliation may suggest that these pious beliefs (absolute sinlessness, Immaculate Conception, Assumption) could be isolated from their Augustinian background and re-expressed as “preferred opinions” (or “liturgical convictions”) instead of dogmas. The Orthodox revulsion for such dogmatization is obvious and only triggers a visceral reaction of rejection. On the other hand, the non-dogmatic Marian beliefs (perpetual virginity, sinlessness, dormition with assumption) are strongly held by all Orthodox Christians. After all, St. Basil could write with tolerance that many in his days denied Mary’s perpetual virginity, and yet J. N. D. Kelly writes that the great Father “implied that such a view was widely held and though not accepted by himself, was not incompatible with orthodoxy”!¹

There can be no doubt that views similar to the belief in the immaculate conception were widespread and commonly accepted within Eastern Orthodoxy until Rome decided to make this doctrine something beyond discussion and a matter of one’s salvation². On the Western side, it should be remembered that such luminaries as Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas rejected the doctrine. Our all too human penchant for defined truth and clarification, even when there are not solid scriptural or patristic grounds to do so, is a great danger. Enforced dogmatic uniformity and centralized authority are no guarantee of truth or unity in love. It sometimes takes courage to say “we cannot say for sure” although we do have pious conviction. Perhaps it is for that very reason that Our Lord once declared:

But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.³

¹ “[The opinion that Mary bore several children after Christ] ... is not against the faith; for virginity was imposed on Mary as a necessity only up to the time that she served as an instrument for the Incarnation. On the other hand, her subsequent virginity was not essential to the mystery of the Incarnation.” (*Homilia in sanctam Christi generationem*, PG 31:1468). But Basil also wrote “The friends of Christ do not tolerate hearing that the Mother of God ever ceased to be a virgin...” (§5) I am personally convinced that the Theotokos was ever-virgin and indeed that the outline of her life contained in the Infancy Gospel of James is accurate. But I recognize, like St. Basil, that what I consider to be an historical fact is not dogma. The best expression would be ‘ecclesiastical conviction’.

² St. Gennadios Scholarios, St. Dimitri of Rostov, Elias Meniatess, Patriarchs Gerasimos I and II of Alexandria (seventeenth century).

³ Matthew 24:26

Indeed, as we conclude our theological review, the humble words of the great St. Paul come to mind:

For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.¹

May there be one voice and one heart to call her “blessed” who is “more honorable than the cherubim and glorious beyond compare than the seraphim”!

IX. THE NEW MASS

If theologians are convinced that the question of Papal primacy and the *filioque* are the main obstacles, I would like to suggest that a far more serious problem is the widening liturgical divergence that began after Vatican II. Certainly, there were significant liturgical and ‘visual differences’ between Latins and Greeks, at least since the days of Patriarch Photius, but these did not prevent even that strict ‘Pillar of Orthodoxy’ to maintain communion with Rome. In fact, the reverend and heavenly attitudes of both liturgical traditions were still compatible: the priest faced the altar and ascended to the heavenly throne with the offering of God’s people. The altar rail mirrored the iconostas and the vestments were quite similar. Both traditions of liturgical worship were in continuity with the spirit of Temple² worship analyzed in Margaret Barker’s controversial yet useful *The Great High Priest*.

In 1969, in the wake of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI promulgated a new text for the Eucharistic service of the Latin rite, often called *Novus Ordo Missae*. Our point here is not to offer a detailed critique of the text or to analyze how the implementation of the ‘new mass’ was inspired by theological and liturgical ideas completely alien to the spirit Eastern Orthodoxy. In fact, it is certain that the intention of the Fathers of the Vatican II was to return to the liturgical Tradition of the early Roman Church, but this ‘archeological’ vision was eventually co-opted and hijacked by the modernist fringe.

There are good and bad reasons to complain about the current liturgical state of Roman Catholicism. Vatican II did restore apostolic

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:9

² The Novus Ordo mass seems to emphasize the Passover meal aspect of the Eucharistic liturgy at the exclusion of the Temple worship dimension.

Traditions that had been completely or partially abandoned: receiving the Eucharist in the hand¹, the kiss of peace², prayer with uplifted hands, etc. On the other hand, the eschatological and heavenly spirit of the liturgy was lost: the mass often became a communal experience of the cultural here and now. The architecture of post-Vatican II churches reflected this profound metamorphosis. As Helen Dietz (RC) painfully admits:

By disorienting the congregation and thereby devaluing the scripture-based symbolism of the *Oriens*, such semi-circular seating arrangements radically de-biblicize Christian worship. Such de-biblicized forms of worship fail to express adequately the eschatological dimension of the liturgy. And in failing to express this eschatological dimension, these forms emasculate the teachings of Vatican Council II which, especially as expressed in the *Novus Ordo Mass*, clearly intended to re-emphasize the eschatological dimension of the liturgy and to restore this dimension to the prominence it had in the earlier Church.³

Only in the context of an absolutely centralized Church authority could such major changes take place without resistance: it would be impossible for an Eastern Orthodox bishop or patriarch to bring about such a radical transformation in the liturgical life of Orthodoxy.

The end result of this 'disorientation' of Roman Catholics liturgics is the gradual appearance of strange buildings (a mild expression), altar girls, rock masses, etc. The tragedy of Pope John Paul II's pontificate is his attempt to uphold conservative theology while allowing scandalous liturgical practices to become so widespread. If "the law of prayer is the law of faith," there is a genuine fear that the Faith of Roman Catholicism will be transformed by a new and alien liturgical spirit?

As a result, it should be said with all possible clarity that the Eastern Orthodox see in Roman Catholicism a communion unified by administrative centralization but greatly divided in what is the essential manifestation of the life of the Church.

As long as the current liturgical spirit of modern Roman Catholicism remains the accepted norm⁴, no amount of theological dialogue will

¹ A controversial practice, possibly unwise in today's context, but undoubtedly apostolic.

² Known as the sign of peace in current Roman Catholic practice.

³ *The Eschatological Dimension of Church Architecture*, in *Sacred Architecture Journal*, 2005

⁴ The U.S. bishops overwhelmingly welcomed the Vatican ruling on altar girls. "The National Conference of Catholic Bishops 'overwhelmingly' supported the Vatican's March ruling permitting females to serve at the altar, according to an NCCB announcement. The NCCB expresses its gratitude to the Holy Father and his collaborators for their pastoral concern on this matter." (Denver Catholic Register, July 7th, 1994, p. 5)

achieve any result. There is no doubt that many faithful Roman Catholics decry these abuses and that Eastern Orthodoxy is itself in need of liturgical renewal.¹ However, this institutional change is an obstacle to reunion as massive as the newly built and highly disturbing cathedrals of Los Angeles and San Francisco. Can these changes be reversed and undone? Scott Hahn (RC) has written popular books² which strongly call for a reclaiming of heavenly worship in the Roman Catholic mass.

It can only be said that Orthodox Christians should not rejoice at this situation but grieve and pray for the urgently needed *metanoia* of those who have been led astray.

X. ORTHODOX FRAGMENTATION

It is tempting, on both sides, to minimize one's internal problems and to focus on all that is wrong in the other camp. Newton's law of extreme reactions certainly applies: Roman Catholicism is extremely centralized, while Eastern Orthodoxy is extremely fragmented. Roman Catholics often point out that "there is no such thing as the Orthodox Church" and that "the autocephalous Orthodox Churches are completely independent." These are problematic yet partially true statements. The word 'Church,' as we have seen, is almost always used in a universalistic sense which is alien to biblical and patristic terminology. For this reason, the word 'communion' is more accurate, and we can say in all certitude that there is indeed an Orthodox Communion which has existed without Rome since the finalization of the Great Schism. The ancient Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem have always been in communion with each other and remain so to this day. The modern patriarchates and autocephalous 'Churches' (Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, Greece, etc) are also in full communion with each other. The unity of the Orthodox Communion is quite visible: the primate of each patriarchate or 'autocephalous Church' commemorates every other primate by name at each Divine Liturgy. Moreover, the faithful and clergy can receive communion or concelebrate in any diocese which is part of this worldwide communion whose honorary primate is the Patriarch of Constantinople. The fact that the latter has no personal

¹ One example among many is the widespread reading of prayers and psalms at a very high speed. The ancient practice of slow antiphonal singing is an urgently needed alternative.

² Especially *The Lamb's Supper*

powers over the other Churches does not mean that the Orthodox Communion does not exist. This being said, it is true that the prerogatives of the universal primate are extremely weak and lack clear statutes: the council of Sardica had given these privileges to Rome, and it is only by default that Constantinople can claim the same. Hence, the 'glue' of the Orthodox Communion is not the authority of Constantinople or of the ancient patriarchates, it is the desire to maintain a unity of love and faith rooted in the Eucharistic life of the Church.

Yet, this unity is not only weakened by the absence of clearly defined prerogatives for the universal primate, it is actually endangered by strong ethno-centric and nationalistic tendencies within Orthodoxy. Not many Greeks or Romanians are fully aware that they are of the same faith and communion as the Russians, although this awareness is growing. The disputes between Constantinople and Moscow over Estonia and Ukraine are well-known: the first one caused a short-lived but frightening schism between the two Patriarchates and the second one is ongoing. Every Orthodox nation wants its own 'autocephalous Church,' and this process has led to fragmentation, doctrinal variations and partial loss of the universal vocation of catholicity. It is for this reason that the great Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov embraced the universal and transnational anchor provided by the Roman Church. The dying of the Church of Constantinople only adds a sense of urgency to the fragility of the Orthodox Communion. While Roman Catholicism is threatened by theological and liturgical disorientation, Eastern Orthodoxy is plagued by excessive nationalism, liturgical decay and doctrinal fluctuations. These are serious problems.

In spite of some setbacks, notably the failure to organize a great pan-Orthodox council, the past ten years have seen some significant results: in 2005, the decision of the Synod of Jerusalem to depose its Patriarch was confirmed by a pan-Orthodox assembly presided over by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. The fact that the deposed Patriarch was forced out when he was no longer recognized by the worldwide communion was a clear sign of the inter-dependence of the autocephalous Churches, a positive sign indeed.

The problem of Orthodox fragmentation has to be taken seriously. It shows us that the universal vocation of the Church is connected to a universal primacy that should neither be absolute nor empty. The canons of Sardica were passed for a reason: Christianity does not exist apart from the (local) Church and history shows that the Churches need some kind of

international center or mechanism of unity and arbitration. As Fr. John Meyendorff explained quite lucidly”

Personally, I see no way in which the Orthodox Church can fulfill its mission in the world today without the ministry of a "first bishop," defined not any more in terms which were applicable under the Byzantine Empire or in terms of universal jurisdiction according to the Roman model but still based upon that "privilege of honor" of which the Second Ecumenical Council spoke. We should all think and search how to redefine that "privilege" in a way which would be practical and efficient today.¹

¹ *The Council of 381 and the Primacy of Constantinople* in Catholicity and the Church (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1983), p. 142

SECTION VI:
HOPES AND CHALLENGES

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I. POPE PAUL VI AND PATRIARCH ATHENAGORAS

As we look back on the growing estrangement - even hatred - that had built up for centuries, we can be grateful that the dialogue has returned to Christian normality. If the late 1800s marked a certain apex for the papacy (with the proclamation of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception, of Papal Infallibility and of the Assumption), the 1900s opened the doors on many new challenges. For better or worse, Pope John XXIII (+1963) decided that it was time to “throw open the window to allow fresh air into the Church,” and convoked what came to be known as the Second Vatican council (1962-1965). His successor, the controversial Paul VI, pursued a vision of liturgical ecumenism and ‘return to the sources’ that led to the promulgation of the so-called New Mass. As his friend Jean Guitton admitted:

[The] intention of Pope Paul VI with regard to what is commonly called the Mass, was to reform the Catholic liturgy in such a way that it should almost coincide with the Protestant liturgy... there was with Pope Paul VI an ecumenical intention to remove, or at least to correct, or at least to relax, what was too Catholic in the traditional sense, in the Mass and, I repeat, to get the Catholic Mass closer to the Calvinist mass...¹

The intention was not to betray Roman Catholicism but to attempt a return to the primitive practices of the Church of Rome. Pope Paul VI (like Pope Benedict XVI), was keenly aware that there were excesses and problems of expression in traditional Roman Catholicism which made it unacceptable by the “separated brethren.” His decision to foster dialogue and reconciliation with Eastern Orthodoxy was part of the all-embracing ecumenical vision of Vatican II.

On the other side of the Mediterranean, Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople was a man of peace and prayer who was willing to resume an authentic dialogue on the real issues. He knew that the

¹ Jean Guitton on Dec. 19, 1993 in *Apropos* (17)

excommunications of 1054 were personal actions between Humbert and Michael Cerularius that had become irrelevant symbols of the Great Schism. Hence, the courageous decision of the Pope and Patriarch to “remove all anathemas from the memory of the Church and to consign them to oblivion” was not a denial that the separation had become permanent. It was simply a symbolic gesture that was meant to finally open a new era of dialogue.

Of course, the post-1054 anathemas remained in force, but this was a sign that the *status quo* could be challenged. Although no official evidence is available, it seems that Pope Paul VI was willing to dialogue with the East on the basis of seven Ecumenical Councils and to relegate the subsequent (Roman Catholic) ecumenical councils to the status of ‘general councils of the West.’ This would have effectively removed the obstacle of Papal Infallibility from the dialogue and allowed for a fresh reformulation of many difficult issues. In 1996, the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch agreed:

In this regard, our Church questions the unity of faith which the Melkite Catholics think has become possible. Our Church believes that the discussion of this unity with Rome is still in its primitive stage. The first step toward unity on the doctrinal level, is not to consider as ecumenical, the Western local councils which the Church of Rome convened separately, including the First Vatican Council.

Paul VI showed the world that a Pope of Rome could make bold proposals to return to the unity of the first millennium. It is regrettable that the pontiff’s most visible legacy turned out to be the liturgical crisis of the *Novus Ordo Missae*.

II. THE VISION OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

The late Pope John Paul II was concerned with the goal of achieving unity with the Orthodox Churches. He generously returned many precious relics to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and expressed repentance and sorrow for wrongs caused over the centuries by the sons and daughter of the Roman Catholic Church.

Pope John Paul, who seemed to have embraced a theological position close to universalism¹, clearly believed that Eastern Orthodoxy was

¹ The origenist idea, still popular in Eastern Orthodoxy and elsewhere, that ultimately everyone will be saved.

sacramental, salvific and “the other lung of the Church.” This expression, dear to the Pope, was at the center of his celebrated encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995):

In this perspective an expression which I have frequently employed finds its deepest meaning: the Church must breathe with her two lungs!”¹

More importantly, the pontiff opened the door to new discussion on the exact role of the Roman primacy, with an explicit reference to the model of the first millennium:

I am convinced that I have a particular responsibility in this regard, above all in acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian Communities and in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation. For a whole millennium Christians were united in “a brotherly fraternal communion of faith and sacramental life... If disagreements in belief and discipline arose among them, the Roman See acted by common consent as moderator.”

Pope John Paul II visited many Orthodox countries and impressed both the crowds and the hierarchy with an attitude that fostered a sense of equality and common responsibility in addressing the spiritual crisis of the post-Christian world.

The problem is that the liturgical metamorphosis of the Roman Catholic Church continued unabated and actually widened the gulf between “the two lungs.” Nevertheless, the pope’s encyclical had some echo, such as Olivier Clément’s book *You are Peter* and what came to be known as ‘the Melkite Proposal.’

III. THE MELKITE PROPOSAL

As we have seen, the most ‘independent’ and ‘orthodox’ Uniate group is known as the Melkite Patriarchate. During its brief history, this community has tried to remain faithful to its Greek Orthodox roots while maintaining a relationship of ‘communion,’ not ‘submission’ with Rome. In 1995, the majority of the Melkite Greek-Catholic synod adopted the following resolutions as a proposal for reconciliation:

1. I believe everything which Eastern Orthodoxy teaches.

¹ Par. 54

2. I am in communion with the Bishop of Rome as the first among the bishops, according to the limits recognized by the Holy Fathers of the East during the first millennium, before the separation.

It was hoped that Pope John Paul II would respond positively, if cautiously, to this opening. Yet, Rome's reaction was extremely reserved. The official reply, signed by three senior cardinals (including the future Pope Benedict XVI), stated:

On the question of communion with the Bishops of Rome, we know that the doctrine concerning the primacy of the Roman Pontiff has experienced a development over time within the framework of the explanation of the Church's faith, and it has to be retained in its entirety, which means from its origins to our day. One only has to think about what the first Vatican Council affirmed and what Vatican Council II declared...

As to the modalities for exercising the Petrine ministry in our time, a question which is distinct from the doctrinal aspect, it is true that the Holy Father has recently desired to remind us how "we may seek—together, of course—the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned" (Ut unum sint, 95).¹

At this time and in spite of Cardinal Ratzinger's admission that the language of Vatican I was "not successful," the position of the Roman Church is that Papal Infallibility is a non-negotiable development. It therefore remains an intractable obstacle on the path to reconciliation and reunion.

IV. PUGNACIOUS CONVERTS

Over the past thirty years, North America has witnessed an amazing number of conversions from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. As we have discussed, the reason is simple: the Christians who gave us the Nicene Creed and the canon of the New Testament were not proto-Evangelicals: they were orthodox and catholic. For various reasons, some pilgrims 'go East,' while others decide to 'cross the Tiber.' One possible obstacle to constructive dialogue is that many have become extremely active in the apologetic realm, and staunch defenders of their new home. We have already mentioned this problem in our discussion of recommended readings.

¹ Letter of Cardinals Ratzinger, Cassidy and Silvestrini, (Congregation for the Eastern Churches, Prot. No. 251/75)

What is more serious is that a large percentage of Eastern Orthodox clergy (in North America) are converts from Protestantism, and many carry with them a gut-level rejection of all things 'Roman Catholic.' Sadly, the liturgical troubles of post-Vatican II American Catholicism have only given fuel to this quest to affirm how much we are different and better. Protestant converts often want to find in Orthodoxy a confirmation of their desire not to be 'like Rome' in any shape or form. Hence, we read unqualified statements to the effect that Orthodoxy rejects purgatory, the Immaculate Conception and even Transubstantiation¹. If Rome has used the expression, it must be tainted by Augustinianism or Scholasticism. If the Orthodox have also used it, this must be a sign of Latinization, which means that we are free to dismiss this Orthodox usage in order to advocate a self-guided return to the mind of the Fathers. Hence, we are far from the days of old when the word from Rome was listened to with seriousness and respect. And yet, these sweeping statements are often misleading; their goal is too often to justify and deepen the schism, not to seek truth in love.

Among the Eastern Orthodox who engage in significant dialogue with Roman Catholics, the majority are cradle Orthodox, not Protestant converts. Indeed, a well-known Orthodox apologist went as far as to label Roman Catholicism as "Protestantism repackaged in sacramental garb."

If truth be told, the same attitude is found among Roman Catholic converts. We have discussed the frequent misrepresentations of Cyprian, Basil and Chrysostom by modern apologists. A good example of poor argumentation is found in an article entitled *Why I Am Not Eastern Orthodox* by Jimmy Akin. The author writes:

Another consideration presented itself: If God set up the institution of the papacy, which group was he more likely to guide into a correct understanding of it: the group that possessed it or the group that was in separation from it? Common sense would suggest that God is more likely to guide the group that possesses an institution to a correct understanding of it. Biblical precedent would suggest this. When the Northern Kingdom seceded from the South in Israel, a question arose about the Jerusalem temple. God had designated this temple as uniquely his. It was the proper place for Hebrews to worship, including the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom (cf. Deut. 14:22–26; 1 Kgs. 11:36). It was the Southern Kingdom

¹ This expression is used in many official Orthodox conciliar texts and catechisms. It was never meant to endorse Aristotelian physics. The distinction substance/accident, like the distinctions *ousia/hypostatis* and substance/energy is simply a way to express the truth that the essential nature of the holy gifts becomes communion with the divine body of Christ, not human food.

that properly understood the role of the Jerusalem temple, and the Northern Kingdom came to worship at other, unauthorized sites.¹

At the end of the article, Akin also reflects:

It was also worth noting the size difference between the two. A little over half of all Christians are Catholic, while a little under a quarter are Orthodox. Again, this is not an argument by itself, but it contributed to an overall impression that raises the question: Which of the following is easier to accept?

These are interesting arguments. In the first one, we move from Jerusalem to Rome and never realize that the first Church (Jerusalem) still is and has always been Greek Orthodox. Should not the Church of Pentecost know what is acceptable when it comes to doctrine and government? Hence, both arguments are irrelevant. Is Rome in the best position to evaluate her own claim to universal jurisdiction?

The size of the Eastern Orthodox Communion is also brought up, even though Akin's mention of Judah and Samaria has preemptively defeated this argument, since the smaller kingdom (with Jerusalem and the two tribes) was in fact the center of true worship.

My intent is not to ridicule anyone's arguments, only to illustrate that the very human desire to defend our positions 'no matter what' is a major obstacle to mutual understanding and reconciliation.

¹ *This Rock*, Volume 16, Number 4 (2005)

SECTION VII:
A VISION FOR UNITY

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I. WHAT IS OUR MODEL?

As we sincerely seek to achieve Christian unity for the sake of the Lord's body, we realize that we must have some kind of common point of reference. It may not be enough, as we have done, to offer a list of 'common grounds' and hope that we can go from there. We have briefly mentioned the issue of doctrinal, liturgical, pastoral and organizational development, an issue that has shaped Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism into what they are today. The challenge is that many who are involved in this dialogue fail to realize that unless we agree on a common model or ideal, it is difficult to chart a common course.

I would like to suggest that it is the early pre-Nicene Church that should be our model, the one that we find described from the book of Acts to Eusebius' *History of the Church*. Empires have come and gone, but "the Faith entrusted once for all to the saints" remains. It is also my contention that the pattern of heavenly worship must be reclaimed and lived in its fullness. This is undoubtedly the apostolic model and the key to both Church unity and spiritual ascent¹.

However, Christianity should be afraid of the present, fail to confront the evolution of science or society, and find refuge in frozen traditionalism. Vatican II was an attempt, failed in many ways, to return to the common ground of apostolic Tradition. If we are going to quote St. Paul's command to "stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us²" and proclaim a faith "delivered once for all to the saints³," we should mean just that. In many ways, we have retained the language of early Christianity: deacons, presbyters, bishops, tradition, etc, but the meaning of these words has profoundly changed. The apostolic model called for a bishop, presbyters and deacons in every city of reasonable size, but what we have today is one

¹ See my forthcoming book *The spiral of divine ascent*

² 2 Thessalonians 2:15

³ Jude 3

far-away bishop for a hundred priests and only one priest per parish. Deacons are rare, their social role has been all but forgotten, so that their function is often purely liturgical, at least in the context of Eastern Orthodoxy. As a result, our claim to follow the apostolic pattern and to be defender of apostolic Tradition is not entirely honest. Both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism loudly affirm their faithfulness to the early Church, but they are still looking for a model. Is it seventh-century Constantinople, eighteenth-century Russia or a cafeteria-blend of second-century Rome and modern-day culture? Within Eastern Orthodoxy, the desperate clinging to antiquated languages and calendars that have nothing to do with apostolic Christianity is a sign of an identity crisis. The historic Orthodox claim that the liturgy should be in the language of the people¹ is suddenly dismissed as a dangerous and modernist idea. If Orthodox identity becomes inseparable from Byzantine Greek and a form of old Russian that very few can understand, the problem is serious indeed. The people are starving for spirituality and modern American denominations are very eager to serve them.

This identity crisis is affecting both communions and challenging our ability to affirm and apply with courage the meaning of apostolic Tradition in today's world. There are certainly pastoral considerations that dictate a prudent course of action on those sensitive issues, but the absence of clear model, both historical and eschatological, has tragic consequences.

II. NEEDING EACH OTHER

Both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism are facing difficult new challenges. Christianity has become an open market where competition from upstart denominations is extremely fierce. The temptation to bury one's head in the sand (Eastern Orthodoxy) or to mimic successful Evangelical methods and worship styles (Roman Catholicism) is as great as it is destructive. In North America, converts from Protestantism have provided their respective 'teams' with solid theological responses, but the struggle remains very difficult. In the rest of the world, the tide of sectarian Christianity (notably Adventism, Mormonism and Pentecostalism) continues its damage to the ancient apostolic Churches.

¹ Beautifully embodied in the ministries of Sts Cyril and Methodius, and St Innocent of Alaska among others.

While Rome has effectively embraced a liturgical modernism as a remedy that has proven even worse than the disease, Orthodoxy is often in denial that anything needs to be fixed liturgically or organizationally. In fact, both sides can learn and benefit from the other's strengths and experiences, as we shall see.

1. Catholics must become Orthodox

The rift between East and West was already extreme by the ninth century and reached its apex with Vatican I. But this apex was also marked by a growing sense that the theological and liturgical path of Roman Catholicism had reached some kind of a dead-end. Vatican II was an attempt to engineer a conciliar return to the sources that would reinterpret the Roman Catholic legacy of the past thousand years for the next millennium. Jean Danielou and Yves Congar – both Early Church scholars – were very influential at the council, but their vision was only partially achieved. As we have seen, the new mass of Pope Paul VI was an overreaction to the possible excesses of the Tridentine rite of Pius V. What was obscured or even lost in modern Roman Catholic worship is not just reverence and a few prayers; it is the eschatological experience of the Eucharist as an ascent to heaven, a manifestation on earth of the eternal liturgy of the angels and saints. Everything comes together to make the modern mass an expedited Eucharistic gathering of the community – or at least part of it since there are now various kinds of masses served at different times. Vestments and architectural styles are a manifestation of today's trends and attitudes: universal ecclesiology becomes incarnate in its liturgical consequence. As a result of this anchoring in the present and disconnection from the apostolic past and eschatological future, the Roman Catholic priesthood is often disoriented. Liberal theology is rampant in seminaries and universities where many have rejected both patristic and scholastic theology in order to look for new ways to 'rescue Christianity from the New Testament.'

I would like to suggest that if Roman Catholicism rediscovers and embraces the liturgical spirit of Eastern Christianity, the crisis of post-Vatican II liturgics will end. But this cannot be achieved without a concurrent embracing of eschatological-Eucharistic ecclesiology and pre-Nicene theology. Time is running short for a Vatican III council that would prepare the Roman Catholic world for the third millennium with an era of convergence and reconciliation with Eastern Orthodoxy.

2. *Orthodox must become Catholic*

The message of the Eastern Orthodox world to Roman Catholicism (and all other Christians) is often reduced to 'leave us alone, we'd like to pretend you don't exist.' This fortress mentality is also a subconscious admission that 'the God-protected city' is in fact a weak and easy prey. The temptation to curl away from the world leads to nationalism and a failure to embrace the catholic-universal vocation of the Church. As a result, Orthodox Christians see themselves as Russian, Serbian or Greek Orthodox members of a national Church whose head is located in a political capital. The contrast with Roman Catholicism is striking: the ability of the Church of Rome to coordinate worldwide missions, social work and a consistent doctrinal message should make the Orthodox think. The need for a universal center of unity and arbitration is obvious, and it does not have to mean absolute supremacy or infallibility. Two admonitions of our Lord come to mind:

Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,' when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye.¹

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.²

The real tragedy about the Schism is the lack of concern about its tragic consequences. The voice that should still cry out from heaven is that of Patriarch Peter of Antioch who had written in 1054:

I tremble lest, while you [Photius] endeavor to sew up the wound, it may turn to something worse, to schism; lest while you try to raise up what has been smitten down, a worse fall may be in store. Consider the obvious result of all of this, I mean the yawning gulf that must ultimately separate from our holy Church [Orthodox Antioch and Constantinople] that magnanimous and apostolic see [Rome]... Life henceforth will be filled with wickedness, and the whole world will be overturned...

We should not have to think in terms of 'mutual interest' to discuss cooperation and reconciliation, but it may be that a common threat will do more for the cause of unity than our concern for the unity of the body of Christ.

¹ Luke 6:40-41

² Matthew 28:19-20

3. *Loving the saints*

If we confess Cyprian, Basil, Leo and Martin as saints and members of the same Body, what we also confess is that in spite of our earthly differences, heaven is filled with both 'Roman Catholic' and 'Eastern Orthodox' saints. In order to achieve visible and authentic unity, there must first be a desire to embrace what is best on the other side, and to find room for legitimate differences of expression. I am convinced that if Orthodox Christians can discover and love such lights as St. Therese of Lisieux or St. Solanus Casey, and if Catholics can embrace as their own St. Seraphim of Sarov or St. Elizabeth Fyodorovna, a new form of dialogue can take place: one motivated by love and respect. In general, Roman Catholicism has been more generous with its beatification and canonization process, with the result that a great variety of remarkable souls are presented as inspiring models for us today. By contrast, recent Eastern Orthodox saints tend to be martyrs and monastics: to my knowledge, not a single woman has been glorified for North American Orthodoxy, which means that if we can embrace Sts. Leo and Martin, we can certainly be inspired by Sts. Mary Cabrini or Katharine Drexel.



If we fail to realize that we are only "witnesses to the Truth" of Jesus Christ and imagine that our witness – in life and theology – will always be perfect, we are chasing the same mirage that leads countless American Christians from denomination to denomination, until one imagines that 'the perfect Church' has been discovered¹. If we accept the fact that our priests, bishops and ecclesial structures can make mistakes, we can focus on the incarnate Truth and deal reasonably with the theological formulas that are as fingers pointing to the moon: they are only signs, imperfectly crafted in human language, to a reality that is "ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible." In a court of law, a human witness can be accurate without being perfect, but inaccuracies can also lead to a 'falsification of the word of God².' This is the mandate³ given to us by Scripture, both as individuals and as communities. Let us deal with our

¹ Many apologists argue that 'the fullness of truth' (defined as a dogmatic-intellectual system) can only be found in their Church.

² 2 Corinthians 4:2

³ Acts 1:8

shortcomings without trepidation and strive to be conformed to Him who is the “faithful witness.”¹

III. RETURN TO SARDICA

On the back cover of *Upon this Rock* (RC), the editors introduce the book with an apt summary of the problem discussed in this study:

As an Evangelical Protestant, Stephen Ray realized that the real issue dividing Catholics and Protestants was authority. Everything else was secondary to the issue of authority.

This is also true of the schism between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy: the supremacy of authority of Rome, coupled with Papal Infallibility, makes every other discussion secondary and ultimately useless if the issue of authority is unresolved.

In this study, I have attempted to show that authority is not a uniform or easy concept: it is not all or nothing; and there is a difference between divinely granted authority and human authority. Moreover, representative authority does not imply doctrinal infallibility: this is true for any particular bishop or for large gatherings of bishops: doctrinal truth is not guaranteed by institutional authority. In 1848, the Eastern Patriarchs affirmed the much misunderstood idea that “neither Patriarchs nor Councils could then have introduced novelties amongst us, because the protector of religion is the very body of the Church, even the people themselves.” In other words, it is possible to understand the preservation of truth outside the artificial dilemma of ‘me (my pastor) and my bible’ or ‘Rome has spoken.’ Metropolitan John Zizioulas reminds us that bishops, councils and ‘autocephalous Churches’ are only structures of communion: theology is only at the service of this communion in the living Truth; not as an intellectual system but as an experience of glorification in “words not lawful for men to utter².”

The thorny issue of ecclesiology and universal primacy needs to be resolved in order for dialogue to achieve concrete results. The Ravenna agreement of October 2007 shows that an in-depth dialogue is under way.

Our detailed historical review has made it clear that this problem can be resolved if the fundamental intuitions of East and West are respected. The council of Sardica stands out as the only successful attempt to

¹ Revelation 1:5; John 18:37

² 2 Corinthians 12:4

formulate the need for a universal center of agreement in such a manner¹. Let us briefly repeat the relevant canon:

But if a judgment has gone against a bishop in any cause, and he thinks that he has a good case, in order that the question may be reopened, let us, if it be your pleasure, honor the memory of St. Peter the Apostle, and let those who tried the case write to Julius, the bishop of Rome, and if he shall judge that the case should be retried, let that be done, and let him appoint judges; but if he shall find that the case is of such a sort that the former decision need not be disturbed, what he has decreed shall be confirmed. Is this the pleasure of all? The synod answered: it is our pleasure.

This canon could easily be rephrased to provide for a viable solution: on the one hand, Rome obtains confirmation of a primacy that is indeed honorary but also endowed with prerogatives that are “essential to its mission.” Moreover, this primacy is presented as connected with the Petrine origins of the Church of Rome. On the other hand, the Orthodox Communion obtains the formulation of a primacy that is based on conciliar agreement and well-defined in scope. Of course, a Sardica II (which could indeed be convened in Sophia, Bulgaria) would have to address the underlying ecclesiology and bring official closure to Vatican I with a conciliar document that would supersede *Pastor Aeternus*. No one is seriously suggesting that such an event could take place in the near future and without concurrent preparatory steps, but “love hopes all things.”

¹ The other example is the so-called Photian council, considered eighth ecumenical by some Orthodox. As we have seen, this council reaffirmed the primacy of the Roman see in the framework of Sardica.

CONCLUSION(S) AND PERSPECTIVES

As we conclude our discussion on the tragic and seemingly unsolvable schism between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, we must end with the realization that very few people are committed to an in-depth dialogue that may cause discomfort and sacrifices. It is much easier, and more in accordance with human nature, to gather up quotations and arguments that support 'our side' and call the other side to repent and return to the fold.

In his wisdom, God has granted lights and shadows to both communions, "thorns in the flesh" to incite us to humility and dependency on the grace and mercy of Christ.

This study is written from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, but with the painful realization that both East and West are sometimes inaccurate witnesses to the Truth, and that both need constant renewal, correction and guidance.

On the Orthodox side, dialogue with Rome is scary: the medieval exaltation of the Papacy and its agenda of world domination have elements of 'antichristic' behavior that cause legitimate concern. Roman Catholics must be aware of this and be willing to manifest what Olivier Clément called "the tears of Peter."

On the Catholic side, dialogue with Orthodoxy is equally threatening and confusing: a lot of sacrificial work is required to achieve a unity that may prove elusive and fragile.

The events of the past fifty years should give us hope and courage. May the crisis and danger affecting both communions be a trigger that calls both the Faithful and clergy to consider the current schism unbearable and sinful.

It is my conviction that in a theological sense, the ultimate 'Vicar of Christ' is the Holy Spirit whose eternal ministry is to guide presbyters, bishops, patriarchs and popes to the fullness of Truth which is communion in He who is "True God from True God" and "Life Eternal."

In the beautiful book *Salt of the Earth* by St. Pavel Florensky, the holy Elder Isidore is asked about his vision for reconciliation between Rome

and Eastern Orthodoxy. His words of wisdom make for the most fitting conclusion to our effort:

The great Hierarch [St. Philaret of Moscow] and the wise Archimandrite were sitting at tea and were thinking together about all the requirements for an ecumenical council and links with the Catholics. But the question then arose of who would take precedence at the council. It was foreseen that neither the Orthodox nor the Catholics would want to concede, and that meant the council would not take place. Then Fr. Isidore entered the room carrying a tray and teacups:

“The Theotokos – that’s who will be first. Therefore, the presiding chair at the council will remain unoccupied: it will belong to her... We must pray to the Theotokos. Through her alone shall come this unification, for human efforts alone will not be sufficient.”¹

¹ *Salt of the Earth*, Pavel Florensky, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, California, 1999, pp.79-80. Translation adjusted to conform to the Russian.

APPENDIX: THE UNITY PROCESS

As an appendix to this study, I would like to present in a summary form a list of problems and workable solutions. There is little doubt that full unity is not achievable in the near future: a number of preliminary steps needs to be accomplished, especially:

- On the Roman Catholic side:
 - Return to the model of heavenly liturgics
 - Adoption of Eucharistic ecclesiology¹
 - Adoption of a patristic-based curriculum in seminaries
 - Publication of pre-conciliar² documents
- On the Eastern Orthodox side:
 - Creation of a pan-Orthodox coordination mechanism
 - Publication of a common Catechism of the Orthodox Faith
 - Liturgical renewal by a return to the patristic tradition
 - Publication of pre-conciliar documents

In general, I believe that adopting a common point of reference, past, future and eschatological is extremely important. Rome has the benefit of its central authority and can more easily work on a step-by-step convergence process.

It would also seem that public debates, especially those that are conducted in a spirit of friendliness, would be helpful to challenge the comfort of the Faithful and foster a grass-roots desire for a theological synthesis.

Here is short list of specific problems (P) and solutions (S):

P: Absence of epiclesis¹ in the mass (RC)

¹ This does not exclude a strong emphasis on the universal vocation of the Church and the need for worldwide coordination.

² This is in reference to a future reunion council

S: Integration of the epiclesis of St. Basil to the Eucharistic prayer(s)

P: Difference in calendar (EO)

S: Not an obstacle to communion; a pan-Orthodox council is needed²

P: altar girls and Eucharistic ministers (RC)

S: Reservation of this function to deacons and (in case of absolute and exceptional need) sub-deacons

P: Priest facing the people

S: Priest may face people during most parts of liturgy of word³, would face East during the Eucharistic liturgy⁴

P: Denial that the primacy of Peter is more than honorary (EO)

S: Not a problem in the context of Eucharistic ecclesiology

P: Celibacy of the clergy (RC)

S: No simple solution

P: Eastern Orthodox fragmentation (organizational)

S: Constitution of a permanent council of Orthodox heads⁵

P: Eastern Orthodox fragmentation (doctrinal)

S: Publication of a common universal Catechism

P: Divorce and Remarriage (EO)

S: Strict application of the legitimate use of annulments and divorce

¹ Invocation of the Holy Spirit after the words of institution

² In some circles, attachment to the Old Calendar has become a symbol of Orthodox identity and resistance to modernism. These psychological factors cannot hide the fact that the Orthodox-Julian calendar is continuing to drift along with the accuracy of the liturgical witness given. Christmas is a solar festival based on solid biblical symbolism, and its observance on December 25 is astronomically accurate and faithful to the intent. The paschal cycle could also be revised, indeed with some adjustments on both sides, to conform exactly with the original intent of the Council of Nicea.

³ Petitions should be done by the deacon, facing East with the people.

⁴ This solution was proposed by Cardinal Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

⁵ Special canonical prerogatives should be granted to the first among equals along the lines of Sardica. If Turkey does not join the European Union within 10 years, the Ecumenical Patriarchate will be forced to relocate to another suitable location, perhaps Mount Athos.

P: Purgatory

S: publication of an agreed statement, as outlined in this study

P: Papal Primacy (*Pastor Aeternus*)

S: New conciliar/canonical proclamation based on Sardica

P: Infallibility (*Pastor Aeternus*)

S: Close Vatican I with a new conciliar proclamation

P: Immaculate Conception and Assumption

S: Careful reformulation of both with the status of 'ecclesial conviction'

P: Infallibility (*Pastor Aeternus*)

S: Officially close Vatican I with a new conciliar proclamation

P: Filioque (RC)

S: publication of an agreed statement, as outlined in this study¹

¹ Of course, a return to the original creed of 381 would be required, although it might be granted that the creed, if recited in Latin, could contain the word *filioque*.

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