

## 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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”<sup>2</sup>, 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 election<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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’<sup>5</sup> picture:

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

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.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> BAC, p.64-74

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>3</sup> John 6, Romans 9, Ephesians 1

<sup>4</sup> DECB, p. 147

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

<sup>6</sup> *The Great High Priest*, Margaret Barker, Continuum, London, 2003, p. 336

<sup>7</sup> *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 Christ<sup>1</sup>,” the means by which temporal creatures can be united to the eternal God-Man, and become “partakers of the divine nature<sup>2</sup>” 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 all<sup>3</sup>.” 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”<sup>4</sup>. This is what I call “the eschatological<sup>5</sup>, 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,

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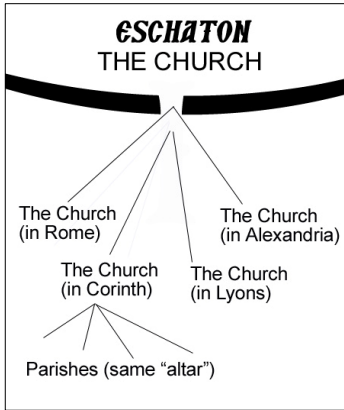
<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:24-28, also Ephesians 5

<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 1:5-9

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:28

<sup>4</sup> John 3:6

<sup>5</sup> 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 world<sup>1</sup>” 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 Corinth<sup>2</sup>,” we find this significant expression: “when you come together as [a] Church.”<sup>3</sup> 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 Church<sup>4</sup>” (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!<sup>5</sup> There is no one Eucharist in Galatia or in Achaia and

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 5 and possible translation of 13:8

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:1

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:28 – or “as Church.”

<sup>4</sup> Romans 16:23; Acts 15:22

<sup>5</sup> 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 Galatia<sup>1</sup> 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 uncertain<sup>2</sup>, 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 τῆ οὔση ἐν used for the local Church.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 1:1

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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'<sup>3</sup>. 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."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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."

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> In other words, confusing space-universal and space-time universal.

<sup>4</sup> 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.”

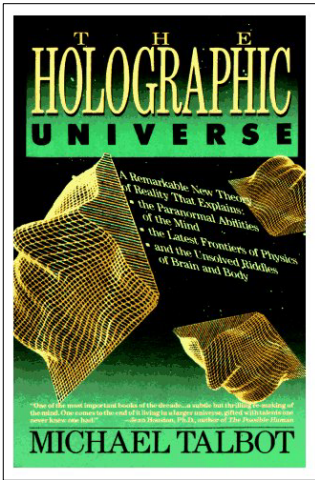
I suggest that we are confessing the existence of the Church, both ‘pre-eternal’ and ‘manifested’ in our world, as something essential for our salvation. But what does ‘catholic’ mean? Does it mean universal or whole or both? And how do we recognize and identify the catholic Church?

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.<sup>1</sup>

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:

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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer at the fraction of the consecrated bread

<sup>2</sup> CCC, 886

<sup>3</sup> Touchstone Magazine, September 2000

<sup>4</sup> Published electronically on [www.catholic-convert.com](http://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-eternal<sup>1</sup>. 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.’

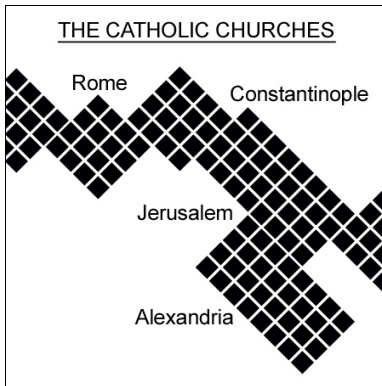
Hence, if the Church is disconnected from its Eucharistic nature, the temptation is great to define ‘Catholic Church’ as Steve Ray does, which most Orthodox theologians do not consider an adequate witness to the mind of the early Fathers. Because there is no single universal Eucharist and no single universal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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 nature<sup>1</sup>. 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 episcopally<sup>2</sup>,” to which the Orthodox would give their full assent.

## II. UNITY IN THE (LOCAL<sup>3</sup>) 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

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

<sup>2</sup> CTC, pp. 75, 79

<sup>3</sup> 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 priesthood<sup>1</sup>,” and if the Lord’s Supper is an “*anamnesis*,”<sup>2</sup> the logical consequence is the offering of “sacrifices”<sup>3</sup>. 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.<sup>4</sup>

## 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.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 - *hierous*) 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...

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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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?<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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...

Boncore'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.<sup>1</sup>

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”<sup>2</sup>. 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...<sup>3</sup>

If, as we shall see, an attempt is made to make an exact analogy<sup>4</sup> 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 gathered<sup>5</sup>, 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

<sup>1</sup> *Apostolic Tradition*, 8

<sup>2</sup> This expression is used of the letter Clement of Rome in Eusebius.

<sup>3</sup> *Apostolic Tradition*, 2

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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). Eusebius<sup>1</sup> 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 Church<sup>2</sup>; 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

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<sup>1</sup> HE, p. 240 (6.43)

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.’<sup>2</sup>

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 > PAPACY<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.”

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 34<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> TPOP, p. 151

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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 priest<sup>2</sup>, 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

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<sup>1</sup> *Epistle XXVI, to the Lapsed*

<sup>2</sup> ‘Priest’ (*hiereus* 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>



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 ecclesie* of Cyprian, but who share its main idea, thus witnessing to it as part of the catholic tradition of the

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<sup>1</sup> *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

As Fr. Meyendorff demonstrates both in *The Primacy of Peter* and *Byzantine Theology*<sup>2</sup>, 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> TPOP, p. 71

<sup>2</sup> BT, pp. 97-99

<sup>3</sup> TPOP, pp. 71-72

<sup>4</sup> 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.*<sup>1</sup>

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 bishop<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, if Peter's successors are "all [the] bishops," to use Dom Chapman's admission<sup>3</sup>, 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.<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> DPBR, p. xiv

<sup>2</sup> 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).

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

<sup>4</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.’

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<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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...<sup>4</sup>

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 Apostles<sup>5</sup>, but only the bishop of Rome is the successor of a particular apostle – of Saint Peter – and thus given responsibility for the whole Church.<sup>6</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> *To the Magnesians*, 6:1

<sup>2</sup> *To the Trallesians*, 3:1

<sup>3</sup> ANF, Volume 7, p. 410

<sup>4</sup> CTC, pp. 79, 80

<sup>5</sup> We have already mentioned that this view was expressed by St. Jerome.

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

holy Apostle Peter was their Prince<sup>1</sup>, and that the Bishop of Rome alone is his successor...<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>1</sup>

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 himself<sup>2</sup>. 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”<sup>3</sup>. 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.”<sup>4</sup>

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.”

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<sup>1</sup> TPOP, p. 81

<sup>2</sup> 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).

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.’<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.”<sup>3</sup>

## 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

<sup>1</sup> HE, p. 240

<sup>2</sup> Canon 8. See TCAC, pp. 56, 57.

<sup>3</sup> 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’<sup>1</sup> 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 catholic<sup>2</sup> through their communion with one of them, the Church of Rome “which presides in charity.”<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> This capitalization is consistent with the shift in meaning. See my Terminology section.

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

<sup>3</sup> CCC, 834. This expression “which presides in charity” is from Ignatius’ epistle 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.”<sup>2</sup>

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 “precedes<sup>3</sup>” 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

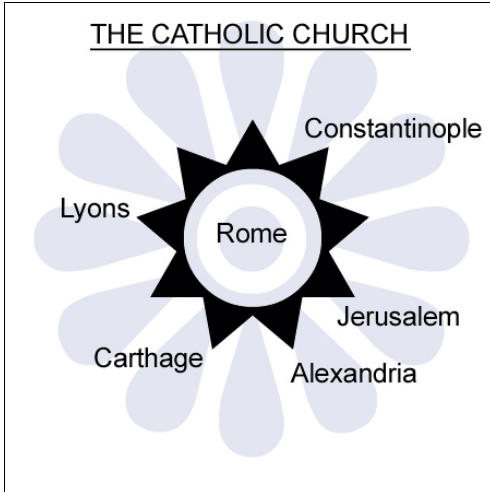
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<sup>1</sup> This is also the Orthodox view, although the proper wording would be to replace “particular Church” (a recent invention) with “catholic Church.”

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> *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 Churches<sup>1</sup>. Their richly elaborate liturgies enshrine key beliefs, but those liturgies do not focus on the issues that divide Easterners from the Catholic Church.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 saying<sup>1</sup> *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"<sup>2</sup>. 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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 parish<sup>1</sup>. 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 Schmemmann in effect admits, Eucharistic ecclesiology goes down the tube if it cannot satisfactorily relate the parish

<sup>1</sup> 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*<sup>1</sup> 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*<sup>2</sup>, the *antimension*<sup>3</sup>, 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 bishop<sup>4</sup> and offers the Eucharist on the bishop’s *antimension*<sup>5</sup>. 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.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

### 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 usefulness<sup>2</sup> 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 contended, 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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*.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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 Uniate<sup>3</sup> 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?<sup>4</sup> 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:

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechetical Lectures*, 18.26

<sup>2</sup> *Against the Letter of Mani called "The Foundation"*, 4:5

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

My concern is that both 'Roman Catholic Church' and 'Holy Orthodox Catholic apostolic Church'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Or 'Eastern Orthodox Church'.

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

<sup>4</sup> 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...<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> The local Church is the whole

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<sup>1</sup> *Epistle to the Ephesians*, Introduction

<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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 34<sup>th</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup>

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

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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.

<sup>1</sup> That is, if universal means space-universal (worldwide).

<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>1</sup>



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.<sup>2</sup>

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. Ignatius<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> TPOP, p. 89

<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> Also, the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, ANF, Volume 7, p. 410



state that ‘the Orthodox reject the universal primacy of the Rome.’<sup>1</sup> 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 considerations<sup>2</sup>. 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?<sup>3</sup> If so, we would have a natural “analogous”<sup>3</sup> 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 34<sup>th</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> This is the thrust of Canon 28 at Chalcedon (451).

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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:

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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 Church<sup>2</sup>, 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> The Word (Magazine), January 1996, pp. 7-11

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Church<sup>1</sup>; but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff.”<sup>2</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> CCC, p.234

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.”

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<sup>1</sup> 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 primacy<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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)<sup>1</sup>, 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 Ware<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> Now Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>



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...<sup>2</sup>

"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

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<sup>1</sup> RA, pp. 60-61

<sup>2</sup> *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 Primate 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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> TPOP, p. 90



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

**- 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.”<sup>2</sup>

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

In Acts 15, there can be discussion as to 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’<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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 consistent<sup>1</sup>.

**- 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.’<sup>2</sup>

**- 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.’<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.”

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

<sup>3</sup> TPOP, p. 14

<sup>4</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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"<sup>2</sup>. 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"<sup>3</sup>. 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"<sup>4</sup> according to St. Paul? Likewise, when St. James writes about "those conflicts and disputes among you"<sup>5</sup>, is he referring to a situation that could

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<sup>1</sup> PCT, pp. 197-198

<sup>2</sup> TSATR, p. 115

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:19

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 3:15

<sup>5</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup>

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. Millenarism<sup>2</sup> 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:

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 2:18

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 themselves<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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,

<sup>1</sup> *Dialog with Trypho*, 80

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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...<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed electronically at [http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Church\\_Dogma/Church\\_Dogma\\_028.htm](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.<sup>1</sup>

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 yes<sup>2</sup>. 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

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in TT, p. 12

<sup>2</sup> 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 issues<sup>1</sup>, 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.”<sup>3</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup> CE, Article “Novatian and Novatianism”

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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?”

<sup>2</sup> *Letters*, 48:1, 3

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, 55[52]:1

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

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 consciousness<sup>2</sup>, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermo ad Caesariensis Ecclesia plebem*

<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>1</sup> 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].<sup>2</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> CE, Entry: Meletius

recognized as a saint.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

For St. Basil, the support of 'the principal Church'<sup>3</sup> (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?<sup>4</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter CCXIV To Count Terentius*

<sup>3</sup> Cyprian's expression

<sup>4</sup> 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-ordination<sup>1</sup> 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, Stephen<sup>2</sup>, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> In cases where the existing ordinations meet certain criteria of acceptability.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> HE, 7.5. This quote is not from Paul Maier's edition.

### 5. *The schisms of the tenth century*<sup>1</sup>

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*<sup>2</sup> did not reflect a workable reality.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> The Bulgarians broke communion with the

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *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.

<sup>3</sup> 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)

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>

### 7. *The tomos of 1633*<sup>3</sup>

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 Church<sup>4</sup> 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.

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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).

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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*.

<sup>4</sup> 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...<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *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*<sup>2</sup>, 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

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

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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 schismatic<sup>3</sup> bishop of Rome.

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs*, 1848

<sup>2</sup> *Satis Cognitum*, Pope Leo XIII, §15

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

### 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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