

# **“SYNODALITY” – RESULTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

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## **I. The results of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church**

The Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church has been focusing on the topic of “Primacy and Synodality” over the last twelve years. This is not surprising, since the issue of the exercise of papal primacy has been an object of disagreement between Orthodox and Catholics over a millennium. The Orthodox contribution has been to point out that primacy and synodality are both inseparable: there cannot be a gathering (synodos) without a president (protos), and no one cannot be first (protos) if there is no gathering (synodos). As the Metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizioulas, pointed out: “*The logic of synodality leads to primacy*”, since “*synods without primates never existed in the Orthodox Church, and this indicates clearly that if synodality is an ecclesiological, that is, dogmatical, necessity so must primacy [be]*”<sup>1</sup>.

### **The Ravenna Document (2007)**

The document of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, referred as the “Ravenna Document” (2007), speaks of synodality and conciliarity as synonyms, “*as signifying that each member of the Body of Christ, by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in eucharistic koinonia (communio in Latin)*”. It then affirms that “*conciliarity reflects the Trinitarian mystery and finds therein its ultimate foundation*”<sup>2</sup> and from there, considers that “*the Eucharist manifests the Trinitarian koinônia actualized in the faithful as an organic unity of several members each of whom has a charism, a service or a proper ministry, necessary in their variety and diversity for the edification of all in the one ecclesial Body of Christ*”<sup>3</sup>. The Ravenna document then distinguishes primacy and synodality on three levels:

“*Defined thus, the conciliar dimension of the Church is to be found at the three levels of ecclesial communion, the local, the regional and the universal: at the local level of the diocese entrusted to the bishop; at the regional level of a group of local Churches with their bishops who “recognize who is the first amongst themselves” (Apostolic Canon 34); and at the universal level, where those who are first (protoi) in the various regions, together with all the bishops, cooperate in that which concerns the totality of the Church. At this level also, the protoi must recognize who is the first amongst themselves.*”<sup>4</sup>

The document then develops this idea by describing how primacy and synodality are actualised on these three levels<sup>5</sup> and comes to the following conclusions:

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<sup>1</sup> J. Zizioulas, « Recent Discussions on Primacy in Orthodox Theology », in W. Kasper (Ed.), *The Petrine Ministry: Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue*, Mahwah, NJ: The Newman Press, 2006, p. 242-243.

<sup>2</sup> Ravenna document, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ravenna document, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ravenna document, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ravenna document, 17-42.

- *“Primacy and conciliarity are mutually interdependent. That is why primacy at the different levels of the life of the Church, local, regional and universal, must always be considered in the context of conciliarity, and conciliarity likewise in the context of primacy”.*
- *“Primacy at all levels is a practice firmly grounded in the canonical tradition of the Church”.*
- *“While the fact of primacy at the universal level is accepted by both East and West, there are differences of understanding with regard to the manner in which it is to be exercised, and also with regard to its scriptural and theological foundations.”<sup>6</sup>*
- *“We, the members of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, are convinced that the above statement on ecclesial communion, conciliarity and authority represents positive and significant progress in our dialogue, and that it provides a firm basis for future discussion of the question of primacy at the universal level in the Church.”<sup>7</sup>*

### **The Chieti Document (2016)**

The latest document of the Joint International Commission, referred as the “Chieti Document” (2016), dealt with the theme of Primacy and Synodality within the first millennium. It underlined that *“Synodality is a fundamental quality of the Church as a whole”<sup>8</sup>* and that with that regard *“the history of the Church in the first millennium is decisive”* since *“the relationship between synodality and primacy took various forms, which can give vital guidance to Orthodox and Catholics in their efforts to restore full communion today”<sup>9</sup>.*

The Chieti Document deepens the threefold view of Primacy and Synodality of the Ravenna Document, noticing though that their implementation varies at each level. On the regional level, the *“interrelatedness between the proestos or bishop and the community is a constitutive element of the life of the local church.”<sup>10</sup>* It also notes that *“since the bishop is the head of his local church, he represents his church to other local churches and in the communion of all the churches. Likewise, he makes that communion present to his own church. This is a fundamental principle of synodality.”<sup>11</sup>*

The Chieti Document then defines primacy and synodality on the regional level according to the Apostolic Canon 34, which offers a canonical description of the correlation between the protos and the other bishops of each region<sup>12</sup>.

With regards to the universal level, the Chieti Document considers that the interdependency between primacy and synodality was expressed within the institution of the Pentarchy: *“Between the fourth and the seventh centuries, the order (taxis) of the five patriarchal sees came to be recognised, based on and sanctioned by the ecumenical councils,*

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<sup>6</sup> Ravenna document, 43.

<sup>7</sup> Ravenna document, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Chieti document, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Chieti document, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Chieti document, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Chieti document, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Chieti document, 13. The canons reads as follow: “The bishops of the people of a province or region [ethnos] must recognize the one who is first [protos] amongst them, and consider him to be their head [kephale], and not do anything important without his consent [gnome]; each bishop may only do what concerns his own diocese [paroikia] and its dependent territories. But the first [protos] cannot do anything without the consent of all. For in this way concord [homonoia] will prevail, and God will be praised through the Lord in the Holy Spirit”.

*with the see of Rome occupying the first place, exercising a primacy of honour (presbeia tes times), followed by the sees of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, in that specific order, according to the canonical tradition.”<sup>13</sup> But the document also notes that “in the West, the primacy of the see of Rome was understood, particularly from the fourth century onwards, with reference to Peter’s role among the Apostles. The primacy of the bishop of Rome among the bishops was gradually interpreted as a prerogative that was his because he was successor of Peter, the first of the apostles”. The document clearly states that “This understanding was not adopted in the East, which had a different interpretation of the Scriptures and the Fathers on this point. Our dialogue may return to this matter in the future.”<sup>14</sup>*

The document of Chieti came to the conclusion that: “*throughout the first millennium, the Church in the East and the West was united in preserving the apostolic faith, maintaining the apostolic succession of bishops, developing structures of synodality inseparably linked with primacy, and in an understanding of authority as a service (diakonia) of love*”<sup>15</sup> and indicated that the Commission should for the future “*on the basis of this common heritage, must consider how primacy, synodality, and the interrelatedness between them can be conceived and exercised today and in the future.*”<sup>16</sup>

The coordinating committee of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue met on Leros in September 2017 to discuss the future steps for the dialogue. After much discussion regarding the progress already made in the dialogue and the work remaining to be done, it was then decided by the coordinating committee that the topic for the next stage of the dialogue should be: “*Towards Unity in Faith: Theological and Canonical Issues.*” A paper will be drafted on this topic should with two main sections: the first will summarise what has already been achieved in the dialogue, and the second will indicate the theological and canonical issues that remain to be resolved if unity in faith is to be re-established between Catholics and Orthodox, opening the way to Eucharistic communion.

It was also decided that work should begin already on an additional document, addressing some of those remaining theological and canonical issues. The document will follow on from the Chieti document and will be entitled: “*Primacy and Synodality in the Second Millennium and Today*”. It will include consideration of “uniatism” among other issues.

## **II. The Challenges on Synodality in the Second Millennium**

The further work of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue, reflecting on Primacy and Synodality in the Second Millennium and Today, will not be an easy task, since many major problems have appeared in the second millennium leading to what Y. Congar qualified as the “estrangement” between East and West.

### **The Crusades and the creation of parallel jurisdictions**

When reflecting on the problems which were caused by the West in the second millennium with regards to the relations between East and West, one can immediately think of the Crusades. The initial intention of the Crusade was legitimate and pious: free the occupied major Christian centres of the East from the Islamic rule. But some scholars see in this initiative a strategy of Pope Urban II to solve the interruption of communion that had happened forty

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<sup>13</sup> Chieti document, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Chieti document, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Chieti document, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Chieti document, 21.

years earlier in 1054 by establishing himself as the head of a universal Church of both the East and the West.

As a direct consequence of the Crusades we see the establishment of parallel jurisdictions in the East. At the time of the Latin Empire, a Latin Patriarchate was created in Constantinople in 1204, parallel to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Other parallel Latin Patriarchates existed in Jerusalem from 1099 until 1291, which was later restored in 1847, as well as in Antioch from 1119 and in Alexandria from 1341. These parallel structures were only suppressed in 1964! Grigorios Papathomas sees in the constitution of these Latin Patriarchate a major ecclesiological deviation since the creation of parallel jurisdiction, or in other words ecclesial co-territoriality, violates the very antique canonical principle of only one bishop in one city<sup>17</sup>.

This phenomenon introduced a radical change in the mind-set of Christianity, which only grew over the centuries. Starting from this moment, the Church of the West (the Latin Church of that time, or the Roman Catholic Church of today) and the Church of the East (the Greek Church of that time, or the Orthodox Church of today) started considering themselves as two distinct, parallel Churches, and not anymore as one Church. Until now, we have not pay enough attention to consequences of the creation of the Latin Patriarchates in the East with regards primacy and synodality.

Nevertheless, in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, at the time of the council of Ferrare-Florence (1438-1439), it was still possible to gather in a council, which ought to be an ecumenical one, as *one Church*, applying the principles of the synodality of the *pentarchy* of the first millennium. Actually, it would be interesting to study with a new approach the council of Ferrare-Florence with regards the practice of primacy and synodality in the middle of the second millenium. Of course, as a council called to restore the unity of the Church, it was a failure. But as an example of how primacy and synodality was still functioning in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it is an extremely interesting witness.

Very often historiography says that the council was one of opportunity, considering that the “Greeks” needed the support of the West to save Byzantium. But in reality, the “Latins” needed the council and the support of the “Greeks” even more because the Church in the West was at that time divided between the “conciliarist” movement and the papacy since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The conciliarist believed that the supreme authority in the Church resided in the ecumenical council and not in the person of the pope. In fact, both parties, the conciliarists and the pope, sought the support of the Byzantines. Finally, the Byzantines took the side of the pope by accepting his invitation, by applying the system of the pentarchy<sup>18</sup>.

It is also extremely important to note that while the Greeks and the Latins discussed openly at Florence all their points of divergence: purgatory, *filioque* and the Eucharist (azyme bread and epiclesis), papal primacy did not occupy at the centre of attention. In fact, the definition of the primacy of the pope in the council of Florence was aimed at that time to solve

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<sup>17</sup> G. PAPATHOMAS, « Au temps de la post-ecclésiologie. La naissance de la modernité post-ecclésiologique : de l'Église une aux nombreuses Églises, de la dispersion de l'Église à l'anéantissement du Corps du Christ », *Istina* 51 (2006), p. 65-67. Sur la co-territorialité, voir aussi ses articles : « La relation d'opposition entre l'Église établie localement et la 'diaspora' ecclésiastique. L'unité ecclésiologique face à la co-territorialité et la multi-juridiction », *L'année canonique* 46 (2004), p. 77-102 ; « Les quatre niveaux à désinence commune de la Polyarchie anti-ecclésiologique (Les quatre déviations anti-canoniques à désinence commune de la co-territorialité, qui impliquent l'anéantissement de l'Église) », <http://www.orthodoxa.org/FR/orthodoxie/droit%20canon/4%20Niveaux%20de%20Co-Terr-fr.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. M.-H. Congourdeau, « Pourquoi les Grecs ont rejeté l'Union de Florence (1438-1439) ». B. Béthouart, M. Fourcade, C. Sorrel. *Identités religieuses. Dialogues et confrontations, construction et déconstruction*, Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale, 2008, p. 35-46.

not a problem dividing the Christian East and the Christian West, but a problem dividing the Church in the West, between conciliarists and partisans of the papacy<sup>19</sup>.

### Uniatism and the problem of co-territoriality

The unionist policy of the see of Rome, conceiving the unity of the Church being realised through *a return to the true Church and communion with the holy see of Rome*, is a challenge which arose in the second millennium, as a consequence of the creation of parallel jurisdictions.

Uniatism reflected a certain ideology which conceived itself as the proper way or method to achieve Church unity. This model of Church unity was based on a policy of “return”: the *dissident* or *schismatic* Orthodox ought to return to the Roman Catholic Church, which was considered as being identified to the *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*, and the concession granted to the Orthodox was to keep their own liturgical and canonical tradition, considered as a separate *rite* from the Latin one. The vouch of Church unity was the see of Rome in the person of the Pope, acting more and more as universal pontiff than a *primus inter pares*. The sense of synodality was lost.

We have from the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church two documents dealing with the issue of uniatism: the document of Freising<sup>20</sup> (1990) and the document of Balamand (1993). While the first was not very well accepted by the Catholic Churches of Byzantine rite, the document of Balamand was very much criticised on the Orthodox side, and openly rejected by the Church of Greece. The plenary of the Joint International Commission ought to discuss “ecclesiological and canonical implication of uniatism” in Baltimore (2000), “*agreement was not reached*” and the dialogue was interrupted for five years.

Although the document of Freising recognized that the historical existence of “Uniates” cannot be discusses, it rejected uniatism as a method to reach unity. Paragraph 6 of Freising is particularly important while it states that “*the term uniatism designates an effort to realise Church unity by separating communities or Orthodox faithful from the Orthodox Church without taking into account that the Orthodox Church, according to ecclesiology, is a sister Church which offers by herself the means of grace and salvation*” (6b)<sup>21</sup>. Uniatism as a method to reach unity was condemned once more by the document of Balamand which stated: “*we reject it as method for the search for unity because it is opposed to the common tradition of our Churches*” (Balamand, paragraph 2).

The presence of the uniate ecclesial structure also complicated the quest of Christian unity, instead of solving it, by creating additional parallel ecclesial structure. The document of Freising recognized that “*where uniatism was used as a method, it has not achieved its goal that was to bring closer Churches, but has provoked new divisions*” (paragraph 6c), since uniatism has led to the creation of new Churches *sui juris*, parallel to the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches.

The document of Freising actually suggested that today, “*our Churches come together on the basis of the ecclesiology of communion between sister Churches*” (6d). Ecclesiology of

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Gill, “The Definition of the Primacy of the pope in the Council of Florence”, *The Heythrop Journal* 2 (1961), p. 14-29.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. A. De Halleux, « Uniatisme et communion. Le texte catholique-orthodoxe de Freising », *Revue théologique de Louvain* 22 (1991), p. 3-29.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 15-16.

communion, which reflects a genuine practice of primacy and synodality, was precisely the weak point of “uniatism” and perhaps the key to solve the problem of Church unity.

### **The universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome: over or among the synod?**

The apex of the tensions between the Christian East and the Christian West came at the end of the second millennium, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when, shortly after his ascension to the papal throne in 1846 and the restoration of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 1847, Pope Pius IX wrote his Apostolic Letter *In suprema Petri apostoli sede* (On the Supreme Throne of Peter the Apostle) dated 6 January 1848. While it was primarily intended for Oriental Christians who entered in communion with Rome through uniatism, it was also addressed to Orthodox Christians, calling them back to unity with Rome. In his letter, Pope Pius IX, considering himself to be “*placed by divine disposition on the supreme seat of the Apostle Peter, and burdened with responsibility for all the Churches*”, criticised the Orthodox for not being in communion with his see<sup>22</sup>.

This apostolic letter encyclical provoked a vigorous reaction from the East which was expressed by the famous encyclical of the four Eastern Patriarchs of 1848, signed by Patriarchs Anthimos VI of Constantinople, Hierotheus II of Alexandria, Methodios of Antioch and Cyril II of Jerusalem, along with the Holy Synods’ members of each of the Patriarchates. One can see from the very form of its composition the expression of synodality as maintained in the Orthodox Church, as opposed to the centralistic vision of Pope Pius IX, already seeing himself as the bishop of the universal Church.

Besides its synodical form, the encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs is also interesting with regards to the question of primacy and synodality, since it recognises explicitly the primacy of the see of Rome: “*Who denies that the ancient Roman Church was Apostolic and Orthodox? None of us will question that it was a model of orthodoxy. [...] Would any of the Fathers or ourselves deny her canonical privilege in the rank of the hierarchy, so long as she was guided purely by the doctrines of the Fathers, walking by the plain rule of Scripture and the holy Synods!*” Nevertheless, it condemned the see of Rome for its innovations. It also criticizes the pope of Rome for having transformed his role of being *primus inter pares* into a jurisdictional supremacy: “*We 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.*” The encyclical emphasises that the primacy of the Church of Rome was not a personal jurisdictional supremacy of the pope, but a primacy of honour of the see, being the capital of the empire (paragraph 13).

The encyclical then underlines that the cause of this innovation is actually due to a lack of synodality: “*Moreover, neither Patriarchs nor Councils could then have introduced novelties amongst us, because the protector of religion is the very body of the Church, even the people themselves, who desire their religious worship to be ever unchanged and of the same kind as that of their fathers*”. It is interesting to note in this passage that the very famous phrase of the encyclical stating that “*the protector of religion is the very body of the Church, even the people themselves*” should be understood not as a privilege of the laity as opposed to the hierarchy or the episcopacy, as it is often interpreted, but as the application of the very principle of synodality according to which the protos (primate) is not *over* the synod, but *among* the synod in which, each bishop, recapitulates the entire body of his local Church.

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<sup>22</sup> A French translation of the letter has been published in *Irenikon* in 1929.

But the apex of the practice of the universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome and its infallibility found its formulation in the Vatican I in the dogmatic constitution *Pastor Aeternus* promulgated by Pope Pius IX in 1870. In a patriarchal and synodal encyclical dated of 1895, and signed by Ecumenical Patriarch Anthimos VII and the twelve metropolitans of the Synod, reacted indirectly to this new dogma<sup>23</sup>.

It is important to underline that in their encyclical, Patriarch Anthimos VII with the members of his Holy Synod do not reject the quest of the unity of the Church, since “*no doubt every Christian heart ought to be filled with longing for union of the Churches*” (paragraph 3), but stressed that “*to this sacred longing, our orthodox Church of Christ is always ready to accept any proposal of union, if only the Bishop of Rome would shake off once for all the whole series of the many and divers anti-evangelical novelties*” (paragraph 3).

Therefore, according to the encyclical, the unity of the Church ought not to be realised through union with Rome, neither through the exercise of a universal jurisdiction of the pope of Rome over the other local Churches, but through the correct exercise of synodality according to which the *protos* is a member of the synod to which he is submitted: “*having recourse to the fathers and the Ecumenical Councils of the Church of the first nine centuries, we are fully persuaded that the Bishop of Rome was never considered as the supreme authority and infallible head of the Church, and that every bishop is head and president of his own particular Church, subject only to the synodical ordinances and decisions of the Church universal as being alone infallible, the Bishop of Rome being in no wise excepted from this rule, as Church history shows*” (paragraph 14).

Having thus reminded that the *protos* is not over the synod, but among the synod, the encyclical underlines that the prerogatives of the bishop of Rome, as *primus inter pares*, were linked with the position of his see within the empire: “*The divine Fathers, honoring the Bishop of Rome only as the bishop of the capital city of the Empire, gave him the honorary prerogative of presidency, considering him simply as the bishop first in order, that is, first among equals.*” (paragraph 15).

The encyclical recalls that on a universal level, questions were resolved in a synodical way through the councils which were the supreme authority: “*But on important questions which needed the sanction of the universal Church an appeal was made to an Ecumenical Council, which alone was and is the supreme tribunal in the universal Church*” (paragraph 16).

The maximalist vision of the universal jurisdiction of the pope as developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as defined by the council Vatican I, combined by the policy of uniatism, have definitely traumatized the mindset of the Orthodox. Even though the dogmas of Vatican I have been somehow balanced by the ecclesiology of Vatican II, it is not clear for an Orthodox mind how the traditional principles of primacy and synodality could be preserved by the dogmas of Vatican I. This is an issue that ought to be seriously clarified, and this is why the former co-president of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, Cardinal Walter Kasper, was calling for a “*relecture*” of Vatican I through the lenses of Vatican II<sup>24</sup>.

### **“Synodal” period in the Church of Russia and the notion of “sobornost”**

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<sup>23</sup> See my article : J. Getcha, « La lettre encyclique patriarcale et synodale du siège de Constantinople de 1895 en réponse au concile Vatican I et au pape Léon XIII », *Istina* 54 (2009), p. 361-385.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. W. Kasper, « Principes herméneutiques pour la relecture des dogmes de Vatican I : A la veille de la reprise du dialogue catholique orthodoxe », *Istina* 50 (2005), p. 341-352.

The beginning of the 18th century in Russia was marked by sweeping reforms carried out by Peter the Great who established, in 1721, a collective supreme administration known as the “Holy and Governing Synod”. The constitution of this Synod was not based on canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church, but copied from the Lutheran ecclesiastical synods in Germany. This period in the history of the Orthodox Church of Russia is known as the “synodal period”, but the administration of the Church during that period is quite different, even stranger to from what one would expect from the practice of primacy and synodality in the first millennium. The members of the Synod were not exclusively bishops, chosen by the Church, but consisted of twelve members: four archbishops, six archimandrites, and two archpriests — all nominated and dismissed by the tsar. The Holy Governing Synod, based in Saint Petersburg and presided over by the Metropolitan of Saint Petersburg, subject to the tsar, was nothing else than a pseudomorphosis of the practice of synodality of the first millenium. The Holy Synod rendered an annual account of its affairs through a lay procurator, who in fact governed the Russian Church. The Synod remained the supreme church body in the Russian Church for almost two centuries.

The patriarchate was restored in Russia at the Council of Moscow (1917-1918), which ought to re-establish the canonical practice of primacy and synodality. Nevertheless, because of the heritage of the synodal period and the influence of the Slavophile movement and of the democratic tendensies of that epoch, the council was much influenced by principles foreign to the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church. As H. Destivelle pointed out, the notion of *sobornost* as developed by the Slavophile played a determining role at the Council<sup>25</sup>. For the greatest representative of the Slavophiles, A. S. Khomiakov, the notion of *sobornost* undermined the *collective* dimension of the Church, in which all the Christians, laymen, clergy and bishops, have the same rights<sup>26</sup>.

Consequently, the Council of Moscow considered the Church as composed by different groups, with different interests, who ought to be represented in the administration of the Church: the bishops, the clergy, the monks and the laymen. Nicolas Afanassieff made the same critique of the Council of Moscow, saying that its “*notion of representativity, introduced in the administrative system of the Church [...] destroyed the unity of the ecclesial body*”<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, he declared: “*How could an election of representatives of laity could invest them with the ministry of administration and grant them a corresponding grace? [...] If the elected representatives of the laity do not possess the gift of administration, how could they conduct the Church? [...] Naturally, the Council of Moscow did not deny the charismatic gifts of the bishops for the administration; but by putting on their sides laymen who, according to the currant conception, are not consecrated, it declared that these charismatic gifts were superfluous for the administration of the Church. In any case, the administration of this charismatic organism became non-charismatic, and was laicised in the bad sense of the word*”<sup>28</sup>.

Such an understanding of conciliarity, based on the notion of *sobornost* of the Slavophiles, is completely stranger to the tradition of synodality as developed by the ancient

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<sup>25</sup> H. Destivelle, *Le concile de Moscou (1917-1918). La création des institutions conciliaires de l'Église orthodoxe russe*, (Cogitatio Fidei 246), Paris, 2006, p. 46-48. See also : H. Destivelle, « Le concile local de Moscou et la conciliarité. La question de la participation des laïcs au concile local dans les débats préconciliaires », *Synod and synodality. Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in new contact. International Colloquium Bruges, 2003*. A. Melloni, S. Scatena (Ed.), Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005, p. 187-199.

<sup>26</sup> A. S. Khomiakov, *L'Église latine et le protestantisme au point de vue de l'Orient chrétien*, Lausanne-Vevvey, 1872, p. 48-49 and 61.

<sup>27</sup> N. Afanassieff, *L'Église du Saint-Esprit*, (Cogitatio Fidei 83), Paris, 1975, p. 105.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106-107.



canons. Nevertheless, it still creates a lot of confusion concerning the theme of primacy and synodality in the Orthodox Church today.

### **Ethnophyletism and autocephaly**

Another problem, which appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is the problem of ethnophyletism which was condemned at the Council of Constantinople of 1872: “*We renounce, censure and condemn phyletism, that is racial discrimination, ethnic feuds, hatreds and dissensions within the Church of Christ*”<sup>29</sup>.

It is important to emphasise that the council of 1872 did not condemn religious nationalism simply as an ideology, but saw in this problem a major ecclesiological problem. The cause was the establishment of a “national” Bulgarian Church, worldwide, without precise geographical limits, and having a universal jurisdiction over all Bulgarian, even on the territory of the Church of Constantinople itself. This understanding of the Church, based on national identity, provoked parallel jurisdiction, just as did previously the creation of Latin patriarchates and the policy of uniatism.

Although it was officially condemned at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ethnophyletism continues to be a problem in the Orthodox Church today. For instance, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Churches of Russia and of Romania officially claimed their jurisdiction over Russians and Romanians all over the world. The problem of ethnophyletism is also the reason why the Orthodox Church is organised according to ethnic criteria in the so called “diaspora”, where are established several parallel ecclesial jurisdictions, a problem that has not been totally resolved by the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (2016).

In his Opening Address at the Inaugural Session of the Holy and Great Council, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew criticised the ethnophyletist tendency within the Orthodox Church today, which leads each autocephalous Church to close itself on its own and to function totally independently from the other autocephalous Churches. He pointed out the dangers of such an atrophy of synodality at the universal level which leads each autocephalous Church to become totally independent and self-sufficient, thus giving an wrong image of the Orthodox Church not being one, but being rather a communion or a federation of Churches: “*While this structure [of autocephaly] is canonically and ecclesiologically correct, the danger of its conversion into a kind of “federation of Churches,” each of which promotes its own interests and ambitions – which themselves are not always of a strictly ecclesiastical nature – renders necessary the application of synodality.*” The patriarch declared: “*If the synodal system is generally mandatory in the life of the Church, the system of Autocephaly renders it still more obligatory for the protection and expression of its unity*”<sup>30</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

As one can see, many deviations have appeared in the exercise of primacy and synodality the second millennium in both East and West. The understanding of the primacy as a universal jurisdiction in the West led to understand the resolution of the unity of the Church as a policy of return and submission to the Roman pontiff known as uniatism and which has caused the creation of new parallel ecclesial structures. In the East, the ethnophylism became a

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Métropolite MAXIME DE SARDES, *Le patriarcat œcuménique dans l’Église orthodoxe* (trad. française de J. TOURAILLE), Paris, 1975, p. 378-383.

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.holycouncil.org/-/opening-ecumenical-patriarch?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_oOILsDUAGY7C\\_languageId=en\\_US](https://www.holycouncil.org/-/opening-ecumenical-patriarch?_101_INSTANCE_oOILsDUAGY7C_languageId=en_US)

temptation for the autocephalous Churches to consider themselves as self-sufficient, national Churches, without any geographical boundaries, that could exercise jurisdiction over citizens of their nation worldwide, parallel to other Churches. Also, the notion of sobornost elaborated by the Slavophile movement, laicised the administration of the Church by introducing the notion of representativity of different categories, thus destroying the unity of the ecclesial body. A historical study *in common* of the deviations and of the pseudomorphosis which have occurred during the second millennium, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in particular, can help us to purify both memories and ecclesial practices in order to recover a correct practice of primacy and synodality, in conformity with the paradigm of the common experience of the first millenium. This is precisely the remaining task for the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.