
STUDIA NAUK TEOLOGICZNYCH
TOM 10 (2015)

DOI 10.24425/snt.2015.112801

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PAPAL PRIMACY IN THE SERVICE OF THE UNITY
OF THE CHURCH – ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
(COMMENTS AND NOTES)

On 28 October 1958, when the Patriarch of Venice, Angelo Roncalli, was elected Bishop of Rome and Pope with the name John XXIII, no one suspected that the Roman Catholic Church would enter a new phase of history that would forever change the perspective of relations within themselves and between Christians everywhere. Many believed that it would only be a transitional pontificate because of his advanced age – he was 77 years old – and nothing more. Therefore, when the new Pope, John XXIII announced in his basilica “St. Paolo Fuori le Mura,” that he wanted to convene an ecumenical council of a special manner¹, with the topic of internal renewal of the Roman Catholic Church in order to be able to answer all the questions that are faced by society,² it was a big surprise, which caused an uproar among the clergy everywhere and was received both with moderation and hope.

The solemn opening of the council was held on October 11, 1962, in the Basilica San Pietro di Roma, in the presence of a significant number of partici-

¹ For the Roman Catholic Church the notion of *ecumenical council* is connected to the exclusive right of the Pope to initiate it, supervise its work and possibly to confirm its decisions with no time limit. Specifically, according to the Catholic canonical law in force, a synod convened by the Sovereign Pontiff is considered ecumenical council, in which the titular bishops of the whole Latin Church take part. Instead, for the Orthodox Church, syntagma *ecumenical council* expression is temporally restrictive, being associated only with the period of the Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787), but broader in terms of the composition, because at it „must attend the Orthodox bishops of the East, together with the Roman Catholic-Church bishops and the bishops of other Churches who have preserved at the ordination of bishops within the apostolic succession”. (I. Rămureanu, *Ce este și ce urmărește așa zisul „sinod ecumenic” proiectat de papa Ioan XXIII* (What is and what aims the so-called “*ecumenical synod*” „designed by Pope John XXIII)”, „Ortodoxia” 3 (1962), p. 353.

² *Aggiornamento* was the big venture proposed by the Vatican II Council and, according to some, was a winning bet. In the Orthodox Church, especially because of the limitation of the religious freedom, things have developed more slowly. Only after 1989, the year of the great political changes in Europe, was there an opening of the orthodoxy towards society and the problems faced by humanity. A real *Aggiornamento* is still expected, especially within the internal relations of the Orthodox Church, where, often, prevails a type of almost medieval mentality.

pants, namely: 2860 priests, who came from 141 countries (more than a hundred came from Africa), 101 non-Catholic observers, to whom 453 artists, 58 auditors and lay guests were added. The council lasted three years (1962-1965) and discussed in four general sessions an extremely diverse range of topics, from strictly theological matters to general issues, where the Church wanted to show their willingness for dialogue and co-operation both with the other Churches and society *in integrum*.

After the death of the initiator of this grand project, John XXIII (June 8, 1963) the work was conducted with the support and blessing of his successor, the Cardinal of Milan, Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini, who became later (June 21, 1963) Pope Paul VI.

For the Orthodox Church³ the council was a new chance given to the dialogue between the two major Christian traditions, Western and Eastern, for the rediscovering of the unity before the fatidical year 1054. Therefore, the Orthodox delegates (observers) carefully watched the works of each session separately, with numerous schemes of work, and made appreciative or derogatory comments. They expressed their agreement or disagreement on some formulations or concepts, introduced into the final documents, that concerned them directly.

In this study we aimed to present comments or written notes of some Orthodox theologians who were present in person at the works of the council, or *post factum* analysts of the dogmatic judgments, in one of the three topics that, at least so far and in the form they are now, are major obstacles to a constructive and beneficial dialogue to both Churches, Catholic and Orthodox. It's about the *dogma of papal primacy*.⁴

³ Nikos Nissiotis says that one of the major obstacles that prevent an effective dialogue between the Catholics and Orthodox is the defective way in which the Council understands the reality of the autocephalous Church. It does not make a distinction between the separate Churches in Chalcedon and the Orthodox Church. Any conciliar document does not mention the Orthodox Church as singular. The Council saw the Orthodox Churches as separate, because of small united communities, which recognized the primacy of the pope. Or, the first step to restore the unity of the Church is for the Roman Catholic Church to recognize in the Orthodox Church its uniqueness and quality as Church in the full sense of the word, breaking away totally from the idea of centralism and self-sufficiency (D. Stăniloae, *Sfântul Duh și Sobornicitatea Bisericii* (Holy Ghost and the Sobornicity of the Church), „Ortodoxia” 1 (1967), p. 33).

⁴ The other two are the doctrines of papal infallibility and the theology of the collegiality of bishops. For these see, especially: D. Stăniloae, *Doctrina Catolică a infailibilității la I-lul și al II-lea Conciliu Vatican* (The Catholic Doctrine of infallibility of the 1st and 2nd Vatican Council), „Ortodoxia” 4 (1965), p. 459-480; I. Rămureanu, *Primatul papal și colegialitatea episcopală în dezbaterile Conciliului al II-lea de la Vatican* (Papal primacy and the episcopal collegiality in the debates of Vatican Council II), „Ortodoxia” 2 (1965), p. 139-166; N. Afanasiev, *Réflexions d'un orthodoxe sur la collégialité des évêques*, „Le Messager Orthodoxe” 29-30 (1965), p. 8-11.

1. PAPAL PRIMACY – A DOGMA UNDER QUESTION

It is known that the main obstacle to closer relations between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church over time was the papal primacy together with the claim of infallibility made by the bishop of Rome. Therefore, the Second Vatican Council meeting with a program so comprehensive that it included this subject on the agenda, was regarded by the Orthodox with great confidence and hope.

Unfortunately, it seems that their expectations were too high, because, realistically speaking, it was almost impossible to move easily over a tradition so old and so well articulated in Vatican Council resolutions from 1870. These documents, which even then created some confusion in the Catholic Church, specifically mentioned the supreme power of the Pope over all, clergy and faithful. In other words, the Pope is granted with discretionary powers in terms of absolute immunity. In specific terms, the Pope leads the Church, convenes and dissolves the councils, appoints and transfers bishops, is the ultimate judge of the Church, but he is not accountable to anyone for anything. This power, this special authority, is a divine right and can not be questioned in any way, even if it is proved that the “person” does not live up to such a dignity. It is considered that someone can not be subjected to Christ if he is not subject to the Pope, because whoever is subjected to the Pope, he is subjected to Christ (!). Of course, these *quasi divine* attributes assigned to the Pope were and are disavowed by the Orthodox, but also by some Catholics.

So, again, it was thought that the new Vatican Council, would not only discuss very seriously these primatial “excesses”, which we will see have no foundation, neither biblical nor patristic texts, but they would also resolve them, in the sense that they would reach an acceptable theological formula, for both the evolutionary stage of society and the Catholic Church, and also for the power of acceptance from the Orthodox Church, in the hope of a real fraternal dialogue. This was because it was believed that it was time for a change of attitude from both sides for the good of Christians everywhere and for the glory of God. What has always been needed is a common testimony in the face of challenges that come from a society undergoing a continuous process of spiritual decay.

Despite some debates with various arguments, which brought face to face different theological currents within the Catholic Church⁵, the result was unsatisfactory.

⁵ The issue of papal primacy, or of the report between the Bishops and the Pope, was certainly the greatest challenge for the formal and informal participants in the Vatican Council II. Basically, on the decisions that were to be taken in connection with the papal primacy, the cornerstone of Catholicism, depended all other decisions and, therefore, the new Catholic ecclesiology was awaited with confidence and hope by the whole Christian world. Therefore, the debate on this subject has been extensive and dense, filled with moments of suspense. From the beginning were deployed, as shown in most commentaries, three streams: a *renewing a current*, comprising the majority of the bishops of France, Germany, Netherlands, Canada, Latin America, Africa and Asia, a *conservative*

Two of the most influential (and also controversial) Catholic theologians of the time, present as experts at the debates of the council, have commented in their writings, in different shades, on the theological formulations concerning the papal primacy. Both of them were the followers of the argument which states that Pope should rule the Church only in union with the board of the Bishops, both in a ordinary way, in union with a permanent representative of the bishops at the Vatican, and also in exceptional cases, in union with the Ecumenical Council. Moreover, there should be less said about the *power of the Pope* and more about *his ministry*. The Pope is only one of the bishops, not above them.⁶

Yves Congar has a fairly balanced attitude when he says that, outside the biblical text (Matt 16: 18) always invoked in this discussion, *there is no strong theological formulation*, fully substantiated, regarding the nature of the papal primacy. He recognizes that the bishopric of Rome is the seat of Peter, but it cannot be said with certainty that the phrase “on this rock I will build my Church” refers exclusively to the person of Peter, but rather to all the apostles. Therefore, Congar does not fully delineate the papal primacy, but he only attenuates its absolutism and monarchism⁷.

Hans Küng, in contrast, has a *much more direct* attitude, more critical, even openly contesting the papal primacy. He is not such a diplomat as Congar; he discusses limits or the manner of expression of the papal primacy, but he also calls into question its very existence. Küng says that it cannot be demonstrated either scripturally or historically. From the *biblical* point of view, the arguments seem to be missing completely, because Peter is no longer mentioned after the synod of Antioch. In the New Testament we have no information about his death, nor on the possible election of a successor. From the *historical* point of view, the arguments largely resemble those of the Orthodox, namely: a) it is not known with certainty that Peter had led the Church of Rome; b) we have no information about the exis-

current, formed with a much smaller group, which includes members of the papal Curia and some of the Italian and Spanish bishops, and a *middle group*, largely composed of several cardinals and bishops, mostly Italians. Of course, the differences are not so clear, this delineation having a serious percentage of subjectivity and informational uncertainty. The people in those groups have not acted uniformly, but, in some instances, in some debates, had different opinions. (B. G. Ionescu, *Conciliul II de la Vatican. Dezbatările și hotărârile sesiunii a doua* (Vatican Council II. The Debates and the decisions of the second session), „Ortodoxia” 2 (1964), p. 199).

⁶ Not only Kung, among Catholic theologians, had opened critical attitudes to maintain the primacy of the Pope in the Church, even if in a less radical manner. K. A. Fink says that a privileged status to the Pope compared to the other bishops should not be given. On the contrary, above him must be a really free council, consisting of the representatives of all the Churches, that needs to meet regularly and have supreme authority in making any decision, the Pope having only a role of *chairman*. (in *Appunti per una storia della Costituzione sulla Chiesa*, „Concilium” 8 (1970), p. 35). In his turn, Wilhelm de Vries says that the attempt to impose the papal primacy to the Orthodox Church is an unfortunate step that will not lead to any progress, but to a freezing for a long time of the existing relations between Orthodox and Catholics. (in *Roma e l'autonomie delle Chiese orientali*, „Oikoumenikon” 2 (1968), p. 396).

⁷ Y. Congar, *L'ecclésiologie du Haut Moyen Age*, Paris: Cerf 1968, p. 159.

tence of a monarch-Bishop in Rome or Corinth in the first Epistle of Clement of Rome, or in the Epistle for Romans of Ignatius of Antioch; c) the oldest list of the bishops of Rome by Irenaeus mentions Lin as the first Bishop(!); d) the first who manifested any claim for primacy in the old Church was Pope Victor I (190-199!) but he was categorically refused by Irenaeus of Lyons; e) the classic text from Matt 16: 18, appeared for the first time in Tertullian, with such intent, but only starting with the sixth century, under the Pope Hormisdas (514-523), namely in 517, was it used as a biblical basis for claiming the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.⁸

Kung proposes *a soft option, the primacy of ministry*. He starts from a logical premise, somewhat close to the orthodox conception (although the Orthodox do not accept any primacy!), *when he says that it would be inconceivable for the pope alone to be right in everything he is doing, and the whole Church to make mistakes*. The primacy of ministry can be obtained only if it is accomplished as a union with the other bishops and the obedience to the whole Church, the ignorance of such a relationship making it reach, in an extreme situation, a position similar to that of schism. Kung cites the primacy of service of Peter and Paul which cannot be reached except by voluntary renunciation of the Pope in power.⁹

Finally, the concept of *papal primacy*, introduced in the official documents, is not very different from its content in Vatican I, which has caused quite harsh reactions from *the Orthodox theologians*, disappointed by the failure of the official delegates to provide for the Church, in its entirety, a real chance of reconciliation.

Here are *three* of the most interesting passages regarding the papal primacy, which strengthen the theological continuity between the two councils, according to which the Pope is in itself an essential element (basic), of the existence of the Church and, logically, the unity of the Church could not be achieved without the judicial primacy of the Bishop of Rome over the universal Church. Thus, the Pope becomes an intrinsic reality, indispensable to the Church in its physical and sacramental completion.

“In virtue of his office, that is as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, *supreme and universal power over the Church*. And he is always free to exercise this power.” (*Lumen Gentium 22*).

“In order to establish this His holy Church everywhere in the world till the end of time, Christ entrusted to the College of the Twelve the task of teaching, ruling and sanctifying. Among their number He selected Peter, and after his confession of faith determined that on him He would build His Church. Also to Peter He promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and after His profession of love, entrusted all His sheep to him to be confirmed in faith and shepherded in perfect unity” (*Unitatis Redintegratio I.2*).

⁸ For details see: A. Plămădeală, *Hans Kung și declarația*, „Mysterium Ecclesiae” 1 (1974), p. 14-16.

⁹ D. Stăniloae, *Început de revizuire și de luptă deschisă în catolicism* (Start of revision and open fight in Catholicism), „Ortodoxia” 4 (1968), p. 624-625.

“In this Church of Christ the Roman pontiff, as the successor of Peter, to whom Christ entrusted the feeding of His sheep and lambs, enjoys supreme, full, immediate, and universal authority over the care of souls by divine institution. Therefore, as pastor of all the faithful, he is sent to provide for the common good of the universal Church and for the good of the individual churches. Hence, he holds a primacy of ordinary power over all the churches” (*Christus Dominus 2*).

The appearance of these very clear expressions on the unique status of the Pope within the Church, provoked negative reactions from the Orthodox, expressed, as it was expected, in various ways, with more or less severity.¹⁰

2. ORTHODOX COMMENTS ON PAPAL PRIMACY

The position of the Orthodox Church is very clear in this regard. Regardless of the school and the tradition to which they belong, all Orthodox theologians say *in unison* that the doctrine of the papal primacy as it is proclaimed by the Catholic Church is artificial. Papal Primacy is a human invention; it is not a biblical truth, has no patristic basis, was never recognized in history, except as receiving honor, which does not involve some special powers.

John Meyendorff argues that the Byzantines gave to the Bishop and the diocese of Rome a great honor and authority, but never granted legal status to this authority. It seems that the Easterners did not take into account for a long time the fact that, in Rome, the primacy of honor and influence, *gradually converted* into a particular claim to acquire a legal authority, with power over the other Churches.¹¹

Papal Primacy appeared in a short term due to the pride of the Bishop of Rome, who converted, after 1054, *a desire* publicly assumed, *into factual reality*, meant to ensure him not only a political dominance, but also a religious one in all of Christendom. Besides, this situation is found also within the general policy of the Pope. All ecumenical initiatives of the Catholic Church seem to fully support the idea that the unity of the Church is only possible through the assembly of Christians everywhere under the protective “umbrella” of the Church of Rome.¹² Or, put

¹⁰ This first part is taken over and improved from N. Dumitrișcu, *El Vaticano II desde una perspectiva ortodoxa*, in: *En Torno al Vaticano II: Claves Históricas, Doctrinales Y Pastorales*, eds. A. Aranda, M. Lluch, J. Herrera, Pamplona: EUNSA 2014, p. 359-381.

¹¹ San Pietro, il suo primato e la sua successione nella teologia bizantina (J. Meyendorff, *San Pietro, il suo primato e la sua successione nella teologia bizantina*, in: *Il primato di Pietro*, ed. O. Cullmann, Ch. Journet, N. Affanasieff, Bologna: Il mulino 1965, p. 588-590).

¹² For a typology of a catholic ecumenical ecclesiology see N. Dumitrișcu, *Ecclesiastical/ Ecumenical Diplomacy during and after second Vatica Council. Old and New Orthodox Notes and Comments*, „Roczniki Teologiczne” 7 (2014), s. 92-97.

more plainly, the unity of the Church can be achieved only by the returning to the Roman fold of all non-Catholic Christians, once regarded as being Schismatics and heretics, now considered only separated from the Mother Church, meaning the Roman Catholic Church.

The difference is that in the Orthodox tradition Christian unity, which is now sought through ecumenical dialogue, is no longer one of absorption and fusion, but a unity in diversity based on the complementarity of the theological traditions and the values of each one of them. Or in other words, theological traditions must be reconciled and integrated through dialogue, not through cancelation, but through mutual enrichment based on the distinction between the permanent truth of faith and the theological and historical ecclesial systems and on a hierarchy of the truths of faith.¹³

Even if in some speeches within the Council debates, the tone and manner of reporting to the Orthodox Church are significantly warmer and more friendly, it is quite clear that the Pope and the Roman Curia did not intend to give up trying to impose the papal primacy and thus, the papal infallibility, to all Christians.¹⁴

2.1. ARGUMENTS AGAINST PAPAL PRIMACY

MONARCHICAL AUTHORITY UNDER PRESSURE

The claim of the Catholic Church to consider Peter as the head or the entitled leader of the other apostles, according to the classic text *Mathew 16, 18-19* is exaggerated, since the vast majority of patristic exegetes considers Christ as the foundation of the Church, the subject of the confession of Peter, or Peter's confession on behalf of the other apostles, regarding Christ's divinity and Messianic feature¹⁵. Besides, Christ the Savior addressed the question "Who do you think I am?" to all the apostles, so *in the plural* and the answer comes from only one of them, Peter, *in the singular*. The Orthodox interpretation of this apparent "grammar dissonance" is that *the personal pronoun* of Peter's answer is actually a *collective singular*, because it involves all the apostles, as a single group (Matthew 18, 18)¹⁶. Peter had no precedence in front of the other apostles, and did not enjoy any privilege. The existence of a *monarchical authority* of a Petrine primacy type cannot be

¹³ I. Ică jr., *Conciliul Vatican II, reforma Bisericii și dilemele epocii post-conciliare. Reflecțiile unui teolog ortodox* (Vatican Council II, the reform of the Church and the dilemmas of the post-conciliar era. Reflections of an Orthodox theologian), in: *Perspectives on Vatican II Council*, ed. R. Lazu, A. Tat, Cluj-Napoca: Galaxia Gutenberg, Publishing House 2004, p. 70.

¹⁴ I. Ică jr., *Conciliul Vatican II*, 79-80.

¹⁵ T. M. Popescu, *Premizele primatului papal* (The premises of the papal primacy), „Ortodoxia” 1 (1955), p. 7-9.

¹⁶ G. Marcu, *Premizele biblice ale erorilor papalității* (The biblical premises of the papacy errors), „Ortodoxia” 2-3 (1954), p. 387.

supported *neither biblically nor patristically and historically*, but rather a conciliar authority, collectively.¹⁷

The Collective vision of the leadership of the Church is evident from the fact that Christ the Savior Himself avoided establishing a hierarchy within the apostles. The episode with the sons of Zebedee is quite eloquent in this regard. In their claim to have a special status within the group, Jesus gave them a famous reply “*Anyone who wants to be first among you will be your slave*” (Matthew 20, 27) that could itself close any discussion around any Petrine primacy. On the other hand, we must not forget also that to other apostles were given nicknames that could compete with the one given to Peter, as happened to John and Jacob (James), whom he called “the pillars of the Church” (Galatians 2, 9), or that Peter is admonished (argued with) by Jesus himself in many circumstances. Moreover, it is known that no Apostle had any activity relying on Peter, *not asking for his approval* or consent for any of their actions or the performed tasks, because all were equal among themselves due to the direct election made by Christ.¹⁸

Saint Paul, on the other hand, makes it clear that *the foundation of the Church is Christ* and that no one can settle another foundation (1 Corinthians 3, 11). And if we refer to a time when Peter could be shown as the head of the Apostles, in the Apostolic Synod, we see that it was not led by him, but by Jacob (James) (Acts 15, 1-9).

The alleged primacy of Saint Peter is unsustainable also because of at least *two cases which occurred after his death*. The first concerns the fact that at the time, only two apostles, Thomas and John, were still alive; the latter living until around 100. Therefore, the Apostle John wrote his Gospel, the Epistles and Revelation, being contemporary with the first three bishops of Rome, namely: Linus, Anacletus and Clement. If there were the Petrine primacy we have got to confront a seemingly impossible situation, a *judicial obedience* of an apostle to a bishop (!). The second, equally unusual, is the fact that establishing the revelation of the New Testament in writing, *it was not over at the time of death of Saint Peter* and, consequently, the emergence of a canonical – administrative hierarchical structures centered on the papal primacy, that might have *to condition the divine revelation itself*, is rather a theological adventure and can not be taken seriously.¹⁹

THE ‘ROCK’ OF THE CHURCH OF ROME

We recall some historical arguments that question the existence of a Roman episcopate of Peter. We know that Peter came to Rome not earlier than the year 57 because, in 58, when Paul wrote a letter to the Romans from Corinth, he does not mention anything about Peter.

¹⁷ S. Căndea, *Hrisostom Papadopoulos and Papal Primacy*, „Ortodoxia” 3 (1962), p. 387-388.

¹⁸ S. Căndea, *Hrisostom Papadopoulos*, p. 386-390.

¹⁹ See the entire paragraph in N. Dumitrașcu, *El Vaticano II*, p. 366.

Normally, if Peter was the leader of the Roman community, Paul could not ignore him; he would not be addressing the Romans without asking for his consent, or at least to inform their pastor.

On the other hand, Saint Paul's habit of not preaching or working where another apostle already had done so, is known, which suggests us that Peter was not in Rome before Paul. In the same vein (manner or style) the captivity epistles must be also seen, written by Paul between the years 61-63, as being devoid of any fraternal greeting to Peter, which – I repeat- would have been unthinkable.²⁰

Therefore, it would seem that Peter did not arrive before the year 63. Within the orthodox conception there was certainly an apostolate of Peter in Rome, but not an episcopate. We can talk about a brief apostolate, most likely started around the year 63, after the release of Paul from his first captivity. It seems that he came back to the East, visited the communities in Mesopotamia and Babylon, wrote his first letter here, and then he re-entered around the year 67, before his martyrdom.²¹

The New Testament also does not speak about any episcopate of Peter in Rome. Neither Peter nor the other apostles were bishops. We cannot equate the apostolate and episcopate. There is a clear distinction between apostolate and episcopate. Through apostolic succession, bishops received the divine grace, with the power to learn, to lead and sanctify, but not the charisms and the general jurisdiction over the territorial unlimited churches, as the apostles had it. This power could not be transmitted through a legal act, but through a sacramental one, which would become the eighth mystery (!), which of course, cannot be sustained, because no Church has eight mysteries.

NIKOLAY AFANASIEV A 'SOLITAIRE' FIGURE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

One of the young Romanian theologians explores the concept of *Papal Primacy* in Afanasiev's ecclesiology in a short paper presented at an international ecumenical gathering, in a professional manner without any prejudice.²² He found that Afanasiev argues first of all that Peter is really the "rock" upon which the Church was built. Furthermore, if Peter were not at the Pentecost when the Church took visible form, the Church would not have existed.²³

²⁰ S. Cârdea, *Hrisostom Papadopoulos*, p. 391.

²¹ G. Marcu, *Episcopatul roman al apostolului Petru în lumina Noului Testament* (The Roman episcopacy of Apostle Peter in the light of New Testament), „Ortodoxia” 4 (1949), p. 128.

²² S. Barbu, *Church Unity and Question of Papal Primacy in Nicholas Afanasiev's Perspective* (paper presented at the 18th Academic Consultation of the Societas Oecumenica, Budapest, August 21-26, 2014), p. 1-13.

²³ N. Afanasiev, *L'apôtre Pierre et l'évêque de Rome*, „Theologia” 26 (1965), p. 628 (cf. Barbu, p. 7).

However, concerning the question of continuity between Peter and the bishops of Rome, Afanasiev said that, *on the one hand*, Peter could not have transmitted his role as “the rock” of the Church since it was an unrepeatable role, and it was a promise made to him personally, whilst, *on the other hand*, the pastoral ministry he exercised as leader of the Church of Jerusalem was continued and repeated by others. Therefore, between the Apostles and those who followed them in the ministry of leaders of that Church, there was continuity, yet the latter did not share in their apostolic ministry.²⁴ What is really interesting is that Afanasiev, unlike most Orthodox theologians, thinks that, even though *for a short period*, still Peter was bishop of Rome. This is why, although all the bishops share in Peter’s chair, according to Cyprian of Carthage, the bishops of Rome succeed Peter in a more special way, which seems to confer on them a *special position* among the other bishops.²⁵

UNIVERSAL JURISDICTION AND THE CONCEPT OF PRIMACY OF “HONOR”

It should be noted that a primacy of universal jurisdiction in the Church was never recognized in any episcopal or patriarchal leadership. The Ecumenical Synods which discussed the legal relations between the principal patriarchal leaderships of the time established only a *hierarchy of honor*, not of law, territorially.²⁶

This is clear from the historical realities, which show that the bishop of Rome had a limited territorial jurisdiction only over a part of the Western Church, as happened to the other four historical patriarchal leaderships (Episcopal), jurisdiction based on the use of Church, not on a primate of divine order, as is suggested in the conciliar documents of Vatican II.

According to Ștefan Barbu, even the concept of *primacy of honor* for the Church of Rome and consequently for the bishop of Rome is contested by some orthodox theologians, having Nikolay Afanasiev the chief of them. The Russian theologian prefers to describe the first not with the classical word of “primacy”, but rather by using the word “priority” in the sense that it is the church that holds priority, or more appropriate “the church-in-priority”. More clearly for Afanasiev, priority meant an “authority of love”, rather than “power” or “special rights”.²⁷ He explains his reason for avoiding the concept of “primacy” through another concept of “Eucharistic ecclesiology” that “excludes the idea of *primacy* by its very nature....

²⁴ N. Afanasiev, *L’apôtre Pierre*, p. 630-632. (cf Barbu, p. 7).

²⁵ N. Afanasiev, *L’apôtre Pierre*, p. 636-637 (cf Barbu, p. 8).

²⁶ Until the schism of 1054, Rome was given only a primacy of honor among the other patriarchal sees, the pentarchy order being as it follows: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

²⁷ N. Afanasiev, *The Church Which Presides in Love*, in: *The Primacy of Peter: Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church*, ed. J. Meyendorff, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press 1992, p. 113 (cf. Barbu, p. 10).

primacy means the power of one bishop over the whole universal Church. Such a power cannot exist in the eyes of Eucharistic ecclesiology, or this power cannot pass beyond the bounds enclosing a local church”.²⁸

And Barbu goes on with the explanation that *Afanasiev* himself makes clear when relating the difference between primacy and priority with his understanding of the relationship between *law* and *grace*, as follows: “Universal ecclesiology and Eucharistic ecclesiology have different conceptions on the question of Church government: the first conceives this government as a matter of law and rights, and the second regards it as founded on grace....The concept of primacy is really the same as the priority only looked at from a lawyer’s point of view”.²⁹

For the Russian theologian this “priority” should not be understood as “primacy of honor”: “for in ancient times the idea of honor and power were closely associated. What is more, there was nothing honorific about priority in the hierarchy of churches, in the modern sense of the word: the church that came first among the local churches won its place by service rendered, and not by prestige”.³⁰

In other words and more clearly, for *Afanasiev* the priority a church enjoys is a “gift of God, and so an election by God”. All other causes that may have contributed to the elevation to the first place of a particular church are only secondary in importance.

However, we should mention *Afanasiev*’s distinction between *primacy*, as the manifestation of law, and *priority* as the manifestation of grace, remains one not fully accepted by Orthodox theologians. For comparison Barbu gives the example of Nicholas Lossky who asks himself “Why should *priority* have a monopoly of ‘grace’ and ‘love’ and why should *primacy* be necessarily understood as legalistic power? Is it not possible to envisage *primacy* as an exercise of presidency in love and over love, as a service, a ministry?”³¹. The same question is taken up also by Zizioulas, namely: ‘Why should priority mean necessarily grace, and primacy, legalism?’³²

At the end, if we consider that Peter worked first in Alexandria, before coming to Rome, then, based on so-called Petrine Primacy among the apostles, logically, Alexandria could also claim the right to universal jurisdiction, not to mention the city of Jerusalem, which, sanctified by the physical presence of Christ the Savior Himself, has a *spiritual primacy* over any Episcopal leadership, and could claim, in its turn, a primate position.

²⁸ N. Afanasiev, *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 115 (cf. Barbu, p. 10)

²⁹ N. Afanasiev, *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 141 (cf. Barbu, p. 10)

³⁰ N. Afanasiev, *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 113 (cf. Barbu, p. 10).

³¹ N. Lossky, *Conciliarity-Primacy in a Russian Orthodox Perspective*, in: *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church*, ed. J. F. Puglisi, Minnesota: Liturgical Press 1999, p. 128-129 (cf. Barbu, p. 11).

³² J. D. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many. Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, California: Sebastian Press 2010, p. 129 (cf. Barbu, p. 11).

‘PRIMACY’ OF CHRIST

Orthodox ecclesiology refuses any primacy of divine order and any geographical – territorial centralism, stating clearly that the Church cannot have another center than on Christ. No bishop has acquired throughout history a divine or human privilege of universal jurisdiction over the Church of Christ, *the only Supreme Bishop* Who is the founder and their only head.³³ The Bishop is the representative of Christ in the world, who by ordination receives the right to teach, to lead and to sanctify the Christian community which he leads.

In the Orthodox tradition the teaching and the ruling ministry is closely linked to the committing of the mysteries (sacraments), because man`s closeness to God cannot be achieved without reaching (performing) the grace within it (*in the teaching and leading ministry*) as the divine power. Therefore, a bishop cannot take up, in the Church, the judicial primacy and the infallibility in teaching without the support of a primate in a special Sacrament, that is, without the right to commit (perform) some mysteries (sacraments) exclusively, or without supremacy in committing some Sacraments. Or, the bishop of Rome, having no right to commit Sacraments, exclusively, or receiving no special grace through a special Sacrament, cannot decide alone nor in teaching or leadership in the Church.³⁴ Therefore, the claim of primacy for the bishop of Rome, cannot be maintained in terms of ecclesiology. No bishop can acquire his power or canonical right over any ecclesiastical jurisdiction without the will and accordance or the allowance of another.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The Vatican II Council is undoubtedly one of the most important moments in the modern history of Christianity, not only because of the extremely generous and challenging topics addressed at the same time, but also because of the large number of people involved in its organization, as well as the time for works, discussions, assessments and, finally, of the assumed decisions. Begun with enthusiasm, both by the *Catholics*, who saw in it an opportunity for internal reform and opening up to the real problems of the society, after the end of the Second World War, and the establishment of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, and *by the Orthodox*, convinced that the time had come for reconciliation after the schism of 1054, the Council has turned progressively into a forum for discussion of the later type *perestroika*. The place of the real reforms, expected primarily by the Catholics themselves, was taken

³³ For details see N. Nissiotis, *Mouvement oecumeniques et Vatican II*, „Istina” 2-3 (1965-66), p. 313-324.

³⁴ D. Stăniloae, *Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), vol. II, Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing House 1978, p. 247.

by more nuanced reformulation of some theological topics of domestic interest, but with major ecclesiological implications, or of repositioning for others, more generally, which also had in mind the relations with other Churches or Christian communities.³⁵

The Orthodox Church looked very carefully at the works of the Council and the reception of its decisions, not only within the Catholic Church, but also, and especially, in the echo felt in the Orthodox world in both the conciliar period, and within the post-conciliar.

The Council reformulates the doctrine of the primacy of the bishop of Rome and of the papal infallibility at Vatican I in an *even more radical manner*, producing a state of disbelief within the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox theologians, who were present in person as observers in the debates, or of analysts *post factum* of the decisions taken, have expressed their disappointment with the content of these conciliar documents, considering that, in the current wording, they are still obstacles in the path towards getting closer to and restoring Christian unity, which are hard to overcome. Strengthening the primacy and infallibility of the pope has direct consequences also on the status of the College of Bishops and its relation with the sovereign Pontiff.³⁶

However, we should note the impact of the Vatican II Council, primarily on the Catholic Church, and secondly on the other Churches and Christian communities as they are called in the conciliar documents. The process triggered by the Council produced irreversible positive changes within Catholicism, although they were accompanied by significant polarizations and tensions due to the ambiguity of the ecclesiological formulations in official documents, followed by the growing opposition between the standardizing and conservative Roman center, with the claim of its absolute authority, and the Catholic bishops, leaders of the local Churches, who want a rigorous application of the principles of diversity, autonomy and communion.³⁷ The tensions between the hierarchical papal centralism and the College of Bishops, between the legal and sacramental, between universal and local, between unity, authority and diversity, are both consequences of the Council in the Catholic world, never satisfactorily resolved, and challenges, or at least topics for thought, for the Orthodox Church everywhere.

Abstract

Second Vatican Council, the biggest event in the modern history of Christianity, triggered a process of opening and reforming of the Catholic Church in an unprecedented scale. For three years have been discussed in detail the issues of major concern, both with purely

³⁵ See N. Dumitrașcu, *Ecclesiastical/Ecumenical Diplomacy*, 97-99.

³⁶ See details in D. Stăniloae, *The Catholic Doctrine of infallibility of the 1st and 2nd Vatican Council*, „Ortodoxia” 4 (1965), p. 459-480.

³⁷ I. Ică jr., *Vatican Council II*, p. 71, 82.

theological and ecclesiastical nature and also pastoral or missionary. One of the concerns of the Council was also, the revitalization of the fraternal relations between Catholics and non-Catholics. This article examines one of the most important theological theme, which unfortunately, remained also after the conciliar or post conciliar discussions, an obstacle to a real dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox, to restore Christian unity: papal primacy, that the Orthodox sees it as a human invention, without biblical and patristic solid bases, term appeared after 1054, as a general feature of the religious policy of the Roman leadership. The Orthodox Church believes in the possibility of restoring Christian unity, but cannot admit the general intercommunion without prior achievement of the unity in faith. Therefore, is expected a decision from the Catholic Church to abandon the claim of primacy and papal infallibility, or a restatement in accordance with the tradition of the first Christian centuries, and also, a redefinition of the relationship between the bishop of Rome and the Catholic Bishops College, in the spirit of a real and effective synodality.

Key words: Council, Papal Primacy, Primacy of Honor, Monarchical Authority, Unity, Orthodox Ecclesiology.

Der päpstliche Primat im Dienst der Einheit der Kirche. Eine Perspektive der orthodoxen Theologie (Kommentare und Bemerkungen)

Zusammenfassung

Das II. Vatikanische Konzil, das das wichtigste Ereignis in der gegenwärtigen Geschichte des Christentums war, initiierte den Prozess der Öffnung und Reform der katholischen Kirche in einem bisher nie dagewesenen Umfang. Drei Jahre lang wurden wichtige Themen, sowohl rein theologischer und ekklesiologischer, als auch praktischer und missiologischer Natur diskutiert. Eines dieser Themen war die Wiederbelebung der brüderlichen Relation zwischen Katholiken und Nicht-Katholiken. Im Artikel wurde die Analyse eines der wichtigsten theologischen Themen unternommen, das leider im Zuge der konziliaren und nachkonziliaren Diskussion ein Hindernis im wirklichen Dialog über die Wiederherstellung der Einheit zwischen Orthodoxen und Katholiken geblieben ist. Es ist der päpstliche Primat, der von Orthodoxen für das Resultat einer menschlichen Invention gehalten wird, beraubt der soliden biblischen und patristischen Grundlagen. Der Begriff erschien nach dem Jahr 1054 als ein grundlegendes Merkmal einer mit dem römischen Primat verbundenen Religionspolitik. Die orthodoxe Kirche glaubt an die Möglichkeit der Wiederherstellung der Einheit der Christen, stimmt jedoch einer Interkommunion nicht zu, ohne die vorherige Herstellung der Einheit im Glauben. Daher wird erwartet, dass sich die katholische Kirche entscheidet, auf den Anspruch des Primats und der päpstlichen Unfehlbarkeit zu verzichten, gemäß der Tradition der ersten Jahrhunderte. Ebenfalls erwartet sie eine erneuerte Definition der Relation zwischen dem Bischof von Rom und dem Kollegium der katholischen Bischöfe im Sinne einer wirklichen und effizienten Konziliarität.

Schlüsselworte: Konzil, päpstliches Primat, Ehrenprimat, monarchische Autorität, Einheit, orthodoxe Ekklesiologie.

Prymat papieski w służbie jedności Kościoła. Perspektywa teologii prawosławnej (komentarze i uwagi)

Streszczenie

Sobór Watykański II, który był największym wydarzeniem we współczesnej historii chrześcijaństwa, zainicjował proces otwarcia i reformy Kościoła katolickiego na niespotykaną dotąd skalę. Przez trzy lata dyskutowano na temat najważniejszych tematów, zarówno natury czysto teologicznej i eklezjalnej, jak i pastoralnej i misyjnej. Jednym z tych soborowych tematów było także ożywienie braterskich relacji między katolikami i nie-katolikami. W artykule dokonano analizy jednego z najważniejszych teologicznych tematów, który niestety pozostał w wyniku soborowej i postsoborowej dyskusji przeszkodą w rzeczywistym dialogu o przywróceniu jedności między katolikami a prawosławnymi. Jest nim prymat papieski, który prawosławni postrzegają jako wynik ludzkiej inwencji, pozbawionej solidnych biblijnych i patrystycznych podstaw. Termin ten pojawił się po 1054 roku jako podstawowa cecha polityki religijnej związanej z prymatem Rzymu. Kościół prawosławny wierzy w możliwość przywrócenia jedności chrześcijan, jednak nie zgadza się na interkomunię bez uprzedniego osiągnięcia jedności w wierze. Stąd też oczekuje się od Kościoła katolickiego decyzji porzucenia roszczenia prymatu i papieskiej nieomyślności bądź też ich przekształcenia zgodnie z tradycją pierwszych wieków. Również oczekuje się redefinicji relacji między biskupem Rzymu a kolegium katolickich biskupów w sensie rzeczywistej i efektywnej synodalności.

Słowa kluczowe: sobór, prymat papieski, prymat honorowy, autorytet monarchiczny, jedność, prawosławna eklezjologia.

