

CHRISTOLOGICAL OR ANALOGICAL PRIMACY. ECCLESIAL UNITY AND UNIVERSAL PRIMACY IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

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What is primacy, then, in the Church, if not precisely the initiation and protection of this step-by-step consubstantial unification of all things in Christ, in which consubstantial unification the very ecclesial being consists? And since Christ is himself not only the ontological/hypostatic event of this consubstantial unification, but also the foremost teacher and initiator of it, through the mystery of the Cross, and in the Spirit, he is indeed the only head and leader of his Church, he is her primordial and ultimate primate. But this means that when we speak of primacy in the Church, *we always mean a Christ-like primacy* (i.e., an *analogical primacy*). That means, *a primacy-in-participation in Christ's unique primacy*. And the way of this participation is, according to Greek Patristic theology, *analogy*, which is identified, in the Areopagitic texts, for example, with *syn-ergy*, which means precisely participation in the divine energy as manifested in Christ-as-primate. How can this be discussed in the context of the contemporary ecclesiological dialogues?

1

The ecclesiological dialogues between East and West over the last fifty years, and especially those between the Roman-Catholic and the Orthodox theologians, have led some theologians from both sides to realize that the basic underlying problem is that, over the course of the centuries—even before the Great Schism, and, of course, in a more decisive way, after the Schism—two different ecclesiologies were gradually created, all the more so in gradual alienation between them. I think that Edward Siecienski's book *The Papacy and the Orthodox: Sources and History of a Debate*¹ is far the best book ever written by an Orthodox theologian on this issue, precisely because it succeeds, by using a highly objective scholarly method of approaching the texts and the problems (it is revealing that one of the book's eminent Roman-Catholic critics wrote that it is impossible for anyone to discover the author's denomination

¹ Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017.

by reading his book), in making this alienation absolutely clear. Thus, according to the book, a gradual over-exaltation of the divine right of Peter's successor to demand absolute primacy—a demand that started, step-by-step, centuries before the Schism—a primacy becoming more and more strictly jurisdictional and pressing for absolute submission and veneration, was met with growing theological scepticism on the part of the East. This was not because a sort of Roman primacy was initially explicitly rejected, but because its Biblical roots were differently fathomed, and it was considered as a privilege bestowed on the bishops of the Old Rome 'by the holy Fathers and the Councils', mainly for political reasons,² and without any universal jurisdictional dimension. It was mainly a spiritual primacy, expressing the unity of the Christian Church, along with the right to appeal to the Popes for a final solution of difficult ecclesial issues. Of course, when the *Filioque* was decisively added to the *Credo*, the Popes, according to the Eastern theologians, became heretics, and no primacy could anymore be accorded to them at all. Things became dramatically worse after the invasion of Constantinople by the Western Crusaders in 1204 and the merciless destruction of the city along with the long occupation that followed. The only reasons for union between the two separate Churches in the following centuries were clearly and exclusively political, stemming from the desperate efforts of some Byzantine emperors to save the remnants of their sinking empire. In the line of thought of the Byzantine theologians of the last Byzantine centuries (such as Niketas Seides, Niketas of Nicomedia, Nilos Doxapatris, George Tornikis, Basil of Ohrid, Andronicos Kamateros, Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch John X Kamateros, Symeon of Thessalonica, Gregory Palamas, Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos, Nikolaos Cabasilas, and others), Christ is the head of the Church, all the Apostles are spiritually equal, and the 'emperors made primates, not the other way around'.³ Even the Roman primacy 'of honour' is now for the first time doubted because of the 'Western heresies'.

But what most concerns us in this paper, is the underlying difference between the two ecclesiologies that were crystallised step-by-step during this period of time; it is precisely for this reason that even on the eve of the departure of the Byzantine delegation to Ferrara, some of its preeminent members would have explicitly preferred to go to the Conciliarist Council of Basel instead. And the difference does not simply mean that there existed a, say, supposedly solid 'Papo-centric' party against a supposedly convinced 'Conciliarist' one. It is rather a growing difference between two different 'ontologies' of the unity of the Church, one that could be perhaps called 'institutional', and another that could be perhaps called 'existential' or, much better,

² According to Siecienski, this happened because in the East 'there were several sees that could claim apostolic origin (e.g., Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus), not to mention all those cities visited by Paul. This relativized the significance of apostolicity and added weight to the principle that church structures were intended to mirror political divisions' (Ibid., 155).

³ Siecienski, *The Papacy and the Orthodox*, 276.

‘participatory’. While these different ‘ontologies’ of the Church represented tendencies rather than a dialectic opposition—and (this is important to stress) they co-existed, more or less, for centuries, after the Great Schism, (and even more after the thirteenth century)—they become two distinctive ecclesiological approaches, culminating, for the West, in Vatican I.

But let us leave for now our historical account in order to switch to some systematic reflection, as is the purpose of this paper. It is a pity that in our ecclesiological, official or academic, discussions we almost never start by asking ourselves and then our opponents what sort of definition of the Church we or they have in mind when we discuss delicate issues such as that of primacy. Or, perhaps better, what is the prevailing characteristic in the image of the Church that each one has in mind: is it the institutional-as-sacramental or the sacramental-as-institutional? For the majority of Roman-Catholic theologians the former prevails, while for the vast majority of Orthodox theologians it is the latter that holds priority. In simple words, the former understands the Church as sacrament in light of her functional/institutional/canonical structure and efficacy; here, even the Eucharist usually tends to be construed in submission and service to this structure.⁴ The latter understands the sacrament as the very essence of the ecclesial structure; it is an ecclesiology of participation, as I have called it, construing the Church as aiming at participating dialogically and analogically, through Christ, in God’s very mode of existence.⁵ In the former case one may wonder whether the unity of the Church is primarily sacramental or canonical/moral and consisting in more or less common ideas and opinions, or ontological, and, finally, whether it implies any ontological change of the mode of our existence or not (i.e., just an ethical/canonical conformity). In the latter case one may, at times, search for the canonical aspect of the Church, not because it does not exist, but because it is clearly of less importance. For an Orthodox Christian, the very being of the Church is deeply connected to the theology of Transfiguration. Because this is what we need the Incarnation for: it is needed in order to have an infusion of divine life into created life. This is the meaning of salvation in ontological terms: now the mode of existence of created nature can change into divine by grace, so that this nature can act, or be acted upon, beyond its limits, to use Maximus the Confessor’s remarkable terms. Resurrection, which is prefigured in Transfiguration, represents the ultimate change of this created mode of existence of beings; as this is prolonged by the sacraments, the Church is revealed as a fundamental event of analogical participation in divine life, since the characteristics of divine life can be

⁴ See on this my *Church in the Making: an Apophatic Ecclesiology of Consubstantiality* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2016), 143–160. Almost all the basic arguments of this paper are extensively discussed in this book, and particularly the First Study (pp. 15–130). For an excellent review of this book see the review essay by Fr Maximus Constatas, in *Analogia* 7, 2019. For the terminology used in this paper see also my *Eucharistic Ontology; Maximus the Confessor’s Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*, Boston: Holy Cross Press, 2010.

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 100ff

transferred to the created life, precisely in an *analogical way*, through Christ, in the Spirit. And, according to the Patristic tradition that culminates, in my view, in the Areopagite as he was read by Maximus the Confessor, the fundamental characteristic of the divine mode of existence that has to be analogically transferred in creation is precisely the *homooousion/consubstantiality*.⁶

2

Thus, the only purpose for the Church of Christ to exist on earth is to introduce us to God's Kingdom, as a participation in God's consubstantial mode of Tri-personal unity, which, as we are going to see, is something that, in a way, starts already now, in history. The Church is not, of course, a duplication of the Trinity, as some Orthodox theologians claim today (usually underplaying, at the same time, the Trinitarian concept of consubstantiality, in order to exalt the 'monarchy' of the Father, and subsequently, of the Primate) but a Christological event, becoming Trinitarian only through and in Christ. That means that she is rooted upon the dialogical/analogical unity between divine and human nature in the one hypostasis of Christ, through the Spirit. This unity is dialogical and analogical because it expresses the unity of all of the divine *logoi* and energies with all of the responding human *logoi* and energies in the one hypostasis of Christ. The Church is the Body of Christ, spiritually growing through a step-by-step mimetical/imitational participation in Christ's loving obedience to the Father's love, in the Spirit, through the mystery of the Cross, which is selfless love, unifying all created beings between them, and, at the same time with divinity. Of course, the Church does not represent an already perfectly achieved consubstantial unity of all beings; the latter is pre-eternally achieved, in the form precisely of a timeless *dialogical inter-giveness of essence*, within the Trinity⁷. The Church is an event of a step-by-step *analogical* imitation of/participation in this divine inter-giveness within the limits of history, as this inter-giveness is being realized as a unifying, or, better, *consubstantializing* activity of the Spirit, who extends through human synergetic response, this Christ-event of consubstantial, ecclesial pan-unity, in creation (and when we use the term *consubstantial*, *consubstantiality*, etc. regarding creation here, we do not mean any abolition of the differences between the created things, but their joining together without confusion in a harmonious and undivided integrating 'identity', in God—that means in Christ's human nature, i.e., in the Church).

What is primacy, then, in the Church, if not precisely the initiation and protection of this step-by-step consubstantial unification of all things in Christ, in which

⁶ Cf. Loudovikos, *Church in the Making*

⁷ This *intergiveness of essence* is precisely what we call *homooousion (consubstantiality)*. See my 'Dialogical Nature, Enousion, Person and non-ecstatic Will in St Maximus the Confessor: The Conclusion of a long Debate', *Analogia* 2 (2017): 79–110, at 92–96.

consubstantial unification the very ecclesial being consists? And since Christ is himself not only the ontological/hypostatic event of this consubstantial unification, but also the foremost teacher and initiator of it, through the mystery of the Cross, and in the Spirit, he is indeed the only head and leader of his Church, he is her primordial and ultimate primate. But this means that when we speak of primacy in the Church, *we always mean a Christ-like primacy* (i.e., an *analogical primacy*). That means, *a primacy-in-participation in Christ's unique primacy*. And the way of this participation is, according to Greek Patristic theology, *analogy*, which is identified, in the Areopagitic texts, for example, with *syn-ergy*, which means precisely participation in the divine energy as manifested in Christ-as-primate. In such a perspective, primacy seems to be a primacy of loving sacrifice and *perichoresis* of all, a Christological/analogical/synergetic primacy as participation in Christ's unique primacy, which took the form of a decisively selfless self-giveness 'for the life of the world'—this is the only divinely given 'authority' to Christ's pupils, and there exists an abundance of Patristic texts that connect, following Paul, all the ecclesial charisms precisely with this divine wisdom of consubstantializing love, which finally forms the very essence of the Church's *esse*.

The idea that the monarchy of God the Father is the direct image of the ecclesial charism of primacy is alien to the Patristic tradition of both East and West. All the many ecclesial *charismata* are particular uncreated energies, and they are necessarily *Christological*, since the ontological unity of divinity with humanity in Christ is their only source—and it would consequently be absurd for the charism of primacy to be an exception. This happens because the life of the Church is built upon the mystery of Christ through the Spirit as an analogical and synergetic step-by-step ascetical struggle to achieve consubstantiality—i.e., the unification of fragmented created nature, which is fragmented due to the inimical narcissistic divergence of our wills. And it is extremely important to note that (as I tried to show in the first study of my *Church in the Making* above) all those particular Christological energies/charismata are indeed ways of achieving consubstantiality, according to Denys the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor—and not only that of the bishop. Each one of them, when properly exercised, unifies all the others in it, while the charisma of the bishop teaches them how to function in this consubstantial way, and it finally expresses this pan-unity in person.

Thus, to project the Trinity directly upon the Church's *esse* can be extremely dangerous, since it can practically underplay history (since history is now *a history of salvation*, deeply connected with Incarnation)—i.e., to underplay the existential dimension of our *becoming members* of the Church through our struggle for *dialogical reciprocity* in Christ. Furthermore, it seems to suggest, consciously or perhaps unconsciously, an ecclesiological model of rigid canonical institutional transcendentalism of hyper-historical perfection (i.e., an *ecclesia perennis* with divinely given structures and perfect institutional unity). Thus, this, so to say, Trinitarian

approach to the problem of primacy tends to ignore the Christological specificity of ecclesiology, though, or precisely because its exponents think that they can directly descend from a Trinitarian account of the 'one and the many' relationship to the Christological, thus ignoring the big difference between the Trinitarian and the Christological consubstantiality (i.e., that the former is pre-eternally achieved, while the latter has to be laboriously achieved step-by-step in history, in the Spirit). In this way, we practically dissolve the most significant part of ecclesiology into a vague Trinitarian projection. Moreover, if we then project, directly again, God the Father's/his Divine Offspring's relationship upon Christ/his members relationship and then on that of the bishop and the faithful, we lose again not only the essential difference between divine and created consubstantiality, but also another most important part of the Christological specificity of ecclesiology, since we ignore that Christ is the head *also of the bishop*, who is not the head of his local Church, except only through analogically/synergetically participating in the uncreated energy/activity of Christ-as-bishop, or, in other words, in Christ as head of his Church. This is why the primate in the Orthodox Liturgy takes off his *homophorion* during the reading of the Gospel, according to St Symeon of Salonica, in order to show that it is Christ himself who is now present there. The same is shown through the bishop's descent from his throne in order to wear his vestments before the Liturgy. Thus, the reality of the primate's charism is a reality of constant reference and mimesis of/or participation in Christ as the only Head of his Church through the bishop, since Christ is the only initiator of the consubstantializing energies, which are the different members/charismata of his Body in the Spirit. In this way, it is only the Christological approach to ecclesiology that reveals the reality and the function of the Holy Spirit in the Church, and through this the good will (*εὐδοκία*) of the Father for the salvation of the world in his Son. The Trinity needs not be directly projected upon the Church, since it is existentially reached only through Christ, who is precisely the one who 'explains' (*ἐξηγήσατο*, according to the first chapter of the Gospel of John) to us, not of course God's essence, but his consubstantial mode of existence, which then becomes the very core of the ecclesial event.

3

We can thus summarize our concept of Christological or Analogical primacy as follows: 1. It is Christ who is the absolute primate of his Church, and any ecclesial primacy is but a synergetic analogical mimesis of/participation in Christ's unique primacy. 2. This is a primacy destined to teach and initiate consubstantiality; this consubstantiality, which can be precisely called on the canonical level *conciliarity*, thus belongs to the very essence of the primate's charisma. In this way, there is not Primacy *and* Conciliarity, since *the latter is the very essence, the only raison d'être of the former*; the opposite is not true!

However, some additional remarks are needed in order to better understand the nature of the ecclesial unity. In our preferred Trinitarian-through-Christology approach, Christ is hypostatically present in his Church not only through the bishop, but, as we said, also through all the other charismata/energies of which his body consists, since all the charismata are, as I claimed, Christological ‘in the place and type of Christ’ (and not only that of the bishop). According to the ‘ecclesiology of consubstantiality’ (as I have termed it in my book *Church in the Making* above), the unity of a local Church is then due not just to a superior charism of unity imposing this unity from above, but it takes place *within each charisma or order as this charisma functions, again through mimesis/participation in Christ’s unifying activity, consubstantially (i.e., unifying within itself all the other charismata/ members of the Church in the Spirit)*. In this case, the primate is, internally, as we said, the initiator and the teacher of this sort of unity *within each charisma* and, externally, its manifestation. Now, in a similar manner, the unity between the local Churches, and, subsequently, the Patriarchal Churches is fundamentally taking place *within each one of them*, and it does not need someone to just externally *impose* this unity from above. The only thing that a primate, patriarchal or even universal, in this perspective, would be allowed to do would be precisely to protect, teach, and promote in a Christ-like analogical, eschatological, perichoretic and sacrificial manner an absolutely consubstantial unity-in-equality of all the Patriarchates—not by imposing any sort of impersonal jurisdictional/canonical unity upon them, but by just teaching and initiating the participatory unity of all the Churches in order for it to take place *within each one of them*, and then simply *expressing/manifesting* this unity *ad extra* (and the Canon Law, in this case, exists not in order to replace, but in order to defend this way of achieving unity). These are, if you like, the primate’s Christological/analogical ‘seniority rights of honour’ (since the expression ‘*presveia timēs*’ does not mean just ‘primacy of honour’ as it is paradoxically rendered today in English). The primate is given the honour to manifest, in a Christ-like *mimetic* (i.e., *participatory way the ecclesial consubstantiality/synodality*), that is, to protect and promote it in a constant mimesis of/participation in Christ’s consubstantializing activity in the Spirit. Christ is the only One who personally exercises the primacy through those who really participate in his uncreated energy of unification of all as this is offered to the Church leaders through their ordination and manifested by them in a potential free dialogical/analogical participation through the Spirit. This is done in Christ’s way of consubstantially gathering all through his love, which means that the primate acts in potential participation in Christ, and not as his *vicar*.

Furthermore, the Canons speak of ‘equal seniority rights’ between the primates of East and West and establishes only a difference of order between them. We need to operate with a concept of ‘ecclesiology of participation’ (i.e., of constant synergetic reference to Christ in the Spirit) as I have called it in my aforementioned book (*Church in the Making*) in order to understand these assertions. The fact that this sort

of understanding of the Church has been almost lost between not only the Roman Catholic but also many Orthodox theologians today has led them to a step-by-step adoption of a basically institutional ecclesiological model (where the Orthodox contribution confines itself to offering some 'pneumatological'/charismatic elements or dimensions in order to smoothen the hard edges of a strictly canonical structure). It is precisely for this reason that some modern Orthodox theologians, who employ an ecclesiological model built upon a strictly Trinitarian/monarchic pattern, claim that a reconsideration of the universal primacy is needed. Some of its exponents want this primacy to be either almost identical to the Roman Catholic jurisdictional primacy, or, at least 'above the primacy of honour'.

However, I think that the Patristic intuition on that point was precisely that if Canon 34 is valid on a universal level then *a universal primus could perhaps oppose or even deny to convoke a Council, cancel or postpone it, or turn over its ecumenical character*, by directly disagreeing with its purpose, or manipulating it, or withdrawing, etc. In that case, the entire Church, in spite of its conciliarity, can practically become a ... captive of this universal *primus*, even if he was 'the President of all heads of Churches and the spokesman of the entire Church once the decisions announced are the result of consensus'.⁸ Is this President allowed to disagree with this ecclesial consensus? If not, then he is no more than an external herald of the Church's decisions without any seniority right, even honorific; if yes, he becomes, practically, a jurisdictional primate and a total possessor of the truth. In other words, the first millennium Eastern Church had, in my view, well understood that any other application of the seniority rights *could possibly result practically in a form of jurisdictional primacy* repressing synodality, not necessarily in the form of a direct papal interference with the affairs of the local Churches (although, for centuries before the Great Schism, as E. Siecienski has so pertinently shown, the papacy pressed the East so hard, at times, in order to impose upon it such a totally jurisdictional authority), but certainly through the possibility of controlling synodical theological freedom and manipulating the participatory and mimetic communion in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, through which the ecclesial charisma of truth is given flesh. But we must re-consider now those 'seniority rights of honour' in light of the above ecclesiological line of thought which has been almost forgotten, though it lies much deeper than any 'Eucharistic' or 'therapeutic' ecclesiology, in the terms of the late Fr John Romanides.

⁸ See John Zizioulas, *The One and the Many. Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World today* (Alhambra: Sebastian Press, 2010), 273.

Now, let us return briefly to what happened in the West concerning primacy. In St Irenaeus, Roman primacy is still strictly connected with Rome's faithfulness to tradition:⁹

The tradition and the creed of the greatest, the most ancient church, the church known to all men, which was founded and set up at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul. For with this church, because of its position of leadership and authority, must needs agree every church, that is, the faithful everywhere; for in her the apostolic tradition has always been preserved by the faithful from all parts.

Cyprian, on the other hand, refers explicitly to Peter's primacy ('He builds his church upon him, one man'), though he still acknowledges that 'certainly the other Apostles were what Peter was, endowed with an equal fellowship both of honour and power; but the beginning is made from unity, that the church of Christ may be shown to be one'.¹⁰

Soon the unity as an expression of the truth of the Church was gradually changed into the opposite (i.e., *the unity as truth*), starting with texts such as the Edict of Valentinian III, of 445:

Therefore, inasmuch as the pre-eminence of the Apostolic See is assured by the merit of St Peter, the first of the bishops, by the leading position of the city of Rome and also by the authority of the holy Synod, let not presumption strive to attempt anything contrary to the authority of that See. For the peace of the churches will only then be everywhere preserved when the whole body acknowledge its ruler [...] But whatsoever the authority of the Apostolic See has enacted, or shall enact, let that be held as law for all.¹¹

Although 'the leading position of the city of Rome', along with 'the authority of the holy Synod' are still mentioned as parallel sources of the 'pre-eminence of the Holy See', along with 'the merit of Peter' (two elements that will disappear from the list of the sources of this pre-eminent authority in the coming centuries), the word 'ruler' here is quite indicative of an evolution that had no direct theoretical parallel in the East. Some years before (on January 417), Pope Innocent I had written to the African bishops, approving their appeal to him in order to condemn Pelagianism:

⁹ *Adv. Haereses*, III.

¹⁰ *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate*, IV.

¹¹ *Constitutio Valentiniani* III, Leo, Ep.xi, PL liv. 636ff.

We approve your action in following the principle of the Fathers that nothing which was done even in the most remote and distant province should be taken as finally settled unless it came to the notice of this See, that any just pronouncement might be confirmed by all the authority of the See, and that the other churches might from thence gather what they should teach.¹²

The style of all these is not far away from what Nicholas I wrote to the Emperor Michael in 865: 'The judge shall be judged neither by Augustus, nor by any cleric, nor by the people... The first See shall not be judged by any'.¹³ These positions culminated in the letter *In terra pax hominibus* from the Roman Church to Michael Cerularius in September 1053: '11.... In prejudging the case of the highest See, the See on which no judge may be passed by any man, you have received the anathema from all the Fathers of all the venerable Councils....32. As a hinge, remaining unmoved, opens and shuts a door, so Peter and his successors have an unfettered jurisdiction over the whole Church, since no one ought to interfere with their position, because the highest See is judged by none'.¹⁴ Here is the first time the term *jurisdiction* is openly employed; it will be used over the centuries that follow. It is true, of course, that since the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Western Church gradually lost a great part of her external security as she lost imperial support; after the multiplication of reigns and enemies that followed, this led, especially after the Schism, to a tendency toward strengthening the canonical structure of the Church together with her institutional centralization, or even toward consolidating a caesaropapism in order somehow to not simply counter-balance but prevail against the civil authorities. But it seems true, on the other hand, that the Roman Catholic theologians soon exceeded their task. Thus, in the *Dictatus Papae* of Gregory VII (in 1075), the Pope becomes the supreme pontiff, above all bishops and emperors, above synods and local churches, an infallible jurisdictional monarch of the Church, and a supreme prince of the secular princes and kings.¹⁵ In the Fourth Lateran Council (in 1215), the Pope is described as possessing 'the plenitude of power',¹⁶ while in the Second Council of Lyons (in 1274) he is called 'the vicar of Jesus Christ, the successor of Peter, the ruler of the universal church, the guide of the Lord's flock'.¹⁷ In the bull *Unam Sanctam* of Pope Boniface in 1302, we see that all of Christ's sheep are 'committed to the pope', and that in the power of the Church 'there are two swords, the spiritual and the temporal [...] But the latter is to be used for the church, the former by her; the former by the

¹² Ep. xxix, (PL 20:582).

¹³ *Mansi*, xv 196Dff.

¹⁴ *Mansi*, xix 638B ff

¹⁵ See J.C. Larchet, *L'Église corps du Christ*, vol. 2 (Paris: Cerf, 2012), 49–50.

¹⁶ See *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Norman P. Tanner, S.J., English Editor, Giuseppe Alberigo and others, Original Text Compilers [Washington DC: Sheed and Ward and Georgetown Univ. Press 1990], Vol. I, 264).

¹⁷ *op.cit.*, 317.

priest, the latter by kings and captains, but by will and by permission of the priest.' The papal authority 'although given to a man and exercised by a man, is not human, but rather divine, given at God's mouth to Peter and established on a rock for him and his successors' (*Corpus Iuris Canonici* ii. 1245 Mirbt, 372). A couple of centuries later, in the decrees of the Ferrara-Florence Council (in 1441–1445) we read:

*Item diffinimus sanctam apostolicam sedem et Romanum pontificem in universum orbem tenere primatum, et ipsum pontificem Romanum successorem esse beati Petri principis apostolorum et verum Christi vicarium totiusque ecclesie caput et omnium christianorum patrem ac doctorem existere, et ipsi in beato Petro pascendi, regendi ac gubernandi universalem ecclesiam a domino nostro Iesu Christo plenam potestatem traditam esse, quemadmodum etiam in gestis ycumenicorum conciliorum et in sacris canonibus continetur.*¹⁸

In this way, as the Fifth Lateran Council (in 1512–1517) declares, 'the person who abandons the teaching of the Roman pontiff cannot be within the church.'¹⁹ All the above claims were further adopted by the First and appealed up to a point by the Second Vatican Council, and I will not, in this paper, discuss the re-considerations that occasionally took place there in detail. What is important, however, is that although the college of bishops is clearly given a canonical existence, mainly through the *Lumen Gentium*, this does not mean a clear synodical authority of this college, since there exists no synodical reciprocity between the primate and the bishops, and the latter exist only in a full final obedience to the former (i.e., without any genuine possibility of a real and free reciprocal interaction between them and the Pope).

It thus seems that instead of a primacy that makes Christ himself analogically manifest through participation/mimesis as-a-Synod, a strong tendency to understand primacy in a vicarious, institutional, and purely jurisdictional manner gradually emerged in the West. Of course, one needs not ignore the efforts made by many Roman Catholic theologians after the Second Vatican Council to somehow consider the serious objections made by theologians of different confessional provenance (or even Catholics) to the above points, some of the most important of whom, I think, include L. Bouyer,²⁰ P. Duprey,²¹ Y. Congar, De Lubac, and J.M. Tillard. Tillard is one of those who tried to solve some of the difficulties deriving from the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, and his work is, in this sense,

¹⁸ op.cit., 528.

¹⁹ op.cit., 640.

²⁰ See his *L'Église de Dieu. Corps du Christ et Temple de l'Esprit* (Paris: Cerf 1970), esp. 476–79.

²¹ See a summary of his views in his 'Some reflections on infallibility' in

Επιστημονική Επετηρίδα Θεολογικής Σχολής του Αριστοτελείου Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης. Μνήμη Ιωάννου Εϋ. Αναστασίου, (Θεσσαλονίκη: Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης, 1992), 189–96 (in Greek).

invaluable. The primacy of the Pope as primacy of his local Church,²² and not as a universal bishop,²³ the synodical synergism between him and the bishops,²⁴ the papal authority as an authority of service in and for the college of ministerium, and not of dominion over the college,²⁵ the effort to understand papal infallibility in synergy with the episcopal college,²⁶ and, of course, the claim that ‘the Bishop of Rome possesses besides, by his function, the ‘power’ to speak in the name of his brother bishops and their Churches’,²⁷ are some assertions toward that perspective, assertions which John Zizioulas, for example, faithfully repeats.²⁸ Tillard dedicates many pages²⁹ to an effort to show that the Bishop of Rome, though he is not the historical successor of Peter,³⁰ assumed in history Peter’s task to watch over the orthodoxy of Christian faith, and take care of Christian unity throughout the world, in a way that his primacy belongs to the very being of the Church—so that without a direct communion with him, all the ‘non-Catholics, cut off from communion with the Church of Rome, no longer appear, therefore, as strangers to the work of salvation, but at the very most on the doorstep of the Church’(!).³¹ All these claims are a direct consequence of Tillard’s fundamental ecclesiological presuppositions, shared by many Roman Catholic authors until today, according to which presuppositions, the very *esse* of the Church is this transcendental (i.e., *hyper-historical*, perfect and immutable) canonical structure, with its necessarily infallible centre of structural unity, a perfect organism of salvation made by Christ through the Spirit to work for human salvation before his second coming, though without any confusion between him and her, since, although she is his spouse, she is, at the very same moment, opposite to him, as ‘an object of grace.’³² The deep and absolute ontological identification-through-participation-in-uncreated-grace of the Church with Christ in the Spirit, made by the majority of Greek Fathers, still remains somehow non-convincing for a significant part of Roman Catholic ecclesiologists—although the emergence of so-called ‘smart ecclesiology’ within the contemporary Roman-Catholic ecclesiological thought today generates high hopes for a new and creative turn in it. I think that we must be patient enough in order to wait for a possibly truly ecumenical and unified Christian council in the future where these suggestions can

²² J. -M.R Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1980), 260.

²³ Ibid., 262.

²⁴ Ibid., 269.

²⁵ Ibid., 272.

²⁶ Ibid., 283.

²⁷ Ibid., 280.

²⁸ Zizioulas, op.cit., esp. 272–3.

²⁹ Tillard, op. cit. 256–318.

³⁰ Despite still being called ‘the successor of Peter’ by *Lumen gentium*, 8.

³¹ Tillard, 313.

³² Ibid., 196.

be discussed in a way that saves both the profound Patristic theology of the Church and the specific needs and issues of modern times.

Concluding formulations

It is as difficult to fathom the *analogical* depth of Christian primacy, as it is, on the contrary, much easier to understand its institutional, more or less jurisdictional applications over the centuries. Because in a purely institutional understanding of the Church, unity is imposed externally and solely by the primate, while in a participatory understanding of her, unity emerges from within. Perhaps the most fertile future problem that we shall have to solve in common will be how to find convincing ways not to combine the two, but to understand these forms of unity as one.³³ *By speaking of an analogical Christological primacy in this paper, we mean that the primate, the more he participates in Christ's primatial/unifying/consubstantializing divine energy in the Spirit, the more he makes transparent the clear presence of Christ, who manifests himself, through the primate, as the absolute servant of the unity of all, as pure loving consubstantiality, as absolute loving self-alienation for the sake of the emerging otherness of all, as pure synodality.* The only way Christ makes himself analogically present as the head of his Church—through a universal primate, struggling to participate in Christ's uncreated energy as unifier of all things—is as manifestation of this *consubstantializing synodality*. This is perhaps, as I think, the hidden theological secret behind the first millennium's official unanimity that the universal seniority rights are seniority rights 'of honour' (i.e., not of any sort of direct or indirect jurisdictional authority). That means that Christological primacy is totally identical with Christological synodality. It is false to claim that during the first millennium there was no theology of universal primacy: the truth is that this theology was still instinctively interwoven with the personal, analogical presence of Christ as the head of his Church in the person of a universal primate 'of honour', whose task and right was not to become the highest secular *primus*, but to manifest,

³³ Something that seems almost impossible when one faces Catholic views like those of J. Schumacher's, who in his article 'Ab Astris ad Castra: an Ignatian-MacIntyrean proposal for overcoming historical and political-theological difficulties in ecumenical dialogue' in this volume (note 26) accuses John Zizioulas for his denial of a universal jurisdictional primacy 'of power', despite the fact that the Metropolitan tries to correct the Orthodox 'myopia' of rejecting a real universal primacy, instead of, merely, one of honor. Schumacher, an ex-Protestant, seems to totally forget that it was precisely this rigid monarchical primacy that led his Protestant ancestors to cut themselves off the 'Roman Anti-Christ', to quote Luther. It is really a theological myopia for a modern Catholic theologian not to understand the inadequacy of such an understanding of primacy (for both Orthodox and Catholics): at the end of his note, the author does not hesitate to propose this dictatorial primacy as a solution to the actual problems between Moscow and Constantinople. The two Churches then need a little tin god (or perhaps a Field Marshal?) in order for him to inflict, in an overbearing way, their immediate conformity. In this case, one legitimately wonders, whether it is this forced and imposed unity that is taken as the Ecclesial truth *of the unity of all*, or it is the ecclesial truth that is expected to lead to unity. Truly, this is a question, as Schumacher claims, of epistemology, in MacIntyrean terms...

in a Christological *kenosis*, the freedom of this Christological *consubstantializing synodality*, Christ and Church as one. No Canon 34 is needed here, on the ecumenical level, for the reasons explained above. We desperately need a fresh theological understanding of the 'seniority rights of honour' today, in line with its use during the first millennium. This does not mean to underplay the canonical aspect of the Church; but it is nonetheless necessary *to stress the ontological source of this aspect*, the Christological (and, through Christ, Trinitarian) foundation of the Church—as expressed, for example, in the Gospel of John (chapters 15–17)—which precedes, illuminates, and theologically justifies the canonical aspect.³⁴

By opposing primacy and synodality, and overstressing either the former or the latter, the theology of the Church, starting even before the Schism in the West, and followed by some recently also by the East, became more and more unable to understand the above position, which suggests that, on the contrary, primacy and synodality are one and the same Christological reality in the Spirit, and not two dialectically opposed poles of ecclesial being. Our recent discussion of a non-jurisdictional against a jurisdictional primacy, the 'one' and the 'many', conciliarity and primacy, etc., simply means that we all seem to admire the same more or less jurisdictional, institutional ('monarchical!') ecclesiological model, and we are now trying to find its, say, less painful form. Moreover, let us not forget the analogous Eastern phenomenon of the ecclesiastical *ethnarchy* during the Ottoman rule, which left its permanent marks upon the vestments of our bishops, and created in the East further presuppositions of an over-exaltation, at times, of a sort of a concentrative primacy; the ecclesiastical fragmentation that followed the liberation proves the fact. On the other hand, the long manipulation and use of the Russian Church by the state created analogous tendencies. (I tried to suggest a solution of the problem of the *diaspora* in my *Church in the Making* above, this time also through Canon 34).

We must honestly admit that what for the Roman Catholics is a dogma is often a habit for the Orthodox. The difference is that, while the Roman Catholics do what they say, the Orthodox say what they do not do. The ecclesiological model which is most admired, perhaps unconsciously, by many Orthodox primates today is, as

³⁴ It is well-known that the supposed lack of obvious and rigid canonical dimensions was, according to the criticism of eminent Catholic theologians, such as De Lubac, the main inconvenience of Afanassiev's 'Eucharistic ecclesiology'—which ecclesiology is, nonetheless, so widely accepted by the Catholic theologians today. However, the Orthodox counter-criticism here is that this Roman-Catholic hyper-priority of the canonical dimension seems to be theologically and Eucharistically uncontrolled; again, it is an epistemological question: what comes first, what is the source of the other? To put it in De Lubacian terms: is the Church that makes the Eucharist and then she is made by her, or it is the Eucharist that makes the Church, and then it offers her its internal logic? The question is not a Scholastic one: is the deep structure of the Church a 'Eucharistic' structure, or the Eucharist is given by the Church her own pre-existing 'canonical' structure? Usually, for an Orthodox, I think, it is the former that seems truer. My personal view is that this tension can be solved only if one tries to overcome this tension, by speaking of an 'ecclesiology of consubstantiality', which can clearly include, as I have claimed (in my *Church in the Making* above, 271–287), both the 'icon' and the 'mimesis', that is both the ontological and the historical/canonical aspects of the Church at once—while the Eucharistic ecclesiology seems to refer only to the former.

I have already said, the Roman Catholic one (of the first Vatican Council!), and some Orthodox bishops seem to feel somehow marginalized when, for theological reasons, they are not allowed to follow it completely. The universal application of Canon 34, suggested by Roman Catholics and accepted by some Orthodox, in order to solve, on the universal level, a false problem created by a false ecclesiological dialectic, will rather create even bigger confusion. No doubt that many Roman Catholics will take this as a final, though indirect, confirmation of their eternal insistence upon the ‘more than honorific’ nature of the universal primacy, and John Zizioulas’s ‘anti-jurisdictional’ suggestion that the universal primate must finally be ‘the President of all heads of Churches’ will be finally smoothly combined by many with some centuries of jurisdictional primacy tradition in the West.

Is there any other option? I believe, yes. The re-discovery of the Greek Patristic tradition in both East and West, over the last hundred years, has brought forth some invaluable pieces of ecclesiological thought of the past, and today we all talk about ‘eucharistic ecclesiology’, ‘therapeutic ecclesiology’, ‘ecclesiology of communion’, ‘Pneumatological Christology’, (and, in my case, about an ‘ecclesiology of consubstantiality’, which, in my view, forms the deepest ontological source of all the above ecclesiologies—along with the cure of their usual one-sidedness). As expected, theologians did not hesitate to put a significant part of the new wine into the old wineskins, each one trying to vindicate his own past, and we are still, up to a point, in this far from comfortable situation today.³⁵ On the other hand, a real ecclesiology-

³⁵ The good thing is that it has been plainly realized by the Catholics that it is impossible to solve the problems concerning the relationship between primacy and synodality without the decisive contribution of the Orthodox theology, as the recent Study by the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, entitled ‘Serving Communion: Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality’ (Los Angeles: Marymount institute Press, 2019) has clearly shown. This is also true concerning parallel modern or contemporary anthropological issues, which have foundered Roman-Catholic theology over the last centuries, and pushed it to the ‘rediscovery’ of the Greek Patristic tradition – and this is also true concerning a deeper understanding of the MacIntyrean principle of *the tradition-constituted reason*. Starting from George-Gennadios Scholarios, and through some great Greek thinkers who tried to assimilate the Enlightenment (minus its atheism), and culminating in the Russian thinkers of the 19th-20th century, along with some contemporary theologians, Orthodoxy moved essentially far beyond the fundamentalism attributed to her by some contemporary Orthodox theologians who are unaware of the above crucial thinkers and their texts; I have analyzed in some detail this unfortunate phenomenon in the seventh chapter (pp 158-210) of my last book in Greek, entitled (in translation) *The Open History and its Enemies: The Rise of the Velvet Totalitarianism* (Athens: Armos 2020) – there exists a deep cultural problem behind this attitude. Unfortunately, these Orthodox theologians give some Roman-Catholic theologians (with a considerably heavier ignorance of even the basics of Orthodox theology) a reason to create a caricature of Orthodox theology in general, fully identifying it with fundamentalism and naysaying (as if those two characteristics are not characteristic of a *religious psychopathology*, common in several denominations and religions). One of those Roman-Catholic theologians is again, I am afraid, Jared Schumacher, in his article in this volume, writing with the usual arrogance of the ex-Protestant Roman-Catholic convert (in the end of his note 34): ‘I agree with Papanikolaou that incorporating a MacIntyrean critique is important for Orthodox theology today as to avoid the trap of fundamentalism; but the question is, what would remain of Orthodox tradition *qua* Orthodoxy if it did?’. In a time when Christianity has been almost overwhelmed by grave secular ideologies, such an *old-fashioned* triumphalism can hardly promote a unified Christian witness in our rapidly amalgamating common *Greek-Western Christian world*. For an effort toward the opposite direction see my *Analogical Identities: The Creation of the Christian Self. Beyond Spirituality and Mysticism in the Patristic*

ical dialogue has started, for the first time after the Great Schism, not only between Orthodox and Catholic, but also within our Churches, and we are deeply grateful to all those who started this, precisely for having paved the way for a real dialogue of truth. We must continue this dialogue in a fresh but decisively non confessional way.

On my part, I believe that an elaboration of an ecclesiology of consubstantiality, and of the Christological or analogical understanding of primacy that follows, is of immense importance if we want to avoid a slow approaching theological impasse not only in our inter-confessional, but even in our inter-Orthodox conversations.