SYNODALITY AND PRIMACY IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

by

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A sense of wonder

Let me begin by recalling a dream that I had many years ago. I was back in Westminster, the boarding school in London that I attended in my youth. A friend took me first through the rooms already familiar to me in my waking life. Then in my dream we entered other rooms that I had never seen before: spacious, elegant, filled with light. Finally we found ourselves in a small, dark sanctuary, covered with golden mosaics glittering in candlelight. 'How strange,' I said to my dream companion. 'I have been living for years in this house, yet never before did I discover these rooms.' And my friend replied, 'Yes, it is always so.' I awoke; and behold, it was a dream.

Indeed, it is always so. In the world around us and in the depths of our own self, there are always new rooms that we have not yet discovered. And this is true especially of the many unknown rooms in the spiritual house in which all of us dwell: the house of the Church. 'The beginning of truth', Plato remarked, 'is to feel a sense of wonder.'[1] We have come to this conference on synodality and primacy precisely in order to renew and enlarge our sense of wonder before the mystery of the Church, to discover rooms that we never knew existed. 'The Eucharist is a continual miracle', St John of Kronstadt used to say; and the same may be affirmed concerning the Church. Gathered here together, let us contemplate this continual miracle with new eyes.

Church and Eucharist

At the outset it will be helpful to put the theme of synodality and primacy in a broader context. Let us pose some fundamental questions. What is the Church here for? What is the distinctive and unique function of the Church, that which the Church does, and which nobody and nothing else can do? What task does the Church perform, which cannot be carried out equally well by a youth group, a musical society, an old people's home, or an ethnic club? What role does the priest fulfil, which cannot be fulfilled by a social worker, a psychotherapist, or a marriage counsellor? What holds the Church together and makes it one? When thinking about the Church, what kind of visual image or 'icon' should we have in our mind's eye?

To questions such as these we may respond: the Church is here to preach salvation in Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. Such an answer is true, but it is incomplete. For the Church is here not only to proclaim salvation in words, but also to render that salvation accessible to us through action. What then is the primary action of the ecclesial community? To answer that, let us recall what happened immediately after the descent of the Holy Spirit on

[1] Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d.

the day of Pentecost, when three thousand converts were baptized. 'They devoted themselves', St Luke tells us, 'to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the *breaking of bread* and prayers' (Acts 2:42). Here, then, is the distinctive and unique function of the Church: to 'break bread', to offer the mystical Sacrifice that is without shedding of blood, to celebrate the Lord's Supper 'until He comes again' (1 Cor. 11:2). It is this that the Church alone can do, that distinguishes the Church from every other kind of social unit. Of course, the Church does many things as well as celebrate the Divine Liturgy. But it is the Eucharist that forms the lifegiving source from which all these other things proceed. It is the Eucharist that holds the Church together and makes it one Body in Christ. Ecclesial unity is not imposed from above by power of jurisdiction, but it is created from within by communion in the sacramental Body and Blood of the risen Lord.

This, then, should be our 'icon' of the Church: a table; on the table, a plate with bread and a cup with wine; and round the table, the bishop and the priests, the deacons – yes, and also the deaconesses – the subdeacons, the readers and the acolytes, along with the holy people, the *laos* or laity: all of them together celebrating the eucharistic mystery. The Church's very name *ecclesia* has a eucharistic reference: it means 'assembly', yet not simply any kind of assembly, but specifically the worshiping assembly, the People of God 'called out' and gathered for the offering of the Divine Liturgy. It is no coincidence that the phrase 'Body of Christ' has a double meaning, signifying both the community and the sacrament. It is equally no coincidence that the words *communio sanctorum* denote both the communion of saints and communion in the consecrated Gifts. The Church is essentially a eucharistic organism, and when she celebrates the Divine Liturgy, then and only then does she become what she truly is. As Cardinal Henri de Lubac insisted, the Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church.[2]

Such has been the answer to our question, 'What is the Church for?' given by theologians in the twentieth century such as Archpriest Nicolas Afanasieff and Metropolitan John Zizioulas. In the words of Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'If asked to point when asked: Where is God? we would point to the person of Jesus Christ; if asked to point when asked: Where is the Church? it is difficult to think how anyone could point to anything but the Eucharist.'[3] Without hesitation I would regard eucharistic ecclesiology, despite the criticisms to which it has been subject, as the most creative element in recent Orthodox thought. And it is precisely from this point of view that we should approach the theme of synodality and primacy. These are to be interpreted, not simply in institutional and juridical terms, as an expression of governance and power, but primarily in a mysterial and sacramental context.

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[2] See Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church* (2nd ed., Fairfax, VA: Eastern Christian Publications, 2006).

[3] Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'Primacy in the Thought of John [Zizioulas], Metropolitan of Pergamon', in John Chryssavgis (ed.), *Primacy in the Church: The Office of Primate and the Authority of Councils*, vol. 1. *Historical and Theological Perspectives* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), p. 267.

Synodality

Turning now to synodality, we can see at once the way in which a church council is to be regarded as a eucharistic event. Most councils have been concerned with the restoration of eucharistic communion when this has been broken, with the question who may or may not be admitted to receive the sacrament; and most (if not all) councils have concluded with a concelebrated Liturgy, embracing all the members.

What is the aim of every council? It is, through the exercise of collective discernment, to attain a common mind. Yet this common mind is not simply the sum total of the convictions of the various participants. When gathered in council, we sinners become *something more* than what we are as isolated individuals; and this 'something more' is exactly the presence of Christ Himself, active among us through the grace of the Holy Spirit. As our Lord has promised, 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in their midst' (Matt. 18:20). It is this dominical affirmation that validates every true council. Is it not significant that the Paraclete descended on the first disciples in Jerusalem, not when each was praying separately on his own, but when 'they were all together in one place' (Acts 2:1)?

'Two or three', said Christ. It is of course true that He also comes to us when we are alone, when in watchful silence we explore the inner sanctuary of our heart and discover there His indwelling presence. Solitude, which is not the same as loneliness, is indeed an integral aspect of our life in Christ. Yet, despite the profound value that solitude possesses, solidarity and togetherness – along with all that is meant by the Russian term *sobornost* – is yet more precious. The Church is not a conglomeration of self-contained monads, but a body with many limbs, organically interdependent.

That is why, within the Church, we each say to the other, 'I need you in order to be myself.' That is why, at every level of ecclesial life, and not least at every council, the members of the Church say not 'I' but 'we', not 'me' but 'us'. 'It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and *to us'*, stated the disciples at the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:28). 'Us' is the decisive synodical word. It is surely a striking fact that in the prayer bequeathed to us by Christ (Matt. 6:9–13), the word 'us' occurs five times, the word 'our' three times, and the word 'we' once; but nowhere in the Lord's Prayer does the Christian say 'me', 'my', or 'I'.

Likewise in the Eucharist – the action that creates the Church – at the *epiclesis* or invocation of the Spirit it is said to God: '*We* offer You this spiritual worship without shedding of blood, and *we* ask, *we* pray and *we* beseech You: send down Your Holy Spirit upon *us*.' By the same token, when reciting the Jesus Prayer that has been my companion for the last sixty years, I prefer to say, not 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me', but rather 'have mercy *on us'*. Needless to say, the more usual form 'have mercy on me' is entirely legitimate; but in saying 'on us' we emphasize that salvation, while personal, is never isolated.

Let us not forget the literal sense of the Greek noun *synodos*. It is formed from *syn*, 'together', and *odos*, 'path' or 'journey'. A synod is a group of persons – primarily bishops, but also including priests and lay participants – who are engaged in a common pilgrimage, who are journeying together on the same path. This idea of a shared journey, implying as it does a

sense of movement and exploration, reminds us that synods are not static but dynamic, not repetitive but revelatory. 'Behold, I am making all things new', proclaims the risen Saviour (Rev. 21:5). At every true church council we experience the newness of our unchanging faith.

When reflecting on synodality, let us envisage it in wide-ranging terms. While it refers in the first instance to the proceedings of actual councils, whether ecumenical or local, it is also to be understood more broadly as a quality extending throughout the Church at every level, in the diocese, in the parish, and in our personal lives. Fr Georges Florovsky used to speak of need to acquire a 'patristic mind'; we may speak likewise of the need to acquire a 'synodical mind'. Synodality implies what has been termed a 'spirituality of fellowship',[4] openness to the other, a willingness to listen. Synodality means not monologue but dialogue, not self-sufficiency but exchange, not solipsism but communion.

We Orthodox are accustomed to speak of ourselves as a conciliar Church, as the Church of the seven Holy Councils. But we have to confess, with humility and realism, that while we affirm synodality in theory, all too often we have neglected it in practice. It is true that, since the era of the Ecumenical Councils, there have been a number of synods: the Council of Hagia Sophia in 879–80; the fourteenth-century Palamite Councils at Constantinople (1341, 1347, 1351); the seventeenth-century councils, notably here at Iaşi (1642) and at Jerusalem (1672), which affirmed the true Orthodox teaching concerning the Church and the sacraments; the Council of Constantinople (1872) that condemned ethnophyletism (regrettably its teaching is not observed in the contemporary Orthodox diaspora); and more recently the great Moscow Council of 1917–18. Attended by priests and laity as well as bishops, tragically cut short by the Bolshevik Revolution, this was in many ways as radical and innovative as Vatican II, if not more so.

Without underestimating all these and other councils, should we not admit that all too often Orthodoxy finds it singularly difficult to act in a conciliar way? How many years of preparation and postponement elapsed before the Holy and Great Council actually met in Crete during 2016! In the Roman Catholic Church, on 25 January 1959 Pope John XXIII, to the astonishment of almost everyone, announced the summoning of an Ecumenical Council; and in less than four years, on 11 October 1962, the Council actually began. I am afraid that this is not the way in which things happen in the Orthodox Church. As long ago as 1902 the Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III sent an Encyclical Letter to all the Orthodox Churches, calling for closer contacts and co-operation. This received a favourable reception. In particular, the Russian Church replied in 1903, emphasizing the importance of 'special assemblies of Orthodox bishops', drawn from all the various Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches, to confer face to face and 'mouth to mouth' on issues of shared concern.[5]

[4] Paul Valliere, 'The Ethical Reality of Councils', in Chryssavgis, *Primacy in the Church*, vol. 1, p. 159.

[5] For Joachim III's 1902 Encyclical, see Constantin G. Patelos (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement: Documents and Statements 1902–1975* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978), pp. 27–33; for the Russian reply, see Athelstan Riley (ed.), *Birkbeck and the Russian Church* (London/New York: SPCK/Macmillan, 1917), pp. 247–57, especially p. 248.

Here we have the seed that led eventually to the Holy and Great Council of 2016; but it was a long time before this seed bore fruit. In 1923 the Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios IV Metaxakis convened what was intended to be a Pan-Orthodox Conference at Constantinople; but a number of Orthodox Churches failed to attend, and several decisions of this Conference proved deeply divisive, in particular the adoption of the New Calendar. After this, in 1930 an Inter-Orthodox Commission met at the Monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos – there were no women among the delegates! – with the task of preparing for what was termed the ‘Prosynod’, which in its turn was expected to lead to a full Pan-Orthodox Council. But in the event the Prosynod was never convened; still less did the proposed Pan-Orthodox Council itself materialize.

In 1965 the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras revived the idea of the Holy and Great Council when he convened the first Pan-Orthodox Conference at Rhodes. Here a comprehensive list of possible topics was drawn up. Further preparations for the Council were made at subsequent Pan-Orthodox Conferences in Rhodes and Chambésy. Yet more than a further half-century was to elapse before the Holy and Great Council finally met in Crete in 2016. This continual postponement of the Council recalls the experience of travelling by air in the 1940s or 1950s. As we waited in the runway, the engine kept revving up, the propellers whirled round and round, but it seemed as if the aeroplane was never actually going to get airborne. Hence the most significant thing about the Crete Council of 2016, viewed in this light, was that at long last the Council had finally met.

Sadly the proceedings of the long-awaited Council turned out to be something of a disappointment. It was far from being pan-Orthodox. Of the fourteen Churches that comprise the worldwide Orthodox communion, only ten attended. The Churches of Antioch, Georgia, Bulgaria and Russia chose for various reasons not to come. The OCA (Orthodox Church in America) was not invited. The absence of the Russian Church was particularly damaging; it was also a surprise, for until the last moment the Patriarchate of Moscow had taken an active and positive part in the preparations.

Before the meeting of the Crete Council, some Orthodox spokesmen speculated whether it might not prove to be the Eighth Ecumenical Council. In retrospect no one today takes that view. Indeed, the Crete Council adopted a significantly different procedure from the seven Ecumenical Councils. At the Ecumenical Councils in principle – perhaps not always in practice – all the bishops of the Christian world were invited, since from a sacramental standpoint all had been consecrated in the same way, and therefore all enjoyed the same gifts of grace. Furthermore, at the Ecumenical Councils each bishop voted individually, and decisions were reached by majority vote. The dissenting minority was usually extremely small – at Nicaea I (325) it consisted of no more than two bishops – but nonetheless a dissenting minority existed.

The procedure at Crete was different. Its guiding inspiration was not so much sacramental and charismatic as administrative and bureaucratic. Not all bishops were invited to the Council, but only twenty-four from each Patriarchate or Autocephalous Church. Had all the fourteen Orthodox Churches sent twenty-four delegates, there would have been 336 bishops

at Crete; in actuality the number was not much more than 150. (Of course, some Orthodox Churches do not have as many as twenty-four bishops; this is the case, for example, with the Churches of Cyprus, Albania, Poland, and of the Czech Lands with Slovakia.)

Another point of difference between Crete and the Ecumenical Councils was that at Crete, so it was decided beforehand, decisions should be reached, not by majority vote as at the Ecumenical Councils, but by consensus. I take this to have meant that, whereas there might have been dissenters *within* each delegation of twenty-four, yet the various delegations, each taken as a whole, were all to be required to accept the resolutions by majority vote. Otherwise a single dissenting bishop could have paralysed the entire proceedings.

Following a decision reached by the Pan-Orthodox Conference in 1976 – no less than forty years previously! – six topics were chosen for discussion at Crete, and on all of these preliminary papers were submitted to the Council:

1. 'The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Contemporary World. The Contribution of the Orthodox Church to the Establishment of Peace, Justice and Freedom, of Brotherhood and Love between Peoples, and the Removal of Sexual and other forms of Discrimination.'
2. 'The Orthodox Diaspora.'
3. 'Autonomy in the Orthodox Church and the Manner of its Proclamation.'
4. 'The Mystery of Marriage and its Impediments.'
5. 'The Importance of Fasting and its Observance Today.'
6. 'Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World.'

Several comments spring immediately to mind. First, these six topics were surely too many to be considered in depth at a meeting that lasted only a little more than a week. In the Roman Catholic Church, the Council of Trent lasted sixteen years, while Vatican II extended across four years, with the sessions amounting altogether to an aggregate of nine months. Because of the short time available and the variety of topics placed before it, the Crete Council lacked a clear focus.

In the case of the seven Ecumenical Councils, each was summoned to deal primarily with a single doctrinal issue that was causing acute controversy throughout the Christian world. But in the case of the Crete Council, there was no such single issue of burning concern. For example, at the end of the Sunday Liturgy in Oxford, where I live, I do not find that I am surrounded by agitated parishioners, exclaiming: 'Despota, we could not sleep a wink last night. We are all so worried about the manner of proclaiming autonomy.'

Clearly, not all of the six topics are of equal importance. The first, on 'The Mission of the Church', is exceedingly general; as a result, the text eventually adopted by the Council said little that was exciting or unexpected. As regards the third topic, surely the question at issue in contemporary Orthodoxy is not the proclamation of autonomy but the proclamation of autocephaly. But this was not included in the agenda and was not discussed. I do not recall anything being said in Crete about the status of the OCA, recognized as autocephalous by the Moscow Patriarchate but not by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a matter that has been pending

for nearly fifty years. Equally nothing was said about the melancholy confusion in Ukraine, and the possibility of establishing an autocephalous Ukrainian Church. Again, I ask myself: Do we really need a Holy and Great Council to make decisions about fasting? Surely this can best be discussed locally and personally at a pastoral level, with the parish priest or the spiritual father.

Two, however, of the six topics are certainly of major importance: the canonical situation of the so-called Diaspora, and the relations of the Orthodox Church with the non-Orthodox world. Yet on these two questions the preliminary papers failed on the whole to come to grips with the real problems involved. As regards the Diaspora, for example, the preliminary papers first noted the failure in the western world to observe the canonical rule of one bishop in each place. This, however, is something we have all been lamenting for the last hundred years. Then it rightly commended the establishment of an Episcopal Synaxis in each area of the Diaspora; but this is something already decided at the Pan-Orthodox Conference in 2009. Otherwise the preliminary paper, and the eventual resolution adopted at Crete, said nothing that was new.

In general, it has to be admitted that the six preliminary 'position papers' discussed at Crete were somewhat conservative in spirit; and the emendations adopted at the Council – which were not extensive – served for the most part to reinforce the conservative character of the documents.

Overloaded though the agenda was at Crete, there were a number of grave problems in today's Orthodox Church about which the Council said nothing. As already noted, it did not consider autocephaly. The question of the Calendar was not raised. Probably this was wise, for there was little that the Council could have done about this, since it is unlikely that Churches following the Old Calendar, such as Russia, would agree to introduce the New. Any such attempt would probably lead to schism.

Nothing was said about the manner of receiving converts into the Orthodox Church. There is a curious discrepancy in present-day Orthodox practice.[6] Since the eighteenth century the Church of Russia has generally received Roman Catholic proselytes simply by confession of faith and absolution, without requiring chrismation or (still less) rebaptism. On the other hand, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), which since 2007 has been in full communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, frequently rebaptizes converts, including Roman Catholics. A similar practice exists elsewhere in the Orthodox Church, notably on Mount Athos. Where baptism is required, it is not said to be 'conditional'.

Now this is clearly not simply a matter of administrative practice, but raises a point of doctrine. It involves the question: Do non-Orthodox Churches possess valid sacraments? Within Orthodoxy there are some, in both the Greek and Slav Churches, who maintain that outside the visible limits of the Orthodox Church there is no divine grace and no valid

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[6] See Kallistos Ware, 'The Rebaptism of Heretics in the Orthodox Canonical Tradition', in Andrew P. Roach and James R. Simpson (ed.), *Heresy and the Making of European Culture: Medieval and Modern Perspectives* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2013), pp. 31–50.

sacraments. They appeal for support to the decision taken by the Eastern Patriarchs (apart from Antioch) in 1755.[7] This, however, is by no means the universal opinion within Orthodoxy. There are others, such as Fr Georges Florovsky in his well-known article 'The Limits of the Church', first published in 1933,[8] who argue that the charismatic and canonical boundaries of the Church do not exactly coincide. For myself I find it literally incredible that the Pope should be considered not merely a layman but an unbaptized pagan. Of course, much depends on what is meant by 'valid'. I had hoped that the Crete Council would formally revoke the 1755 decision, and would decree that all converts, already baptized in the name of the Trinity with the use of water, should be received neither by rebaptism nor yet by simple profession of faith with absolution but by chrismation. In this way a uniform practice throughout Orthodoxy would be secured. But regrettably on this matter the Cretan delegates remained, in the words of the Akathist Hymn, 'dumb as fishes'. The matter was not discussed.

Further issues ignored in Crete, although subject to vehement controversy in the non-Orthodox West, were the ministry of women in the Church and the practice of so-called 'same-sex marriage'.

So how are we to assess the Council of Crete? After such lengthy preparations, what did we actually achieve? Perhaps the Crete Council is best regarded, not as an isolated happening, a one-off event, but as the beginning of a process, as the first in a series of such meetings. At Crete Patriarch Daniel of Romania proposed that there should be a Holy and Great Council every seven years; and he offered on behalf of the Romanian Church to be the host at the next such gathering. This last is certainly a vital point, for Holy and Great Councils are costly occasions, and we do not have a Christian Emperor to cover the expenses. Surprisingly the Crete Council dispersed without making a decision on when and where the next Holy and Great Council was to be held, and no continuation committee was set up. We need to start working now towards a further council, which we hope will be fully pan-Orthodox. Preparations for the Cretan assembly lasted, as we have seen, for 114 years, from 1902 to 2016. Shall we have to wait for another 114 years before there will be a sequel?

Fortunately at Crete there was little or no political interference. For the future let us erect a placard: Politicians keep out! Admittedly in the Byzantine era the Christian Emperors played a prominent part in the Ecumenical Councils. But Putin is not the Emperor Constantine, nor is Poroshenko the Emperor Justinian.

The most important thing about the Crete Council, as we have said, was that it actually met. Subsequent Councils, so we hope, can deal with the matters that were not examined at Crete. What the Crete Council has done is to reaffirm the synodical spirit of Orthodoxy, its

[7] See 'A Constitution of the Holy Church of Christ [A. D. 1756] defending the Holy Baptism given from God, and spitting upon the Baptism of the heretics which are otherwise administered', in William Palmer, *Dissertations on Subjects Relating to the "Orthodox" or "Eastern-Catholic" Communion* (London: Joseph Masters, 1853), pp. 199–202. The correct date of this decree is 1755.

[8] Originally published in *Church Quarterly Review*, vol. 117, no. 233, pp. 177–31; reprinted, under the title 'The Boundaries of the Church', in Richard S. Haugh (ed.), *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 13. *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach* (Vaduz: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), pp. 36–45. Haugh has combined the original text in *Church Quarterly Review* with additional material by Florovsky, translated from the Russian.

conciliar ethos. And for this we are grateful above all to the leadership and persistence of His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

Primacy

Coming now to the subject of primacy – which is of such central significance in the current Orthodox/Roman Catholic dialogue – the first thing to be said is that synodality and primacy are complementary and interdependent. There is between them, as Metropolitan John Zizioulas has rightly insisted, an 'inseparable link'.[9] 'In Orthodox ecclesiology,' he writes, 'there can be no such thing as primacy without a council, nor, conversely, can there be a council without a primate.'[10] This follows, indeed from the eucharistic nature of the Church. At every concelebration of the Eucharist there is always one who fulfils the role of liturgical president; and in a similar way at every church council – and the council, as we have seen, is basically, a eucharistic event – there is one who acts as president and primate.

Between the primate and his fellow bishops, as Apostolic Canon 34 makes clear,[11] there is a reciprocal relationship. The bishops are not to act without the primate, nor the primate without the bishops. There is between the two what may be termed co-responsibility and differentiated interdependence. And what is the chief function of primacy? It is to promote mutual consultation and so to safeguard the unity of the Church. The primate is basically a bridge-builder. In the words of Fr John Meyendorff, 'The essential functions of the "first bishop" consist in assuring that a constant consultation and conciliarity takes place among all Orthodox Churches, and that ecclesiastical order (especially local and regional unity of all the Orthodox) be secured.'[12] Thus the ninth-century *Eisagoge*, after describing the Patriarch of Constantinople as 'the living and animated icon of Christ', goes on the affirm that his task is 'to return all heretics to Orthodoxy and the unity of the Church', while Canon 102 of the Council *in Trullo* states that his vocation is 'to bring back the lost sheep'.[13]

Primacy, as Fr Alexander Schmemann observes, exists in contemporary Orthodoxy in a 'great variety of existing patterns – from the almost absolute "monarchy" of the Russian patriarch to the more or less nominal primacy of the archbishop of Athens'; this 'reveals the absence of a common understanding of primacy [in the Orthodox Church], or of a constant canonical theory of it'.[14] As Archdeacon John Chryssavgis admits, 'The truth is that we do not

[9] In John Chryssavgis (ed.), *Primacy in the Church. The Office of Primate and the Authority of Councils*, vol. 2. *Contemporary and Contextual Perspectives* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), p. 447.
[10] 'Primacy, Ecclesiology, and Nationalism', in Chryssavgis, *Primacy in the Church*, vol. 1, p. 301.
[11] Apostolic Canon 34 is quoted in full in the Ravenna Statement adopted at the tenth plenary session of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (8–14 October 2007): see §24, in Chryssavgis, *Primacy in the Church*, vol. 1, p. 314.
[12] 'The Ecumenical Patriarchate in the Twentieth Century', in Chryssavgis, *Primacy in the Church*, vol. 1, p. 403.
[13] These two texts are quoted by Alexander Rentel, 'The Canonical Tradition: Universal Primacy in the Orthodox Church', in Chryssavgis, *Primacy in the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 573 and 583. On the role of the Pope as 'the visible sign and guarantor of unity', see Bishop Dimitrios [Salachas] of Gratianopolis, 'The Ministry of the Bishop of Rome: From Doctrine to Modes of Exercise', in Chryssavgis, *Primacy in the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 587–610, especially pp. 588, 590–2. What is said there about the Pope may be applied *mutatis mutandis* to the Ecumenical Patriarch.
[14] 'The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology', in Chryssavgis, *Primacy in the Church*, vol. 1, p. 340.

really have a developed doctrine or – more correctly – a defined apology for the concept of primacy.'[15] While the Patriarchate of Moscow agrees with the Ecumenical Patriarchate that Constantinople holds the first place in the *taxis* or canonical order of the Orthodox Church, there is no full agreement between them concerning the scope and the practical implications of this 'first place'. The Grand Logothete Theodore Metochites said in the fourteenth century that the great men of old have expressed everything so perfectly that they have left nothing further for us to say. But at any rate as regards the question of primacy in the Orthodox Church, this is by no means the case. The last word has not yet been spoken.

The lack of agreement over the primacy of the Ecumenical Throne can be seen, among other things, in the conflicting views concerning the granting of autocephaly. (Perhaps we should speak not of 'granting' but of 'recognizing' autocephaly.) Constantinople sees this as the prerogative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate; Moscow considers it the responsibility of the Mother Church. This divergence is evident in the disagreement that arose in 1970 concerning the OCA. Moscow, on the grounds that it was the Mother Church of the Russian Metropolia in the USA, granted autocephaly to its daughter, but Constantinople refused to recognize this action. Fortunately on this occasion sacramental communion between the two Patriarchates was not broken. But the extraordinary fact remains that, nearly half a century later, no solution has been found to this disagreement.

More serious is the conflict that has arisen in 2018 over Ukraine. The Patriarchate of Constantinople has granted a *tomos* of autocephaly to the schismatic groups in Ukraine, to the so-called 'Kievan Patriarchate' under Philaret Denisenko and to the so-called 'Autocephalous Church' under Metropolitan Makary. Rejecting this decision, Moscow retains under its jurisdiction the portion of Ukrainian Orthodoxy that is headed by Metropolitan Onufry, which contains in fact considerately more parishes that the other two groups together. As a result Moscow has taken the decision to break communion with Constantinople, although the latter has not so far retaliated, but seeks to maintain full communion with Russia. Several of the other Orthodox Churches have urged that this breach between Moscow and Constantinople should be resolved at a pan-Orthodox level, either by reconvening the Crete Synod or by summoning a special *synaxis* of all the primates of the worldwide Orthodox Church.

With all due respect to the two Patriarchates, many of us are disturbed by the actions of both parties in this complex and unhappy dispute. While the Ecumenical Patriarchate sees itself as the Mother Church of Ukraine, it has to be acknowledged that for more than 330 years Ukraine has formed an integral part of the Russian Church. This is a fact of history, and, as Aristotle remarks, 'Even God cannot change the past.'[16] At the same time, while reservations can be expressed concerning the policy of Constantinople, there is reason also to be disquieted by the decision of Moscow to break communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In the words of Archbishop Anastasios of Albania, with specific reference to the crisis in Ukraine, 'It is unthinkable that the Divine Eucharist, the mystery par excellence of the infinite love and utter humiliation of Christ, could be used as a weapon against another Church … However serious

[15] 'Reflecting on the Future', *Primacy in the Church*, vol. 2, p. 454.

[16] Aristotle, *Nicomachaean Ethics*, book 6 (1139b10–11), quoting the poet Agathon.

they may be, the accumulated questions of jurisdictions on no account may constitute a cause for a Schism of Orthodoxy, anywhere in the world.'[17] Alas! What Archbishop Anastasios has termed 'unthinkable' is exactly what has in fact happened.

It has been said by the Fathers that to start a schism is worse than to commit murder. Schisms are easy to instigate but hard to heal. For seventy-five years, from 1870 until 1945, there was a schism between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Bulgaria; and the cause was precisely the question of autocephaly. Let us pray that the present schism between the second and the third Rome will not last for three-quarters of a century.

The inability of the worldwide Orthodox Church to reach agreement over the OCA and, more recently, over Ukraine has led some – particularly Roman Catholics – to suggest that what Orthodoxy needs is a greatly strengthened primacy at the universal level. Personally I am unenthusiastic about such an argument. If we are to develop further our understanding of primacy, this should not be simply for negative reasons, as a solution to particular problems, but it should be inspired by a positive vision of the reality of the Church. Let us not be reactive but proactive.

Before leaving the topic of primacy, let us emphasize one basic point, that applies not only to the exercise of primatial authority but to every level of ecclesial ministry. When the apostles disputed about who should have the first place, Jesus rebuked them: 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It should not be so among you' (Matt. 20:25–26). Christ is entirely unambiguous: 'Not so among you!' The exercise of authority within the Church is to be utterly different from that which prevails in civil organizations. As a Kingdom not of this world – eucharistic, pentecostal, eschatological – the Church is unique. She is never to be assimilated to models of power and government prevailing in the fallen world around us. The bishop is not a feudal overlord or an elected parliamentary representative. The chief bishop or primate is neither a dictator nor a constitutional monarch nor the chairman of a board of directors.

Having stated what ecclesial authority is not, Jesus then goes on to specify what it is. 'It should not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant (*diakonos*) … even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matt. 20: 26–28). Such is the true meaning of primacy. The first shall be the last. Power, says Christ, means service; *exousia* signifies *diakonia*. The perspective has to be reversed, the pyramid stood upon its head. All genuine primacy is kenotic; the primate is the servant of all. Among the titles applied to the Pope, the one that appeals most immediately to the Orthodox is *servus servorum Dei*, 'the servant of the servants of God'. The same title can be applied to every primate in the Church. And if the primate's vocation is to serve others, then his ministry involves sacrifice and even martyrdom, outward or inward: he may be called to 'give his life', as was done by Christ. Above all the primate carries out his ministry in a spirit

[17] Letter of Archbishop Anastasios of Albania to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, dated 7 November 2018.

of love. As Fr John Behr and Archdeacon John Chryssavgis have rightly said, 'Primacy presides in kenotic love.'[18]

The aged woman and the uncompleted tower

Among the richly symbolic visions to be found in *The Shepherd* of Hermas, there are two which express in a striking way the two contrasting aspects of the Church. First, Hermas sees the Church as a venerable woman of great age. 'And why is she so old?' he asks; and he is told, 'Because she was created before everything else; and because of her the world was framed.' After that, Hermas is shown a great tower, to which fresh stones are being continually added.[19]

Such is the paradoxical character of the mystery and miracle of the Church. In the words of Fr Alexander Schmemann, 'The Church, which by her very nature belongs to the aeon, to the Kingdom of the age to come, abides yet in history, in time, in "this world". She is *in statu patriae*, but also *in statu viae*. She is fullness, but she is also mission.'[20] The Church is old yet young, unchanging yet ever new. She is plenitude and completion, eternal, pre-existent, but at the same time she is dynamically caught up in the ever-evolving movement of history, implicated unreservedly in a process of adaptation, renewal and growth. She is transcendent yet fragile. Stressing these two aspects, both the aged woman and the uncompleted tower, and borrowing a phrase from Plato,[21] Fr Georges Florovsky describes the Church as 'the living image of eternity within time':[22] she is the 'image of *eternity*', yet she is a '*living*' image, an 'image *in time*'.

If, during our reflections on synodality and primacy, we keep in view these two aspects of the Church, contrasting yet complementary, we shall not wander from the true path.

[18] Contemporary Ecclesiology and Kenotic Leadership: The Orthodox Church and the Great Council', *Primacy in the Church*, vol. 2, p. 914.

[19] *Vision* II, iv, 1; III, ii, 4–9.

[20] 'The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology', in Chryssavgis, *Primacy in the Church*, vol. 1, p. 354.

[21] Plato, *Timaeus* 37d.

[22] 'Sobornost: the Catholicity of the Church', in E. L. Mascall (ed.), *The Church of God* (London: SPCK, 1935), p. 63; reprinted in Richard S. Haugh (ed.), *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 1, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972), p. 45.