

International Association of Orthodox Dogmatic Theologians
in partnership with
Orthodox Theological Faculty of Arad

PRIMACY AND PRIMACIES IN THE CHURCH

Caraiman Monastery (Romania)
25-27 September 2016

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House Editing, 2018

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The Primacy and Catholicity of the Church (Πρωτείο και καθολικότητα της Εκκλησίας)

Within the synodical institution—as an administrative form of the Church—the authority of the Church and the meaning of primacy (and of the *primos*) can not be seen and interpreted separately from the basic attribute of the Church, which is *Catholicity*. This necessity arises from the fact that the Church extends to the whole world beyond time, national, cultural and racial discrimination¹. In this context the concept of primacy exceeds the importance of a simple governing body. Primacy in the Orthodox Church is understood and interpreted within the synodical system of management and operates in the Eucharistic congregation of the faithful.

St. Maximus the Confessor presents the catholicity of the Church (which is inseparably connected with its unity),² when referring to the way in which the Church is the image and type of God. God created the world, connects and conjoins everything through his providence and determines each person's boundaries separately in a conclusive unity, even though the very same

¹ John Karmiris, *Ορθόδοξος Εκκλησιολογία [Orthodox Ecclesiology]*, Athens 1973, p. 300.

² Gregory of Nyssa, *In Inscriptiones Psalmorum*, in: *Gregorii Nysseni Opera V*, Mc Donough, J. - Alexander, P. (ed.), Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962, p. 129 (PG 44, 557).

nature leads creation to division and dissolution. So likewise the Church provides created beings—which differ in nature, gender, species and opinion—unity, and grants the divine form and the name of an identity that “we are also called and are Christians.”³

The unifying principle, which determines the catholicity of the Church, is Jesus Christ. This is not a conventional principle, which could be converted and changed during every period of time concerned or the needs of people of specific ethnic and cultural areas. The unifying principle of the Church has an ontological character: that is why it differentiates the true unity from any false one. This unity goes beyond the divisions of conventional society and leads to nature itself, because it is not based on a change of thinking and or circumstances of man, but the *reconstruction* and *reconstitution* of life itself. The existing society is not converted to another, but a *new society* is created, superior in value to the previous one. In this society man (anthropos) integrates *creatively*. Christ Himself, acting as a crucible, according to St. John Chrysostom, de-constitutes people with all the secular and contractual peculiarities and dependencies and reconstitutes them into a new society of peace and reconciliation, on the one hand between man and God, the created nature and the uncreated God, on the other hand between people.⁴

According to St. Maximus the bond of cohesion of this unity is *faith*. Within faith, through *catholic (universal/inclusive)* reference and *meeting*, they adhere to each other and are connected inside a single and indivisible grace.⁵ This happens because faith unshackles man from the strict rules of the correct and philosophical discourse leading him/her on a path, where its end is the beginning,⁶ since the knowledge of God, which is conscious faith, entails its own incomprehensibility.⁷ That is why “faith,”

³ Maximus The Confessor, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 664D–665C.

⁴ John Chrysostom, *In Epistolam ad Ephesius V*, PG 62, 40A–D. Cf. *Eph.* 2:15–16.

⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 665D.

⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium II*, 85–89, in: *Gregorii Nysseni Opera I*, Jaeger, W. (ed.), Leiden: F. J. Brill 1960, p. 251 ff (PG 45, 940B–D).

⁷ Idem, *De Vita Moysis II*, in: *Gregorii Nysseni Opera VII*, Musurillo, H. (ed.),

according to St. Gregory the Theologian, not only refers to that of the Jews or Christians, but something that goes beyond the rational and conventional life-style: it concerns all people who live a virtuous and righteous life, where this way of life is that which alienates man from the common body of the Church.⁸ So faith transmutes people into sons “through faith in Christ” creating a nation, “the Christian nation.”⁹ In this “supranational” society, all people are blended regardless of origin, gender, language or culture on the basis of the new identifying element, which is none other than the sonship of persons in Christ.¹⁰ Therefore faith unites everyone into *one society*, going beyond the logical contradictions, physical differences and conventional-social discrimination.¹¹

Based on the above, the Church is not just “the people of God,” as is held by the Roman Catholic Church and emphasized by St. Augustine,¹² but “the Body of Christ” because she primar-

Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964, p. 87 ff (PG 44, 377B).

⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Monitum in Orationem XVIII*, PG 35, 992B: “He [meaning his father] was ours before even going in our the Church court [i.e. in the Church]; his way [of life] made him an adoptive son to us. Just as many of our own, whose life alienates the common body, is not with us; so many outside of us, who by the way [of their life] achieve faith and need the name [of the son] have practically the property of sonship”. This observation of Saint Gregory should be interpreted regarding the relationship of man with Christianity, because faith of course, as a way of life, does not replace the sacrament of baptism, but a condition of grafting the human body in the Church.

⁹ 1 Peter 2:9. See relevant information John of Damascus, *Contra imaginum*, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskus III*, Kotter, B. (ed.), Berlin: De Gruyter 1975, p. 72 (PG 94, 1320D).

¹⁰ q. v. Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyrorum in Gesesim IV*, PG 69, 184D-185A.

¹¹ In this context, the universality of the Church differs from that which is set out in paragraph 35 of the Ravenna Statement (2007), described as a commitment of decisions of a council for “all Churches and all faithful, at any time and place” because faith is not “binding”, but expressed *universally / inclusively* by the whole Church.

¹² Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis) of Australia, *Περί τὸ Ἀλάθητον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἐν τῇ Ὁρθόδοξῳ Θεολογίᾳ* [On the infallibility of the Church in the Orthodox Theology], Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia of the Church of Greece, 2014, p. 62.

ily unites people in the one name of the Christian, catalyzing diversity before God and underlining the qualitative nature of the Church.¹³ That is why the catholicity of the Church does not primarily relate to the place and time, as a “universal church,” which includes all the individual local churches, but is interpreted qualitatively, in other words as each local Church, which experiences and teaches in one seamless continuation, the one revealed truth against heretics and schismatic “pseudo-churches.”¹⁴ It is in this context that the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem are to be understood, when he notes that the faith of the Church handed the “*in one, holy, catholic Church*”, so the faithful to avoid “*the defiled systems of heretics*” and remain forever in the holy catholic Church, in which he/she is regenerated.¹⁵ The fact that faith is the criterion of catholicity is also shown by the words of St. Cyril, who distinguishes the Christian church, in which the religious congregation is celebrated, as the catholic Church herself and urges the faithful in search not of the Lord or the Church in general, but of the catholic Church, which is the continuation of Israel’s Church¹⁶.

¹³ Diversity among Christians certainly exists according to the degree of approach of God as well as by differentiation between human persons, but not as a particular social personality. This is clear, given that the unity and diversity within the Church is not based on different abilities of the faithful people, but on one faith and one baptism in the name of the one Triune God. While the unity of the Church founded on the transfiguration and regeneration of the human person, society is based on covering the living needs and interests. This way, people in society *coexist*, while in Church they comprise the *one body* of Christ the Savior.

¹⁴ John Karmiris, *Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησιολογία* [Orthodox Ecclesiology], *ibid*, p. 303. On the different ecclesiological approach of primacy between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church, which is based on the evolution of historical conditions and in the qualitative unity, q.v. *Papsttum als ökumenische Frage*, by the working group of ecumenical university Institutes (ed.), München: Kaiser, 1979, p. 141 ff.

¹⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Κατηχήσεις ΙΗ'* [Catechesis XVIII], 26-27, PG 33, 1048A.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, PG 33, 1048B: “And you if ever dwell in cities, do not just look to find where is the house of the Lord (because various wicked heresies also try to name the houses of the Lord), nor only where the Church is located, but where is the Catholic Church. This is the specific name of this holy and mother of us all. She on the one hand is the bride of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, (because it is written,

Since the one catholic Church is based on one faith, divisions into different sects are due to the deviation and perversion of the truth of faith and not the social and personal autonomy of man.¹⁷ St. Gregory the Theologian notes that sects rely on people characterized by *irrationality, ignorance* and its derivative evil *audacity*. When these are combined with vanity and passion for primacy, they lead to the misuse of the mind and to the creation of heretical opinions.¹⁸

“as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,”). On the other hand, she is imitating the Jerusalem on High, who is free and the mother of us all, first barren, now mother of many children”. Faith, of course, as the unifying principle of the body of the Church is often overlooked, when the Church is interpreted as “people of God”, who exists only in the Eucharistic congregation and directed (managed) by the spiritual leader in charge of the congregation. cf. Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Εὐχαριστία, Σύνοδοι καὶ Πρωτεύειο [Eucharist, Councils and Primacy]”, in: ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ [Theology] 87 (2016), p. 32. Rather, faith is a prerequisite of unity, when the Church is interpreted as “body of Christ” because the mere adoption of one faith is not enough in the one Triune God and in Jesus Christ, for someone to belong to the Church, but the transforming power of faith is required to become a member of the Church by participating in the one body and blood of Christ. That is why this head of the *Body* –and not of the people– is *Christ* himself, who presides over the whole body, that is all transfigured *members* (clergy and laity) of the Church, and not all parts (individuals) who *make up* the community. This emphasizes the *functional unity* of the Church, as opposed to *cumulative* interpretation of the ecclesiastical community, and the Bishop is understood as the visible sign of our unity of the one faith of the Catholic Church. Cf. N. Matsoukas, *Δογματική καὶ Συμβολική Θεολογία Β΄. Έκθεση τῆς ὀρθόδοξης πίστεως [Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology II. Report of the Orthodox faith]*, Thessaloniki: Pournara, 1985, p. 414 ff., and Fr. P. Heers, *Η ἐκκλησιολογική ἀναθεώρηση τῆς Β΄ Βατικανῆς Συνόδου. Μία Ὀρθόδοξη διερεύνηση τοῦ Βαπτίσματος καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας κατὰ τὸ Διάταγμα περὶ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ [The ecclesiological revision of the Second Vatican Council. An Orthodox investigation of Baptism and the Church in the Decree on Ecumenism]*, Thessaloniki: Uncut Mountain Press, 2014, p. 81 ff. and 152 ff.

¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromatum* 7, 17, in: *Clemens Alexandrinus III (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 17)*, Stählin, Ed. O. (ed.), Leipzig 1909, p. 76 (PG 9, 552AB).

¹⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *De Moderatione in Disputando (Oratio XXXII)*, 3, PG 36, 176C-177A and idem, *Apologetica (Oratio II)*, 41, PG 35, 449AB.

In this ontologically understood new society, in the Holy and Catholic Church, the law is replaced by the *holy canons* and the power by *priesthood*. The two elements of this new charismatic community of the Church go beyond the simple assurance of a harmonious coexistence with many different personalities between them, on the basis of the principle of tolerance, therapeutically work and ensure genuine unity without suppressing diversity. Priesthood, as a form of angelic ministry on earth,¹⁹ does not dominate over bodies with the concept of political power exercising physical or mental violence, but touching the human soul itself²⁰ works therapeutically by extending the work of the biological parents. So do the holy canons of the Church, which are not designed, according to St. John Chrysostom, to punish overt actions, but act as a guide for the safe course of the faithful towards salvation. That is why submission to civil law is involuntary, mandatory and enforced. However, in the case of canons, submission is an achievement “of choice and personal freedom.”²¹ This is shown in the exercise of “fair” power, which *imposes* by laws the lifestyle of every society, while *paternal* power is recognized in the Church, which by canons *guide* people into communion with God.

The element, then, that joins the Church together as One is faith in one God. This faith is received by the Church and with diligence keeps her, proclaims her, teaches her and delivers her to the next generations. Even though there are different languages, the power of tradition is one and the same in all the Churches around the world, without being dependent on the skills or abilities of the primates of each Church.²² St. Irenaeus further explains the one apostolic faith as the foundation of the unity of the Church, when he points out not to adjust the content of faith in the mental ability of each person, so it will mean the existence of

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, *De Sacerdotio III*, 4, PG 48, 642.

²⁰ Ibid, 5, PG 48, 645.

²¹ Idem, *In Epistolam II ad Corinthios XV*, PG 61, 509B.

²² Irenaeus of Lyon, *Contra Haereses*, 1, 10, 1-2, PG 7, 549A-553A.

another God, other than the creator and builder of everything, or another Christ and Only-begotten, "but examine what was said in parables, adapting them to the general idea of faith."²³

The unified faith, therefore, ensures the apostolicity of the Church and its unity, although it has spread, according to St. Irenaeus, to the whole world.²⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor refers to this unity of apostolic faith, when interpreting the first liturgical entrance of the Bishop to the holy Church, considering her an image and type of the first one, the presence of the Son and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh into the world, by which the nature of the people is liberated and redeemed from slavery and decay from sin, which delivers man to death.²⁵ The people's liturgical entrance with the Bishop means on the one hand, the return of the unfaithful from their ignorance and delusion in conscious faith in God, on the other hand through repentance the correction of lecherous conduct and obscene life of believers.²⁶ So, the Bishop has not and does not express sovereignty that characterizes political leaders, but he becomes the guarantor of the Church's unity in the faith which ensures salvation of the Church's people. Therefore, when the Bishop does not respond to the apostolic faith, then he is rejected by the faithful and the Church becomes deserted, since he does not guarantee salvific faith. This is what Basil the Great describes in his *Letter to the Westerners* observing for thirteen years the prevalence of the Arian heretical opinion.²⁷ In the perspective of the apostolic faith and sacramental life of the Christian community the word of St. Ignatius is understood

²³ Ibid, 1, 10, 3 PG 7, 553B-556A.

²⁴ q. v. John Karmiris, *Ἐκκλησιολογία [Orthodox Ecclesiology]*, ibid, p. 316 ff.

²⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, PG 91, 688CD.

²⁶ Ibid, VIII, PG 91, 688D-689A. In this interpretative context the Bishop is understood charismatically, i.e. as type and image of the salvific faith in Jesus Christ, and not relational, that "as an image of the many" who "is made up as the "one" in communion with the many" (q.v. Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Εὐχαριστία, Σύνοδοι καὶ Πρωτεῖο [Eucharist, Councils and Primacy]", ibid, p. 33).

²⁷ Basil of Caesarea, *Epistola CCXLII*, in: *Saint Basil: Lettres III*, Courtonne, Y. (ed.), Paris 1966, p. 66 ff. (PG 32, 901A).

when he notes that: "everyone follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ the Father... That Eucharist is certain, in which the bishop prevails or to whoever he allows." The unity of the Church around the Bishop is interpreted within the context of the liturgical congregation and performance of the sacraments, and in no case in the same person of the Bishop.²⁸ St. John Chrysostom describing the religious congregation of the faithful shows the unity of the single body of the Church, stressing out the equality of all in the Divine Eucharist and the sacraments, where "everyone is worthy to participate the same in glory."²⁹ This is why the Bishop participates in the congregation "not as a person but as the incarnated body of the local Church," as underlined by Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon.³⁰

The concept, then, of primacy should be interpreted in this unity of faith, which is the foundation of catholicity of the Church and not in the unity of the Holy Trinity.³¹ St. Gregory the Theo-

²⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistola ad Smyrnaeos 8-9*, in: *Ignace d'Antioche. Polycarpe de Smyrne. Lettres. Martyre de Polycarpe (Sources Chretiennes 10)* [=S.C.], Camelot, P. T. (ed.), Paris: Cerf 1969, p. 162 (PG 5, 713A-C). q.v. idem, *Epistola ad Ephesios XX*, ibid, p. 90 (PG 5, 661A), N. MATSOUKAS, *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία Β' [Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology II.]*, ibid, p. 386 ff., and I. Feidas, "Rezeption und Synodalität in der ältesten Kirche des zweiten Jahrhunderts", in: *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ [Theology] 87* (2016), p. 188ff.

²⁹ John Chrysostom, *In Epistolam II ad Korinthos XVIII*, PG 61, 527AB: "There are also cases where no priest is different from the faithful, such as the time of the awesome Mysteries [meaning the Holy Communion], who all are claimed to enjoy the same ... one body and one cup stands before all. One can also see that people are involved very much in prayer... I said all this, so that everyone and the incipient may be modest. To understand that we are all one body, and we have so much difference between us, as much members to members (i.e. no difference), and not hold responsible priests for everything, but we must also take care, as the Church is our common body. Since it gives us greater security and more performance towards virtue (meaning for someone to reach virtue)". Also q.v. N. Matsoukas, *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία Β' [Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology II]*, ibid, p. 417 ff.

³⁰ John Zizioulas (Metropolitan of Pergamon), "Ὁ Συνοδικὸς Θεσμός. Ἱστορικά, ἐκκλησιολογικά καὶ κανονικά προβλήματα [The Synodical Institution. Historically, ecclesiological and canon law problems]", in: *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ [Theology] 80* (2009), p. 14.

³¹ About the Trinitarian foundation of ecclesiastical unity-society, q.v. J. Molt-

logian refers to the diversification of the members of the Church, as rulers and ruled, and having as a basic prerequisite to their equality in faith, and not the authoritarian hierarch. He highlights the necessity and functionality of this differentiation, so that “*the harmony of the spirit compatible and connected to its strength*” the full body of the Church may emerge.³² The differences, namely, between the Church members are not interpreted as a relationship between master and slave, upper and lower, but highlight different charismatic functions of the very same body.³³ In the Church, where the diversity of the ecclesiastical body is not determined by the one who is “upper”, but by the charismatic attributes acquired by the faithful in their communion with God in Holy Spirit, differentiation is not understood *horizontally* between people, but *vertically*, in terms of the spiritual level of human relationship with God. Therefore, neither the Bishop nor the Hierarchy as a whole are an instrument of salvation,³⁴ but rather Christ Himself offers salvation in Holy Spirit through the divine gifts accomplishing the unity of the ecclesiastical community based on the diversity of the charismatic body of the Church.³⁵

Therefore, it is clear that primacy has no theological foundation; it can only be understood in the interpretative frame of

mann, “Ein ökumenisches Papsttum”, in: *Papsttum als ökumenische Frage*, *ibid*, p. 252 ff.

³² Gregory of Nazianzus, *Apologetica (Oratio II)*, PG 35, 409C: “As in the body while one part rules and has a sort of primacy and another is ruled, the same occurs in Churches... so that both be combined with each other and be merged, both the one that lacks and the one that excels, just as with members (of a body), and are compatible (between them) and linked with the attaching strength of the spirit in harmony to be presented as a full body, really worthy of that of Christ, who forms our Head”.

³³ Theodoret of Cyrus, *In Psalmos XLIV*, PG 80, 1196C. q.v. N. Matsoukas, *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία Γ* [*Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology III*], *ibid*, p. 261 ff.

³⁴ Stylianos Harkianakis (Bishop of Australia), *Περί τὸ Ἀλάθητον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἐν τῇ Ὁρθοδόξῳ Θεολογίᾳ* [*On the infallibility of the Church in the Orthodox Theology*], *ibid*, p. 66.

³⁵ Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae Fusiou Tractatae VII*, PG 31, 929C-932B, and N. Matsoukas, *Δογματική και Συμβολική Θεολογία Β* [*Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology II*], *ibid*, p. 414 ff.

numbering according to the rank and the office, which does not mean in any way either submission to an authority, as in the created reality (cosmology, politics), or the causal relationship between the existence of the three divine persons, as the Trinitarian doctrine is interpreted. It rather indicates the logical order in the names and the relationship between them. So, the number does not belong to the numbered, which would confer on him an “ontological status” and would give a natural priority to the *primos*, but exists according to the will of those who number.³⁶ That is why primacy and honor and the value of the *primos* exists only within the Council, since the will and the criteria of the numbered are responsible for the priority of numbering. The basic selection criteria of the *primos* should be the genuine expression and defense of the apostolic faith, which establishes and highlights the catholicity of the one Body of the Church.

³⁶ Idem, *Epistola VIII, 2*, in: *Saint Basil: Lettres I*, Courtonne, Y. (ed.), Paris 1957, p. 24 (PG 32, 248C) and idem, *Liber de Spiritu Sancto XVII*, 43, S. C. 17, p. 189 (PG 32, 148B). Also q.v. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theologica V (Oratio XXXI)*, 18, in: *Gregor von Nazianz, Die fünf theologischen Reden*, ed. Barbel, J., Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1963, p. 248 (PG 36, 152CD): “do you ignore that each number indicates how many are the objects, and not what is the nature of these?”