

## Elements of a Vision for the Effective Synthesis of Universal Primacy and Conciliarity

Peter Galadza

---

### ***Introductory Note***

Since 2005, the North-American Orthodox/Catholic Theological Consultation has been discussing the question of primacy. In 2007 the decision was taken to ask each of the more than twenty members of the consultation to present a very brief statement of how they would envisage the organic synthesis of a universal primacy on the one hand and effective conciliarity (synodality) on the other. In essence, the statement should summarize how Catholics and Orthodox might visibly express and maintain full communion. The following text was presented at the consultation's bi-annual meeting in October 2008. I have been a member of the consultation, representing the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, since 1997. The consultation is the oldest extant body of its kind in the world, having met regularly since 1965.

### ***A Note on Method***

Conditioned by the nature of the task assigned us, the following reflections are very selective in their focus. Nonetheless, I believe they go to the heart of several areas of ecclesial life that would have to be reformed for Catholic and Orthodox hierarchs to restore eucharistic communion. As I proceed, it should become apparent that my method is

- 1) to seek inspiration in the Scriptures and Tradition for
- 2) a vision of how a re-united Church should “be” and act,
- 3) noting the impediments to such being and acting, and
- 4) suggesting how these impediments might be removed.

Obviously there is nothing original here, but I note the aforementioned to make clear that my concerns and approach are of a very practical nature. In fact, my approach might be dubbed “ecclesial problem solving” as I am most concerned to highlight the concrete goals of a re-united Church and the issues that prevent Catholics and Orthodox from realizing that unity.

***Koinonia and Convocation: Who Has the Right to Effectively Call Everyone to “Dinner”***

Certainly there is no substitute for face-to-face encounter. Such encounters curb the demonization of opponents. No wonder that table fellowship is so prominent in descriptions of the Kingdom.

But who in a re-united household of God should have the right to mandate such encounters? Who should have the right to call the world’s bishops to the eucharistic table for fellowship followed by the kind of practical sharing that naturally flows from a non-cultic approach to liturgy? In other words, who should have the right to convoke a council (preceded by the Eucharist)? I fantasize – and I stress “fantasize” – that visionary Church leaders would restore such a role to a bishop of Jerusalem (duly elected for such a purpose). As this is “dreaming in Technicolor” I will only note the reasons for my continued fantasizing. If Rome has always been recognized as the primatial see owing, in part, to its status as the sight of the witness of Peter and Paul, it seems that Jerusalem, the “mother of Churches” according to Tradition, might be an even more appropriate primatial see as it is the sight of the witness of the Witness Himself (Rev. 1:5). Such fantasizing is conditioned by the “baggage” that Rome carries in the consciousness of non-

Catholics and my desire to see not only Orthodox “elites” support such re-union, but the Orthodox masses as well.

Let me now return to “reality.”

Certainly the bishop of Rome would have to have the right to convoke gatherings of bishops, Eastern and Western. (During the first millennium, the emperor exercised this role. Of course, once the Byzantines lost Italy, he could no longer do so effectively. But how ironic that ecclesial gatherings should require the strong arm of the state.) These gatherings would not only consist of universal and regional synods, but also regular meetings of a *permanent* synod, comprised of the heads (or delegated representatives) of autocephalous Churches *and* appropriate representatives of regional Catholic hierarchies (a problem of its own, but not insurmountable).

Naturally, the Eastern *Catholic* Churches would be re-integrated into their Orthodox counterparts, and the various Roman dicasteries would no longer have responsibility for any Churches except those of the Roman Rite. Thus, the pope’s title, “patriarch of the West” would have to be restored as “the West” would be the only “area” where he would exercise the kind of jurisdiction foreseen by *Pastor aeternus*. (More on this below.)

As is evident, this structure of pope/permanent synod would reflect a universalization and institutionalization of the directive of Apostolic Canon 34:

The bishops of every nation ought to know who is the first one among them, and to esteem him as their head, and not to do any great thing without his consent; but every one to manage the affairs that belong to his own diocese and the territory subject to it. But let him (i.e. the first one) not do anything without the consent of all the other (bishops); for it is by this means that there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Incidentally, in order to avoid the impression that Orthodox hierarchs consistently meeting with the pope have thereby somehow become members of the Roman Church, the perma-