THE EXERCISE OF PRIMACY IN THE CHURCH: AN ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This paper explores the theological justification of approaching the reality of primacy from within the context of *koinonia* ecclesiology. After surveying twentieth century contributions to the theological vision of primacy from an Orthodox perspective and seeing that its proper exercise in no way undermines the communal mode of the church's existence, the paper necessarily attempts to delineate an Orthodox theological vision of primacy from within the context of the Trinitarian communal relations and in so doing further draws out in a more concrete way how this ministry might be exercised on a universal level.

It hardly needs to be stated that the issue of primacy continues to be most divisive today amongst Christians in general but specifically amongst those in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.[1] Right from the outset, it has to be said that it is not primacy *per se* that has been questioned by the Eastern Orthodox tradition but its modern juridical mode of application. And so, beyond a proper understanding of the notion of primacy, which would surely assist in overcoming this major hindrance towards unity between these two major Christian churches, a consideration of the unique theological insight of the Eastern Orthodox tradition will be undertaken in order to examine the extent to which such a ministry supports the communal vision of authority which is constitutive of Orthodox theology.[2] This paper will therefore focus on the formidable task of presenting the extent to which primacy can indeed belong to the very *esse* [being] of the Church and accordingly be considered a ministry

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nurturing a genuine *koinonia*[3] of churches and therefore visibly expressing their unanimity, mutual identity, equality and particularity at the same time. Whilst many Orthodox theological works have argued for a vision of primacy based upon the Trinitarian relations, none to date have extensively reflected how the ordered *koinonia* within the life of the Trinity can in fact shed light upon the issue of primacy. It is precisely in this area that this article hopes to contribute in its concern to articulate an Orthodox vision of primacy from within the context of the Trinitarian communal relations. In this way, we will have shown that primacy, when properly founded upon the mystery of the Trinitarian life, in no way undermines the churches' communal mode existence, but on the contrary enhances it. Attention is now turned towards presenting the main ideas expressed by this theological approach in order to further draw out in a more concrete way how this ministry might be exercised on a universal level.

Twentieth Century Contributions to the Theological Vision of Primacy

In upholding the necessity for primacy, there arose in the twentieth century a theological approach which essentially claimed that such a ministry belonged to the very being of the *ekklesia* as *koinonia* insofar as its entire reason for existence and emergence within the history of the church was the preservation of the visible communion of the local churches – without this of course suppressing their full integrity and catholicity. And so, according to this approach, not only did the communal nature of the church not preclude the existence of primacy but on the contrary necessitated it; indeed, it was this office which manifested the *koinonia* of the local churches together and enabled them to give a genuine witness of their identity of faith with one common voice. This meant that the primatial system of the church's visible organisational structure upheld the mutual identity of the local churches and was therefore the manifestation and actualisation of the integrity of each ecclesial assembly; an integrity in which each local church was not seen to be simply a part of the whole, but rather, in the words of Zizioulas[4], a 'whole of the whole.'[5] Moreover on a deeper level, in identifying various degrees of primacy – local,[6] regional,[7] national[8] and in its highest form, universal – this approach rejected the

view that the nature and exercise of primacy was incompatible as such with Orthodox ecclesiology, since it saw no inconsistency in claiming the primordial character of the church's communal mode of existence and at the same time making primacy inherently a part of this *koinonia*. In wanting to justify theologically the exercise of such a ministry of unity, Zizioulas highlighted the simultaneity between synodality and primacy by pointing out, quite simply, that, 'synods without primates never existed in the Orthodox Church, and this indicates clearly that if synodality is an ecclesiological, that is, dogmatical, necessity so must primacy [be].'[9] Accordingly, since synodality was inseparably bound to the very essence of the church as *koinonia,* then so was primacy. In this understanding, the chief purpose for universal primacy was understood within the context of a synodical structure of the church, namely one bishop of a local church responsible for expressing the unanimous mind of the bishops within an ecumenical synod, and in this way preserving the *koinonia* of the local churches.[10] Having explicitly stated this however, Zizioulas concurred with Schmemann who had previously concluded that in Orthodox ecclesiology a clear theology of primacy, specifically on a universal level, had yet to be fully articulated.[11]

Harkianakis[12] attempted to formulate a theology of primacy in the church from within the context of the Trinitarian communal relations, in this way, clearly underscoring its communal nature. Indeed, for Harkianakis, the mystery of the Trinity was central not only for an understanding of primacy, but for the *ekklesia* in general since it constituted the source and paradigm of all structures within the life of the church.[13] Harkianakis articulated a theology of primacy from within the context of the relationship between the *unity* and *multiplicity* within the life of the Holy Trinity.[14] Simply put, he argued that just as the unity within the Trinitarian Godhead did not encroach upon the ontological distinctiveness, equality and particularity of each divine person, so too would the unity of the church – visibly expressed through the primacy of one local church – not diminish the catholicity and essential equality of each local church. Specifically on this correlation, Harkianakis wrote:

> Just as the idea of *homoousia* in the Trinitarian dilemma does not violate the independence of the individual persons of the Trinity, so too does the idea of the unity of the church in the ecclesiological problem not violate the independence of the individual churches or of the individual persons belonging to those churches.[15]

Put another way, it could be said that in the same way that the unique and concrete divine hypostases do not disturb the Trinitarian *koinonia* but rather enrich it, so too would the multiplicity of local churches not necessarily disrupt the unity and *koinonia* of the church as a whole. Furthermore, for Harkianakis, the *perichoretic koinonia* of the Trinity[16] – which ruled out any form of subordination in the tri-hypostatic Trinitarian Godhead, since each person dwelt in the other through a movement of reciprocating love, yet without losing their distinctive personal attributes – signified also the essential equality of all local churches. And so, in situating his vision of primacy within a Trinitarian context, Harkianakis was able to contribute in a significant way towards an ecclesiological appreciation of this universal primacy.

A Possible Contribution to a Theological Understanding of Primacy

Now, in an attempt to further relate the theological principles concerning primacy to the mystery of the Trinitarian *koinonia*, it remains to be shown how the exercise of primacy within the *ekklesia* finds its archetypical roots in the clear ordering [*taxis*] within the interpersonal life of the Godhead.[17] More particularly, the Eastern Orthodox tradition, especially as witnessed by the Cappadocian patristic tradition, distinguished a distinct ordering and differentiation within the Trinity; namely, a primacy belonging to the Father[18] who, as 'πρώτη αἰτία ἀχρόνως [the primal cause eternally]'[19] of the Son's generation and the Holy Spirit's procession, was the ground or 'sole *arche*' [μοναρχία][20] of unity and *koinonia* within the immanent Trinity.[21] This conviction regarding the monarchy of the Father was based on their interpretation of the words of Jesus that 'the Father is greater than I' (Jn 14:28), which was interpreted as a reference to the Father's 'unoriginated' hypostatic quality; and not to any greater moral or functional importance of the Father in relation to the Son and Holy Spirit. In other words, the Father

was considered to be greater not because his essence was superior or for the reason that He transmitted it to the other two persons, but because He was the sole principle cause of the Godhead – however, One who always personally shared his incomprehensible divinity with his Son and Spirit. Accordingly, it is the *monarchia* of the Father that is the ground of *koinonia* within the Trinity and not any abstract conception of the divine *ousia* [essence]. This is nothing other than the biblical affirmation that the one God was the Father almighty (cf. 1Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6 & 1Tim 2:5). Before examining the implications of this for our theology of primacy, a little more must be said as to how such an ordering within the Trinitarian life does not destroy the inherent *koinonia* and unity of the divine three persons.

As the 'uncaused' hypostasis, the Father is always with his divine Word and Spirit who themselves are different hypostatic principles within the Godhead – not mere 'relations' of the transcendent nature of God[22] – yet co-eternal and co-equal. Indeed, in this understanding, it is precisely the ontological personal priority of the Father, which also gives *koinonia* its primordial character since divine fatherhood necessarily implies a relationship [*schesis*][23] – in the case of God the Father, a *schesis* with his Son and Spirit, without whom, fatherhood would be logically inconceivable. That is to say, the Father can never be perceived as being alone in his divinity as this would necessarily imply that He was not always 'father' but became so, which would be unacceptable in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. However, within this *schesis* there has always been a distinct *taxis* which means that everything begins with the Father and ends with him as well (cf. Rom 11:36: 'for from him and through him and to him are all things' and 1Cor 15:24).[24] From this, it can be seen that primacy and *koinonia* are not mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, are concurrent since a personalist approach to primacy, initiated by the person of the Father, necessarily means the ontological significance of divine *koinonia* – specifically the Father's communion with the Son and Spirit which serves and ensures it. And so, following on from this, Zizioulas was correct to conclude that 'there is no inconsistency in making communion primordial and at the same time making the Father ontologically ultimate.'[25] Having established that primacy and *koinonia* are

intimately linked within the life of the Trinity, where the former protects the equality and fullness of the *koinonia* of the three persons, it remains to be shown how such a primacy could serve as a model for the unity of the various local churches throughout the world.

In light of the above theological reflection, it becomes clear that the issue of primacy is not whether its existence within the church is theologically justified or not, but on the contrary what particular expression of ecclesial primacy could do justice to the Trinitarian model delineated above, thereby serving as a faithful paradigm for the *ekklesia* as *koinonia*.[26] Principally based on the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers, which, as we have said, has been the hallmark of the Orthodox vision of God, at least three theological implications emerge, directly related to what the Eastern Orthodox tradition would consider to be a theologically sound theology and exercise of primacy within the church.

A Genuine Ministry of Solicitude Communally Exercised

Interpreted theologically, primacy within the church would need to be perceived as a real and permanent ministry, namely, more than merely honorary in nature. That is, since the ordering within the Trinity is real and permanent, so too, would primacy need to be seen as a genuine ministry bestowed by God upon the church for its *koinonia*. Grounded upon the Trinitarian *koinonia*, the exercise of such a ministry, essentially an all-embracing pastoral concern [*phrontis/ sollicitudo*][27] which respected the catholicity of each local church, would need to be such that would visibly manifest and therefore be a faithful sign of the *koinonia* of the churches throughout the world. In this way, the harmonious co-existence of all local churches could be ensured. Implemented in such a manner, primacy would be a genuine ministry of solicitude, and not one understood in terms of jurisdictional powers and sovereignty. Indeed, in a reintegrated and united church, the Eastern Orthodox tradition would readily acknowledge such primacy in the church of Rome, whose special standing in the early church as we have seen had also given it a sense of greater responsibility amongst the churches – yet never standing above them – not only to preserve the apostolic faith but to hand it on unadulterated, in this way maintaining

the unity of the church.[28] Consequently, as a genuine service towards the *koinonia* of the churches, primacy could not be exercised in such a way that would compromise the ontological integrity and fullness of the local churches. Rather, a '*koinonia* in diversity'[29] would need to be maintained since the Holy Trinity is a mystery of unity in diversity and diversity in unity.[30]

In practical terms, the specific prerogatives of the church of Rome, exercised in counsel with all churches – since within the Trinity the Father never acts alone or in opposition to his Son and Spirit – would include amongst other things not only an 'all-embracing pastoral concern' for the communion of churches, but also a duty to convoke councils, promulgate their decisions, supervise episcopal elections, and ensure, through such councils, that the authentic tradition of faith was properly adhered to. Such a primacy would be nothing other than an expression of the *koinonia* in faith and life of all local churches. Indeed, as we shall see, such primacy is clearly evidenced in the canons of the early church, particularly the so-called 34th Apostolic Canon, and many others of the first common Christian millennium.[31] Consequently, far from being expressed in a juridical language of *plenitudo potestatis* [fullness of power] such a vision of primacy would suggest the privilege of humble service and concern [namely, *phrontis/ sollicitudo*] by the bishop of Rome for the entire church which, as pointed out by Ware, would imply, in the language of the New Testament, the strengthening of the people of God (cf. Lk 22:32), their shepherding and spiritual nourishment (cf. Jn 21:15-17),[32] but always jointly with the entire college of bishops. It is for this reason that primacy continues to be understood in terms of solicitude by the Eastern Orthodox tradition and always in mutual reciprocity with synodality.

A Ministry Upholding the Ontological Integrity of the Local Churches

Building upon the notion of *sollicitudo* as a faithful insight into primacy, by which the 'unity in diversity' of the churches throughout the world could be maintained, the second theological principle concerns an embodiment of primacy which would have to uphold the ontological integrity and catholicity of each local church.[33] If the Trinity is considered

to be determinative for primacy then it could be said in the same way that the monarchy of the Father does not, in any way, imply a radically greater dignity or essential superiority over the Son and Spirit, so too must the ministry of primacy exercised by one church – historically, the church of Rome – not claim for itself any higher powers of jurisdiction over the other local churches. Or put another way, in the same way that the full, concrete and personally distinct identities of the Son and Spirit of God are not undermined by the monarchy of the Father, so too would the wholeness, fullness and distinctiveness of each local church have to be upheld in the exercise of primacy. Just as the Son and Holy Spirit are distinct hypostases, equal in honour to the Father, so too is each local church – as the full embodiment of Christ within a particular place – equal in honour to all other churches. When headed by their bishop, all local churches make Christ fully present by the Holy Spirit, and so are all validly the church of God in their fullness, although in *koinonia* with all other local churches.[34]

As a ministry upholding the communion of the local churches, the primatial bishop could not therefore usurp the integrity and prerogatives of the other local churches. Nor could such a bishop interfere in the internal affairs of particular local churches, except from within the context of a council and only when it was believed that a local church was acting contrary to its God-given mandate. Furthermore, it would also not be theologically permissible for any one bishop to stand over the college of bishops claiming for himself supreme and universal power of jurisdiction over all other local churches, since all bishops possessed an equally 'catholic' ecclesial identity.[35] From a Trinitarian theological perspective, if the one essence were to have pre-eminence over the divine hypostases, then so too could there be a greater importance placed on the 'universal' church over and against the local churches, where the latter could simply be considered as being a part of the whole and therefore subjugated to the whole. Rather, within the life of the Trinity, it is the Father who presides in perfect love, and therefore is the ground of unity, without disturbing the ontological equality and otherness of the Son and Spirit. So too, within the communion of local churches, there is one local church 'pre-eminent

in love' which must be seen to be responsible for expressing the equality and ontological integrity of all other local churches without being seen, however, to threaten their diversity or otherness.[36] Indeed, the diversity and otherness of the churches would need to be seen as intensifying and reconciling, on a deeper level, the mystery of *koinonia* and love, as it does within the life of the persons of the Trinity. And so, in this understanding, the local church is not seen to be secondary to the one universal church but rather constitutive of it. Consequently, the ministry of primacy cannot be seen outside of the *communio ecclesiarum* [communion of churches].

A Ministry Maintaining the Simultaneity between the 'One' and 'Many'

This point leads to the third theological principle guiding the exercise of primacy within the church and has to do with the simultaneity between the 'one' and the 'many' in the Trinitarian vision. Being the ground of unity within the Trinity, the Father, as unique cause of the divine hypostases of the Son and Spirit, cannot nevertheless be said to be temporally prior to them; rather there is a *co-inherence* and *co-incidence* between the 'one' and the 'many' – indeed, a concurrence and co-emergence where the 'many' is constitutive of the 'one'.[37] Since the ontological principle or cause within the Trinitarian life is the person of the Father – and not the essence – this implies that God is not first 'one' [namely, one simple undifferentiated essence] and then 'many' [specifically three persons], but is always simultaneously both 'one' and 'many'. The reason for this is that the Father, as stated above, cannot be Father unless through and with the other two divine persons. When such a personalist vision of the Trinity is translated into the realm of ecclesiology, it consequently becomes clear that there can be no priority given to the 'one' church as though it were fundamentally anterior and superior to the 'many' local churches.[38] As an image of the Trinitarian life of the three divine persons, the whole church and local churches are in a perichoretic relation of mutuality and receptivity, which implies mutual inclusion and reciprocity. In this way, primacy cannot become a means to impose the alleged priority of the one universal church over the local churches, as if they were temporally posterior and subordinate.

Indeed, the mutual interiority and simultaneity between the local churches and the universal church would prohibit the primatial bishop intervening, in an immediate way, in the affairs of other local churches under the pretext of securing the unity of the one church of God. Such a centralist tendency would effectively imply an ontological precedence of the universal church over the local churches, and therefore the absorption of the latter into the former – something, which only a substantialist approach to the Trinity could justify. Accordingly, a personalist rather than a substantialist approach to the Holy Trinity would therefore see primacy in terms of reciprocity: in the same way that the Father alone cannot express the fullness of *koinonia* within the Trinity apart from his Son and Spirit, but only in relation to them, so too could one church – or its bishop – not claim to be totally self-sufficient in and of itself with the power to act without the counsel of all local churches. Consequently, what has clearly surfaced from a theological perspective, is that primacy can only be exercised from within a communal or relational paradigm and never as a sovereign and absolute plenitude of power demanding unqualified obedience from other bishops which it would consider to be its mere functionaries.

34th Apostolic Canon – A Test Case for a Communal Vision of Primacy in Koinonia

That the above theological reflection on primacy was more than a purely speculative abstraction, but indispensable for the daily life of the church lived out as *koinonia*, is particularly seen in the various canons enunciated by the different synods of the early 'undivided' church. The principle of primacy, exercised from within the context of *koinonia* can clearly be seen, for example, in the so-called 34th Apostolic Canon[39] which, even though specifically concerned with primacy on a regional level, could just as easily be applied to the realm of universal primacy. The canon, in full, reads as follows:

> the bishop of every region must recognise him who is first [πρῶτον] among them and regard him as their head [κεφαλήν], and do nothing exceptional [περιττόν] without his consent; but each is to do only those things which concern his own diocese [παροικίᾳ], and those areas which belong to it. But

> neither let him who is the first do anything without the consent of all. For in this way there will be harmony, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.[40]

This canon brings to light a number of pertinent points: firstly, that primacy and *koinonia* are intrinsically bound together. In highlighting the mutuality between the bishop of a local church and the *protos/primus* [the 'first' bishop], the canon, as a whole expressed the communal or relational character of primacy.[41] According to this canon, the primatial bishop, although first, could only act with and on behalf of the entire college of bishops and never apart from them or above them. When seen in this light, the principal bishop emerges genuinely as *primus* [first] but always *inter pares* [amongst equals] in this service of unity. And so, through the exercise of primacy, the different local churches could exist as one united and integrated community of believers. The inextricable link between primacy and *koinonia* was succinctly expressed by Tillard: 'In God's plan, therefore, the power of the primate is that which enables the *aedificatio Ecclesiae* entrusted to every bishop to open into the universal *koinonia* and to find its home there.'[42] Once again, it has to be remembered, however, that as a sign of unity and *koinonia,* primacy did not take away the 'independence' of every local bishop to deal with matters concerning their own diocese.

In reflecting further upon the canon, a second point can be stated with relation to the mutual interdependence between collegiality and primacy. In according primacy to one local church and its bishop, the canon clearly underscored the legitimate authority of the primatial bishop. It was this bishop, for example, who had the distinctive responsibility not only for strengthening the communal ties between the various local churches but also, from a more practical perspective, convoking and presiding at episcopal synods and confirming new episcopal elections within a given province.[43] Commenting upon this canon, Zonaras, a Byzantine canonist wrote:

> It is for this reason that the canon ordains that all bishops of every province ought to know who is first among them… and ought to regard him as their head, and not do anything unnecessary without consulting him…

> anything… to do with the common condition of the whole province, as for instance, questions concerning the dogmas, matters involving adjustments and corrections of common mistakes, the installation and ordination of hierarchs, and other similar things.[44]

That is, in matters concerning several local churches, decisions undoubtedly had to be collegial, but this implied that there was one who would be responsible for convoking the gathering, expressing this unanimity and therefore being the sign of the *koinonia* of the churches. Indeed, it was within this context that the meaning of the phrase, 'do nothing exceptional without his [i.e. the primate's] consent' is to be found. In this way, the canon did not undermine the authority of the particular local bishops when it came to managing the affairs of their 'own diocese and those areas which belong[ed] to it.'

Thirdly, not only were individual bishops to do nothing 'exceptional' without the knowledge of their head, but also the first bishop could not do anything without consulting his fellow bishops. In regards to the relationship between the first bishop and his fellow bishops, Zonaras wrote the following: 'the first bishop must not abuse the honour in which he is held and turn it into a despotic use of power, ruling alone and acting without consulting his fellow bishops.'[45] Accordingly, while it was true that the principal bishop could speak on behalf of the entire church regarding matters which concerned the entire church – and therefore express the unity and unanimity of the church of God throughout the world – he could not, nevertheless, exercise such an authority as if he were set apart and over the other local bishops with a supposed power fundamentally different from that of his fellow bishops. Put simply, it is clear, from the canon in question, that the authority of the principal bishop was communally conditioned. Indeed, it would have been inconceivable for any bishop, even if he were considered to be the 'first', to meddle in the internal affairs of any other episcopal diocese. Whatever problems arose on a broader scale could only be resolved within a conciliar context, in which all bishops enjoyed an equal say. Indeed, it was on this account that the proper functioning of the synodal system in the church was a *sine qua non* presupposition for the integrity of the practice of primacy. Accordingly, it becomes obvious

that the legitimate authority and responsibility of each bishop was not altered by primacy.

One last point which can be inferred from the 34th Apostolic Canon is that a careful relationship between primacy and synodality was not simply a matter of mere canon law but was theologically founded – indeed reflective of the harmony within the Trinitarian life. This can be seen from the end of the canon which affirmed that only in collegial harmony could there be unanimity for the glory of the Trinitarian God. The causal relationship between harmony within the episcopal body and the proper glorification to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is also seen in the eucharistic anaphora of St John Chrysostom: 'Let us love one another so that with one mind we may confess: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Trinity of one essence and inseparable.'[46] Consequently, based on the theological approach to primacy, this unique and divinely constituted ministry of unity came to be seen as an essential ecclesial service expressing, in a visible way, the *koinonia* between the local churches. Moreover, even though it was conceived to be a unique authority, which assumed the care of the church of God as a whole, it was nevertheless communally exercised.

Concluding Remarks

The theological approach to primacy situated this ministry of unity within the context of the divine *koinonia* of the life within the Trinity – which, as we have seen was certainly 'ordered' – and therefore pre-eminently held it to be a divinely instituted gift bestowed upon the churches as a visible link of their *koinonia*. In this sense, the gift of primacy was shown to be that specific ministry by which the entire people of God within the '*communio ecclesiarum* [κοινωνία ἐκκλησιῶν]' could experience proleptically the unifying gift of divine grace and life promised by God in his eschatological kingdom. In a most profound sense, the key purpose for primacy was found ultimately in God's pre-eternal plan to gather the entire created realm, by the Holy Spirit, to Christ, and through him to the Father – in this way, keeping the various local communities in *koinonia*.[47] Indeed, precisely because primacy had the communal life of the Holy Trinity as its source, was it able to safeguard the unity in

faith and life between the local churches throughout the world. And so, modelled on such a paradigm, the special gift of one church's authority was not meant to hinder the *koinonia* of the churches through the conciliar principle, but rather to safeguard and give expression to it, preventing the local churches, in this way, from becoming isolated. Consequently, in relation to the exercise of primacy, we highlighted that there has to exist a dynamic synergy between the episcopate as a whole, where the first amongst bishops – namely, the *primus* – together with the entire body of bishops, namely his equals – *inter pares* – must strive for the unity of the communion of churches. Indeed, what came to light was a vision of primacy which was the result of a long and dynamic 'economy' initiated by God with a calling and vocation for the body of the faithful to remain united in *koinonia* through such a ministry for the glory of God's name and the recapitulation of the entire world in God.

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[1] This was noted in the encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* of the late Pope John Paul II who drew attention to the importance of finding ways to resolve the obstacle of primacy, which had led to the gradual estrangement of East and West. Before him, Pope Paul VI in 1967 had also acknowledged the ecumenical problem of papal primacy when he wrote: 'The Pope, as we well know, is undoubtedly the greatest obstacle on the path of ecumenism.' *Information Service, The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity,* no.2 (1967), 4, cited in Adriano Garuti, *Primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the Ecumenical Dialogue,* trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 1.

[2] In examining the idea of primacy, it is of paramount importance to define what is meant exactly since in theological language it has normally signified up to this point the primacy of the bishop of Rome, which has included an authority to teach infallibly and a supreme power, or a jurisdiction over other local churches which is universal and immediate. On the issue of a proper understanding of primacy, Schmemann wrote: 'The ecclesiological error of Rome lies not in the affirmation of her universal primacy. Rather, the error lies in her identification of this primacy with 'supreme power,'… This ecclesiological distortion, however, must not force us into a simple rejection of universal primacy. On the contrary it ought to encourage its genuinely Orthodox interpretation.' A. Schmemann, 'The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology', in *The Primacy*

of Peter: Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church, ed. John Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1992), 163.

[3] Etymologically, the word *koinonia* basically signifies a common share that a person may enjoy with someone or something, namely something held in common from which all can benefit and in which all can share. For this reason, the term can be defined in terms of 'participation', 'impartation' and 'fellowship'. The opposite of *koinonia* is *idiom* [ἴδιον] signifies that which is private and therefore cannot be participated in and enjoyed by all.

[4] His full name and title is: His Eminence Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon.

[5] J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 147.

[6] On a local level, the principle of primacy seen operating was in the bishop who presided over the eucharistic assembly surrounded by his presbyters and deacons, but of course not isolated from the community but in communion with it. For example, the bishop was the first to receive the holy gifts but all the faithful subsequently received and drank from the same cup.

[7] At this level, primacy referred to the local church of a pre-eminent city whose bishop – usually given the title Metropolitan or Archbishop – was considered *primus inter pares*.

[8] Namely, the well known system of national autocephalous churches.

[9] J. Zizioulas, 'Recent Discussions on Primacy in Orthodox Theology', in *The Petrine Ministry: Catholic and Orthodox in Dialogue*, ed. Cardinal Walter Kasper (New York: The Newman Press, 2006), 242-243.

[10] Cf. A. Schmemann, 'The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology': 165: 'Primacy is the necessary expression of the unity in faith and life of all local churches, of their living and efficient *koinonia*…. Primacy is thus a necessity because therein is the expression and manifestation of the unity of the churches as being the unity of *the* church.'

[11] J. Zizioulas, 'Recent Discussions on Primacy', 242-243. Cf. also A. Schmemann, 'The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology', 164.

[12] His full name and title is: His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis) of Australia.

[13] In no way would the Eastern Orthodox tradition want to absolutise the analogy since the ontological gap between uncreated and created remains even though 'by grace' this chasm has been bridged.

[14] Cf. S. Harkianakis, 'Can a Petrine Office be Meaningful? An Orthodox Reply', *Concilium* 4.7(1971): 118.

[15] S. Harkianakis, 'Can a Petrine Office be Meaningful', 119.

[16] Cf. *ibid,* 119. Elsewhere, Harkianakis characterised *perichoresis* in the following way: 'an ineffable and captivating reciprocal embrace of infinite love [ἕνα… ἄρρηκτο καί ἄλληκτο ἀλληλοεναγκαλιασμό ἀπείρου ἀγάπης].' S. Harkianakis, *In the Margins of Dialogue* [in Greek] (Athens: Domos, 1991), 116.

[17] It needs to be stated that there are limitations to this approach insofar as the created realm will never be able to image the uncreated fully and perfectly.

[18] In referring to God the Father as the ultimate cause of unity and *koinonia* within the Trinity, the Cappadocian fathers did not imply by this any gender within the Godhead, nor would they have wanted to infer from this, as some have suggested, that in human relations the male gender was ontologically superior to that of the female. For example, in her work on the Trinity, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 266-78 referred to several contemporary theologians who rejected the ontological priority of the Father within the Trinity precisely because they attributed the origin not only of oppressive human 'patriarchy' but also paternalistic and sexist ideas in the fatherhood of God.

[19] St Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 31 [Theological Oration 5], 14. *Greek Fathers of the Church,* vol. 4 (Thessalonika: Patristic Publications 'Gregory Palamas', 1976), 220. Also, cf. the same father: 'they are *from* him, though not *after* him. 'Being unoriginate' necessarily implies 'being eternal', but 'being eternal' does not entail being unoriginated so long as the Father is referred to as origin [ἀρχήν].' *Oration* 29 [Theological Oration 3], 3, *On God and Man,* trans. Lionel Wickham (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2002), 71. From this it follows that for Gregory all three divine persons were co-eternal but not co-unoriginate, for they derived timelessly from the Father. Also St Basil, *Letter* 38, 4: 'God, who is over all things has his own mark of differentiation which characterises his subsistence; and this is that He alone is Father; He alone has his hypostasis underived from any cause.' *The Later Christian Fathers,* trans. Henry Bettenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 80.

[20] Whilst it is true that the term '*monarchia*' could simply refer to God's single rule within the world, which would be common to all three divine persons, it also designated the ontological *arche* of the Father, who was the sole cause and origin of the persons of the Son and Holy Spirit. Cf. Gregory Nazianzus: 'When we look at the Godhead, the primal cause, the sole sovereignty [τήν πτώτην αἰτίαν καί τήν μοναρχίαν], we have a mental picture of the single whole, certainly. But when we look at the three in whom the Godhead exists, and at

those who derive their timeless and equally glorious being from the primal cause [ἐκ τῆς πρώτης αἰτίας], we have three objects of worship.' *Oration* 31 [Theological Oration 5], 14, *On God and Man,* 127-128. And also the following where the *monas* is identified with the Father: 'For this reason, a one [μονὰς] eternally changes to a two and stops at three – meaning the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In a serene, non-temporal, incorporeal way, the Father is parent of the 'offspring' and originator of the 'emanation' [γεννήτωρ καὶ προβολεύς].' *Oration* 29 [Theological Oration 3], 2, *On God and Man,* 70.

[21] Based on Cappadocian Trinitarian theology, Zizioulas went to great lengths to underline that the Father is the cause of the Son's and Spirit's personal being and not of their essence. Cf. J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 126-134.

[22] Cf. St Basil, *On the Holy Spirit,* trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1980). The claim that '*persona est relatio*' would need to be modified to '*persona est in relatio*' to be acceptable to the Eastern Orthodox tradition as this would take away the temptation to reduce personhood to mere relations within the Godhead. Such an amendment would affirm the relational character of the three persons who nevertheless exist genuinely in relationship with the others.

[23] Cf. Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 29 [Theological Oration 3], 16: 'Father designates neither the substance [οὐσίαν] nor the activity [ἐνέργεια] but the relationship [σχέσις] and the manner of being [τοῦ πῶς ἔχει] the Father relates to the Son or the Son to the Father.' *On God and Man,* 71.

[24] Cf. Gregory Nazianzus who in *Oration* 42.16 wrote: 'the three have one nature… the ground of unity being the Father [ἕνωσις δε ὁ Πατήρ] out of whom and towards whom the subsequent persons are considered.' [Translation my own].

[25] J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 126.

[26] At this point, it has to be said that applying the Western notion of the Trinity, which argues that the divine essence is the starting point for Trinitarian theology and not God the Father might very well yield different conclusions to primacy. Indeed, it could be said, if not taken to extremes of course, that divergent views on primacy between the East and the West are rooted in differences within the doctrine of the Trinity. In this way, the approach taken in this article can only hope to shed light on the Orthodox vision of primacy.

[27] Cf. the phrase, 'all-embracing pastoral concern' by Kallistos Ware, 'Primacy, Collegiality, and the People of God', in *Orthodoxy Life and Freedom,* ed. A.J. Philippou (Oxford: Studion Publications, 1973), 119.

[28] Cf. the conclusions of John Camateros, the 12th century Patriarch of Constantinople: 'we recognise the church of Rome as the first in rank and honour among equal sister churches… but we have not been taught to recognise in it the mother of other churches or to venerate it as embracing all other churches.' Cited in J. Meyendorff, 'St Peter in Byzantine Theology', in *The Primacy of Peter,* ed. John Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press,1992), 81. And also, Symeon of Thessalonika: 'One should not contradict the Latins when they say that the bishop of Rome is the first. This primacy is not harmful to the church. Let them only prove his faithfulness to the faith of Peter and to that of the successors of Peter. If it is so, let him enjoy all the privileges of the pontiff.' J. Meyendorff, 'St Peter in Byzantine Theology', 86.

[29] Limouris employed an orchestral image to describe the relationship between the 'one' and the 'many' in a united church in terms of symphony in polyphony. He stated that: 'the character of the oneness in the catholic church is that of symphony in polyphony. The balance of the various instruments is preserved by the conductor of this orchestra. While all together contribute to a harmonious performance, nevertheless each instrument guards its speciality and its proper character... Respect for the diversity of the instruments in the harmony of the assembly is what makes the unity of this mystical orchestra.' Gennadios Limouris, 'The Church as Mystery and Sign in Relation to the Holy Trinity – In Ecclesiological Perspectives', in *Church World Kingdom,* ed. Gennadios Limouris (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), 33.

[30] Cf. the phrase of Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 25, 17: 'μονάδα ἐν Τριάδι καὶ Τριάδα ἐν μονάδι [unity in Trinity and Trinity in unity]'. Original cited in *Greek Fathers of the Church,* vol.3, 284.

[31] Another example would include Canon 9 and of the council of Antioch ['The presiding bishop in a metropolis must be recognised by the bishops belonging to each province and undertake the cure of the entire province, because of the fact that all who have any kind of business to attend to are wont to come from all quarters of the metropolis. Hence, it has seemed best to let him have precedence in respect of honour, and to let the rest of the bishops do nothing extraordinary without him…']; Canon 19 ['No bishop shall be ordained without a synod and the presence of the Metropolitan of the province. He must be present in any case, and it were better that all the fellow ministers in the province should attend the synod too…'] and canon 14 of the council of Sardica ['If any bishop prove irascible… and be moved to act too soon in regard to a presbyter or deacon, and should want to cast him out of church, we must provide against such a man's being condemned hastily and being deprived of communion; instead, let the one cast out have a right to resort to the bishop of the metropolis of the same province…']. Translation from *The Rudder* (Chicago: The Orthodox Educational Society, 1957), 594, 539 & 545 respectively.

[32] Kallistos Ware, 'Primacy, Collegiality, and the People of God, 119.

[33] For an insightful study of the catholicity of the local church, see Christopher Ruddy, *The Local Church* (New York: A Herder & Herder Book, The Crossroad Publishing House, 2006).

[34] Furthermore, according to Zizioulas, just as diversity within the Trinity does not destroy the *koinonia* of the three persons, so too difference [*diaphora*] between the churches must be maintained and need not necessarily lead to separation [*diastasis*] (J. Zizioulas, 'Communion and Otherness', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38(1994): 351) or for that matter corruption [*diaphthora*].

[35] Cf. the understanding of papacy as enunciated by Pope Innocent IV at the Council of Lyon in 1274: 'The Holy Roman Church possesses also the highest and full primacy and reign [*principatum*] over the universal church, which she recognises in truth and humility to have received with plenitude of power from the Lord Himself in the person of Blessed Peter, the prince [*principe*] or head of the apostles… To her all the churches are subject, their prelates give obedience and reverence to her.' *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church,* ed. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, 6th ed. (New York: Alba House, 1996), 29.

[36] For the Holy Trinity, diversity does not destroy the unity of the three persons but on the contrary 'expresses three entirely different ways of God's undivided and identical life by which the fullness of God's love is manifested'. S. Harkianakis, 'The Mystery of Person and Human Adventure', *Phronema* 11(1996): 9. 'Diversity' need not necessarily lead to separation as 'logic' might dictate but, in the case of the Trinity, it rather intensifies and reconciles on a deeper level the mystery of communion and love which each of the three persons share. In this regard, Tillard also emphasised that, 'unity without diversity makes the church a dead body: pluralism without unity makes it a body which is dismembered'. J.M.R. Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 320.

[37] The Scriptures make it clear that God the Father is never without his divine Word and Spirit in his action towards the world since the *dabar* and *ruah* of God are essential to God's being. In the creation of the world, for example, God created through the Son (Jn. 1:3, 1 Cor. 8:6, Col 1:16, Heb. 1:2) and the Holy Spirit was the one 'in whom are all things' (Ps. 104:30, Gen. 1:2, 1 Cor. 2:10). St Basil the Great summarised this wonderfully when he wrote: 'The Originator of all things is One: He creates through the Son and perfects through the Spirit.' St Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit,* 16, 38, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1980), 62.

[38] For Zizioulas, the simultaneity between the 'one' and the 'many' was based on a proper relationship between Christology and Pneumatology. He argued that

even though it was Christ, as head of the church, who maintained the unity of the Church, it was the Holy Spirit who particularised the one body of Christ by making each local Church a full and catholic church. Zizioulas stated quite clearly: 'If we attach to Christology and Pneumatology an equal importance, we are bound to recognise full catholicity to each local Church (*totus Christus*) and at the same time seek ways of safeguarding the oneness of the Church on the universal level'. John Zizioulas, 'The Church as Communion', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38.1(1994): 10. If this balance between Christology and Pneumatology were to be destroyed or even slightly off-balance, this would then lead to an aberrant understanding of church unity. If Christology were stressed at the expense of Pneumatology then unity would be wrongly seen as the submission of every local church to a universal church. If on the other hand, Pneumatology were emphasised at the expense of Christology then the unity of the Church in Christ would be destroyed. Whilst true, this comparison cannot be taken too far since the Spirit maintains both unity and diversity in creation and by extension with the church. Nevertheless, the important point made by Zizioulas, namely the simultaneity between the one and the many, is an important one.

[39] Modern scholarship contends that what came to be known as the Apostolic Canons was a collection of 85 canons which arose in the fourth century. They were subsequently accepted by the council of Trullo (692AD) Cf. J. Zizioulas, 'Primacy in the Church', 9, and P. Duprey, 'The Synodical Structure', 153-153.

[40] 34th Apostolic Canon. In G. Rallis and M. Potlis, *Syntagma II*, 45.

[41] Reflecting upon this canon, Schmemann wrote that the 'essence of … primacy is stated quite clearly: it is not 'power' or 'jurisdiction' (for the primate can do nothing without the assent of all), but the expression of the unity and unanimity of all…' A. Schmemann, 'The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology', 161.

[42] J.M.R. Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome,* trans. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (London: SPCK, 1983), 148.

[43] Thomas FitzGerald, 'Conciliarity, Primacy and the Episcopacy', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38(1994): 37.

[44] G. Rallis and M. Potlis, *Syntagma II*, 45.

[45] G. Rallis and M. Potlis, *Syntagma II*, 46.

[46] *The Divine Liturgy,* 65.

[47] Tillard saw the whole justification for primacy precisely as the means to keep the local churches in communion. Interestingly, in comparing the unique function of primacy and apostolic succession in general, he made the following

distinction: 'The 'apostolic succession' secures the vertical communion, so guaranteeing that the church committed to the bishop shares the identity of the Church of the Apostles…. But there must also be a horizontal communion which will guarantee the identity of this local church with all the other local churches here and now dispersed throughout the world: the identity across space…. communion with the *centrum unitatis* [the principal bishop]… allows [the bishop] to carry out his function in the second dimension [namely, horizontal communion].' J.M.R. Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome,* 152-153.

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