

# *The Successor of Peter for Unity and Communion*

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**A**t the inaugural Mass of his ministry as the Bishop of Rome, on 24 April 2005, Pope Benedict XVI summarised the significance of his task as the shepherd of the universal Church, saying: “My real programme of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history.”<sup>1</sup> The Lord Jesus entrusted the great task of feeding his sheep to Simon Peter after receiving from him the threefold profession of love which also reminded him of his threefold denial of the Master at the crucial moment of his life (Jn 21:15-19; 18:17,25,27). Saint Ambrose expressed the significance of this ministry of Peter: “Where Peter is, there, therefore, is the Church; where the Church is, there isn’t death but eternal life.”<sup>2</sup> But in a divided Church, the notion of Petrine ministry is an emotional issue with profound roots. Walter Kasper, in his introduction to a symposium on this topic says: “The fact of being in favour of papal primacy is one of the most fundamental characteristics of the very identity of Catholics. Likewise, its refusal belongs to the very identity of many Orthodox and Protestants. This is why it is a very emotional issue.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, “A Service to God’s Joy,” in *L’Osservatore Romano*, n.17 (27 April 2005), 1, 8-9, at 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *Enarr. in Ps. 40, 30* (PL 14, 1134): *Opera omnia di sant’Ambrogio, commento a dodici salmi/2*, Città Nuova 1980, 68-69.

<sup>3</sup> W. Kasper, “Introduction to the Theme and Catholic Hermeneutics of the Dogmas of the First Vatican Council,” in Idem (ed.), *The Petrine Ministry: Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue*, The Newman Press, New York/Mahwah 2006, 7-23, at 9.

Knowing fully that this ministry is for the unity and communion in the Church, John Paul II invited the Church leaders and theologians to engage with him in “a patient and fraternal dialogue [...] leaving useless controversies behind [...], keeping before us only the will of Christ for his Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea ‘that they may all be one [...] so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (Jn 17:21).”<sup>4</sup> As a response to this call, there is new wave of mutual listening to find the will of Christ regarding the universal role of the Bishop of Rome, but not without some hiccups. Ioannis Zizoulas responding to it says: “There is no such thing as individual ministry, understood and functioning outside a reality of *communion*.”<sup>5</sup> In the Church as a communion, having equality, difference and relationality, the primacy also must be understood within the framework of Jesus’ own attitude, for he “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28).

The faith of the Apostles has been a sure compass with a special place to Peter as the pointer for the unity and authenticity of faith in the Church. However, the lack of unanimity in the interpretation of the N.T. testimony makes the realization of unity seem a mirage.<sup>6</sup> The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith affirms that primacy and episcopal collegiality belong to the Church’s structure itself: “From the beginning and with increasing clarity, the Church has understood that, just as there is a succession of the Apostles in the ministry of Bishops, so too the ministry of unity entrusted to Peter belongs to the permanent structure of Christ’s Church and that this succession is established in the see of his martyrdom.”<sup>7</sup> We shall dwell on the theological significance of

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* (1995), n.96.

<sup>5</sup> I. Zizoulas, “Recent Discussions on Primacy in Orthodox Theology,” in W. Kasper (ed.), *The Petrine Ministry*, 231-248, at 243.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 244: “If we wait until biblical scholars come to an agreement on this issue, we may have to postpone the unity of the Church for another millennium, if not infinitely.”

<sup>7</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations on the Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mystery of the Church* (31 October 1998), n.3: *Origins* 28 (1999) 560-563; (hereafter CDF, *The Primacy*).

the task of the successor of Peter for the unity and communion in the Church.

## 1. Mission of the Church as Sacrament of Salvation

*Lumen Gentium* teaches that the mission of the Church as sign and instrument of salvation is epitomised in the apostolic mission of the bishops: “the Bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the Apostles as Pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ” (LG 20). The Church is apostolic in *origin, teaching* and *structure* and it is the belief of the Catholic Church that the bishops in communion with each other maintain the apostolicity of the Church; in this task, the Bishop of Rome, as the successor of Peter, has the charism of “the unity of faith and communion,”<sup>8</sup> that is, to be “the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity both of the Bishops and of the multitude of the faithful” (LG 23). The Church exists to point towards God, and to work for the unity of the people of God, seeking truth and charity.

In realizing her mission “The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified with any political community nor bound by ties to any political system. It is at once the sign and the safeguard of the transcendental dimension of the human person” (*Gaudium et Spes* 76). Therefore, the Church does not ask from the political community anything else except to recognize this transcendental mission<sup>9</sup> and, as *Deus Caritas Est* affirms, it is to “guarantee religious freedom and harmony between the followers of different religions” (DCE 28). What are the distinguishing marks of the Church and the State? Whereas charity is the fundamental task of the Church, justice is primarily the concern of the State, but in the achievement of these, both are interrelated:

There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate

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<sup>8</sup> Vatican I, *Pastor aeternus*, Prologue: Denz-Hun, n.3051.

<sup>9</sup> Benedict XVI, *Letter to Chinese Catholics* (27 May 2007), n.4: *Origins* 37 (2007), 145-158, esp. 147.

love is preparing to eliminate man as such. [...] We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. The Church is one of those living forces: she is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ (DCE 28).

According to this teaching, the State and the Church are not contradictory entities. Jesus “recognized civil authority and its rights when he ordered tribute to be paid to Caesar, but he gave clear warning that the greater rights of God must be respected: ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God, the things that are God’s’ (Mt 22:21).”<sup>10</sup> The Church with her task as the spokesperson of the will of God is under obligation to speak out what the Lord wants from his people (Acts 4:19). So every State is persuaded to promote the peaceful practice of the worship of God by its citizens and it must realize that by imposing unilaterally its own regulations on Church practice, it would be impeding the realization of the basic purpose of God for the Church.

Although the Church is a worshipping community, democratic principles are respected within the Church. But, “Participative structures in the church are not efforts to incorporate democratic procedures into the church. For the church is neither a democracy, nor a constitutional monarchy, nor an oligarchy. The church cannot be compared to any political model for it is uniquely a spiritual communion guided by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, proposing democracy for her would make one suspect such a Church “to be a direct derivation from the Enlightenment and secular sociology.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, it was Rousseau, repudiating Roman Catholicism, who made religion subservient to the State, whereby whoever goes against the norms of the State was to be punished

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, n.7.

<sup>11</sup> S. Euart, “A Canonical Perspective on the Sexual Abuse Crisis,” in *Origins* 37 (2007), 113-119, at 115.

<sup>12</sup> I. Zizoulas, “Recent Discussions on Primacy in Orthodox Theology,” 237-238.

severely.<sup>13</sup> Rousseau advised that “tolerance should be given to all religions that tolerate others, so long as their dogmas contain nothing contrary to the duties of citizenship. But whoever dares to say: *Outside the Church there is no salvation*, ought to be driven from the State, unless the State is the Church, and the prince the pontiff.”<sup>14</sup> Here Rousseau makes the State the final arbiter of the fate of all citizens, even regarding their spiritual life.

The Catholic Church held the above adage for centuries but with the passage of time, she has discovered the true intent of such a dictum, as based on a particular world-view. It does not basically hint at the intolerance of the other religions or the State, but it was meant as a warning against deserting the Church, which the Fathers considered as the house/Ark in and through which God brings about salvation.<sup>15</sup> Today the Church considers herself as the sacrament of salvation, yet believes that God’s ways of saving humanity are known to him alone (GS 22). Her openness to dialogue with other Christian brethren and other religions has helped the Church to see her age-old affirmations in new light so as to facilitate the *transcendental* choices the human beings have to make.

## 2. The Church in the Service of God’s Kingdom

The Church, born from the wounded side of Christ, is “the kingdom of Christ — already present in mystery” (LG 3) and therefore, she “receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom” (LG 5). The Church is not brought about by the goodwill of human beings, nor by a democratic process, but by the call of God himself. Commenting on the Letter of St Clement of Rome to the Corinthians (ca. 96 A.D.), Pope Benedict XVI says: “The action of God who comes to meet us in the liturgy precedes our decisions and

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<sup>13</sup> J.J. Rousseau, “The Social Contract,” in R.M. Hutchins (ed.), *Great Books of the Western World: 38. Montesquieu, Rousseau*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago 1952, 387-439, esp. 437-439.

<sup>14</sup> J.J. Rousseau, “The Social Contract,” 439.

<sup>15</sup> J. Ratzinger, “Nessuna salvezza fuori della Chiesa,” in Idem, *Nuovo popolo di Dio*, Queriniana, Brescia 1971, 365-389.

our ideas. The Church is above all a gift of God and not something we ourselves created; consequently, this sacramental structure does not only guarantee the common order but also this precedence of God's gift which we all need."<sup>16</sup> Those who are responsible for the common order cannot assume to undo God's design to manifest the Truth, but must hear it with docility. Now, what sort of ministry is intended for Peter's successors?

### 3. The Petrine Ministry for Unity and Communion

Walter Kasper commenting on John Paul's encyclical letter, *Ut unum sint* points out the stress regarding papal primacy: "the Pope himself has given an important indication for a new interpretation of primacy inspired by the gospel. His interpretation is not a jurisdictional one based on the idea of sovereignty; it is a spiritual one based on the idea of service — a service to unity, a service and sign of mercy and love."<sup>17</sup> The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) too has indicated the limits of such an office: "The Roman Pontiff — like all the faithful — is subject to the Word of God, to the Catholic faith, and is the guarantor of the Church's obedience; in this sense he is *servus servorum Dei*. He does not make arbitrary decisions, but is spokesman for the will of the Lord, who speaks to man in the Scriptures lived and interpreted by Tradition; in other words, the *episkope* of the primacy has limits set by divine law and by the Church's divine, inviolable constitution found in Revelation. The Successor of Peter is the rock which guarantees a rigorous fidelity to the Word of God against arbitrariness and conformism: hence the martyrological nature of his primacy."<sup>18</sup> The primacy does not imply an authority unto oneself, but a humble testimony of the supremacy of the Lord Jesus whose mouth-piece the Pope is. He is the first witness (*martyr*) of the death and resurrection of the Lord after the manner of Peter for the pilgrim Church.

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<sup>16</sup> Benedict XVI, General Audience on *St Clement, Bishop of Rome* (7 March 2007).

<sup>17</sup> W. Kasper, "Introduction to the Theme and Catholic Hermeneutics of the Dogmas," 22.

<sup>18</sup> CDF, *The Primacy*, 7.

The Catholic Church acknowledges that the successor of Peter has authority over all her particular churches and bishops, who “are responsible for sanctifying and governing the People of God *cum et sub Petro*, with missionary dynamism and in continuity with the work accomplished by their episcopal predecessors.”<sup>19</sup> Though this apostolic task is interpreted differently by the different Christian denominations, in ecumenical circles, the necessity for a visible centre of unity on behalf of the entire Christianity is expressed.<sup>20</sup> The Ravenna Document affirms the recognition of “the *protos* or *kephale* at each of the established ecclesiastical levels [...] and universally, for the bishop of Rome as *protos* among the patriarchs. This distinction of levels does not diminish the sacramental equality of every bishop or the catholicity of each local Church.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the Petrine ministry has to be understood in the theological context as that of *episkopê*, who watches over the Lord’s flock with many collaborators.

#### 4. The Role of Peter in the New Testament and the Early Church

In the New Testament, the name of Peter is mentioned more than anyone else after Jesus himself: it is cited nearly 154 times without counting the other 27 times where the apostle is named as Simon and 9 more times in Aramaic as *Cēpas*.<sup>22</sup> The lists of the apostles practically begin with “first, Simon, also known as Peter” (Mt 10:2; Acts 1:13). Simon is the first one to profess the faith in Jesus, as “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16). Following the confession, Jesus gives him a new name *Cēpas*, Peter,

<sup>19</sup> Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of the Bishops *Apostolorum Successores*, Introduction: EV 22 (2003-2004), 1576.

<sup>20</sup> *The Evangelical Catechism of the Adults* (1975), affirms the necessity of the service of a representative on behalf of the entire Christianity. Cf. J. Werbick, *La Chiesa: Un progetto ecclesologico per lo studio e per la prassi*, Queriniana, Brescia 1998, 450.

<sup>21</sup> Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, “Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority,” n.44: *Origins* 37 (2007), 382-387, at 387.

<sup>22</sup> C.M. Martini, *Il coraggio della passione*, Edizione Piemme, Milano 2008, 10.

and promises to build his Church on this *rocky foundation* and give him *the keys* of the Kingdom *to bind and loose*. Joachim Gnilka, commenting on the words of Jesus in Mt 16:17-19 and investigating the other instances where the notion of rock is used, says: “Today there is a widespread agreement in the understanding that ‘rock’ refers to the person of Simon and not to his faith. [...] Christ is the architect of the *ecclesia*, which he calls his Church. [...] This refers to the universal Church and not to any particular local or provincial community.” Peter is the rock who cannot be replaced; he is the shutter of the gates of Hades. The powers of keys are given to him concerning prohibiting and allowing, as related to discipline and teachings. Therefore, “the destructive powers of death cannot prevail over the messianic community. It is an eschatological community until the end of times.”<sup>23</sup> Regarding the words of Jesus to Peter: “I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Lk 22:32), Gnilka comments: “This is the only passage which directly speaks of his relationship to his companions. The clause ‘once you have turned back’ — possibly a later addition out of consideration for his denial — brings back Simon into the circle of the disciples, just because he himself was weak in faith. It reveals to him that ultimately it is not he who supports the discipleship, but the Lord.”<sup>24</sup> Referring to this text the Pope says that this assurance, uttered in the context of the Pasch “points to the ultimate meaning of this Primacy: Peter must be the custodian of communion with Christ for all time. He must guide people to communion with Christ; he must ensure that the net does not break, and consequently that universal communion endures. Only together can we be with Christ, who is Lord of all.”<sup>25</sup> In the text unique to John (21:15-17), one can notice the special task conferred on Peter, through a triple question by the risen Jesus, asking him whether he loved him above all and when Peter answers affirmatively he is given the responsibility to tend and feed his Master’s sheep and to

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<sup>23</sup> J. Gnilka, “The Ministry of Peter — New Testament Foundation,” in W. Kasper (ed.), *The Petrine Ministry*, 24-36, at 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Benedict XVI, General Audience “Peter, the Rock” (7 June 2006).



be ready for laying down his life. At the same time, Peter affirms that Christ is the “chief shepherd” (1 Pet 5:4).

The primitive community gives evidence how Peter exercised the power of the keys to bind and loose: he was the first among the Twelve who had seen the risen Lord (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5), a fact that makes him as the most important point of reference (Gal 1:18). In the *Acts of the Apostles*, Peter naturally takes up the leadership among the Eleven (1:13) and presides over the selection of the substitute in the place of Judas Iscariot (1:15-26). On the day of Pentecost, he stands as the spokesperson of the Eleven and presents the life, preaching, miracles, the death and resurrection of Jesus (2:14-36). As the head of the community, he imposes the disciplinary prescriptions (5:1-11); organizes the selection of the deacons (6:1-11); inaugurates the mission towards the gentiles (10:1-11,18). In him the power of miracles appear (5:15-16), and he becomes the great witness of the sufferings and glory of Christ Jesus (1:2-3). The first half of the *Acts* is a clear testimony of the primacy of Peter among the Twelve. Given his authority, he admonishes against the errors that circulate in the Church and defends the writings of “beloved brother Paul” from erroneous interpretations (2 Pet 3:15-17). Paul too wants to be in harmony with him. He accepts Peter as the first testimony of the *kerygma* (1 Cor 15:5). Three years after his conversion, he goes to Jerusalem and meets *Cēpas* and stays with him for fifteen days (Gal 1:18).

Recalling Peter’s ministry both to the Jews and Gentiles, J.D.G. Dunn describes him as one that: “*probably in fact and effect the bridge-man who did more than any other to hold together the diversity of first-century Christianity.*”<sup>26</sup> According to him, “James and Paul, the two other most prominent leading figures in first-century Christianity, were too much identified with their respective ‘brands’ of Christianity, at least in the eyes of Christians at the opposite end of this particular spectrum. But Peter, as shown particularly by the Antioch episode in Gal. 2, had both a care to hold firm to his Jewish heritage which Paul lacked, and an openness

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<sup>26</sup> As quoted in F.A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church*, The Newman Press, New York/Mahwah 2001, 30.

to the demands of developing Christianity which James lacked.... *So it is Peter who becomes the focal point of unity for the whole Church.*"<sup>27</sup> This is quite an enlightening observation from the side of a Protestant theologian.

## 5. The Ministry of the Successors of Peter

Once Peter departed from the scene, the faithful looked up to the successor of Peter at Rome for definitive guidance. Ignatius of Antioch called the primacy of Rome as the "primacy of love."<sup>28</sup> Other than him, Irenaeus of Lyons, around the end of second century recognized the See of Rome as the centre of ecclesial communion.<sup>29</sup> He describes the Church of Rome as "the greatest and most ancient church, known to all, founded and established at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul." The tradition of Rome has come "from the Apostles and the faith which it has preached to men, comes down to us through the successions of bishops. Thus we shall confound all who, in whatever way, either through self-satisfaction or vainglory, blindness or doctrinal error, form communities they should not. For every church, i.e. the faithful who are in all parts of the world, should agree with this church because of its superior foundation. In this church the tradition from the Apostles has been preserved by those who are from all parts of the world."<sup>30</sup> Irenaeus knew that the Church of Jerusalem and Antioch were older. Yet, the greatness of the Roman Church came, undoubtedly, from the witness of Peter and Paul. He also wrote regarding Pope Clement's exercise of primacy in the first century: "In the time of this Clement, no small dissension

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<sup>27</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 385, as quoted in F.A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops*, 30 (emphasis is mine).

<sup>28</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Rom.* 1, 1: *Apostolic Fathers*, II/2, 192. According to Ignatius, the Church "which [...] presides in the place of the district of the Romans, worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of blessing, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and presiding over love, observing the law of Christ, bearing the name of the Father, which I also greet in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of the Father."

<sup>29</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haeres.*, III,3.3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, III,3.2. The translation is from F.A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops*, 153.

having occurred among the brethren in Corinth, the Church in Rome dispatched a most powerful Letter to the Corinthians exhorting them to peace, renewing their faith and declaring the tradition which it had lately received from the Apostles.”<sup>31</sup> However, when Bishop Victor insisted that all should fall in line with the Church of Rome in celebrating Easter, on the Sunday after 14 Nisan or they would be cut off from the communion with Rome, Irenaeus writing to Victor asked him not to be so drastic and he showed him how Polycarp and Anicetus had settled the matter without insisting that such uniformity of practice be necessary.<sup>32</sup> Tertullian considered Rome as the *ecclesia principalis* of the Latin Churches and Ambrose and Augustine reiterated it. This recognition could be “interpreted in the light of an understanding of the then existing relationship between the evangelizing church and the evangelized churches.”<sup>33</sup> Regarding the readmission of the heretics into the ecclesial communities, Pope Stephen’s insistence on the sufficiency of the imposition of hands, Cyprian, who advocated rebaptism, accepted the norm of the Pope and wrote: “No innovations! Hold to what has been handed down. If heretics come to you, impose your hands that they may be received in penitence.”<sup>34</sup> Cyprian held that the episcopate is one and undivided and Jesus builds his Church upon Peter, but after the resurrection, he bestowed equal power upon all the Apostles: “that He might display unity, He established by His authority the origin of the same unity as beginning from one. Surely the rest of the Apostles also were that which Peter was, endowed with an equal partnership of office and of power, but the beginning proceeds from unity, that the Church of Christ may be shown to be one.”<sup>35</sup> Vittorio Grossi commenting on Cyprian says: “The bishops of the Latin Church developed their coepiscopality with the *cathedra Petri* as the focal

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, III,3.3.

<sup>32</sup> F.A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops*, 152-153.

<sup>33</sup> V. Grossi, “Patristic Testimonies on Peter, Bishop of the Church of Rome,” in W. Kasper (ed.), *The Petrine Ministry*, 83-122, at 96-97.

<sup>34</sup> Ep. 74.1, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>35</sup> Cyprian, “The Unity of the Church,” in *Saint Cyprian Treatises*, trans. and ed. R.J. Deferrari, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 1958 (reprint 1981), 99.

point, identifying in Peter the genesis of the episcopacy (Cyprian, the *primatus textus* of *De ecclesiae unitate* 4). This understanding led to extending the understanding of the primacy of the church of Rome beyond its primacy as *ecclesia principalis*.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the Bishop of Rome exercised his primacy over the churches of the major cities of the West because these were considered as evangelized at the initiative of Peter who sent disciples.

In the Christian Orient, the letter of Pope Leo the Great sent to Flavian, the Patriarch of Constantinople (449), in the context of the Eutychian heresy, read during the Council of Chalcedon (451), made the Fathers exclaim: "Peter has spoken through the mouth of Leo." Further, with Emperor Theodosius I, there was a gradual decline in the interference in the internal order of the Church on the part of the empire. The independence of the ecclesiastical law of the West was recognised by the civil authority, and the latter made it as its own. When, in the post-Nicene period, the eastern Churches were reorganized as patriarchates which were functioning in unison with the emperor, the latter in the person of Theodosius II asked Leo the Great for the confirmation of the decrees of the Second Ephesian Synod convened by him. In the post-Constantinian era, the doctrine of primacy can be inferred from the writings and decretals of Pope Gelasius of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It had upheld two principles: the integrity of the catholic faith and communion with the Apostolic See by being in communion with the bishop of Rome.<sup>37</sup> However, with the division of the East and West, in 1054, the papal primacy was understood and developed differently in the two traditions.

## 6. The Two Vatican Councils

In the wake of ecumenism, scholars perceive the definition of papal primacy in Vatican I as a response to the particular historical context. In Europe, the evolving of the nation States tried to undo the authority of the Church over its members.<sup>38</sup> By appealing to

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<sup>36</sup> V. Grossi, "Patristic Testimonies on Peter, Bishop of the Church of Rome," 95, 115.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109, 116-117.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. DH 3050-3075; V. Conzemius, "Perché il primato del papa fu definito

sovereignty, the State claimed to direct the Church within its territory according to its own interests. In France, the king nominated bishops and prevented the exercise of papal jurisdiction. The French revolution assumed the State's claim to power over the Church and other European States also introduced the system. This ideology called Gallicanism<sup>39</sup> was the principal cause against which the Church laboured for recognition of papal authority. Against intellectual developments, like rationalism, materialism, atheism, and liberalism, that called into question the foundations of the Christian faith, they upheld the infallibility of the pope as the representative of the authority of God and of His revelation.<sup>40</sup> The Church also refuted other attempts like Conciliarism<sup>41</sup> and Febronianism.<sup>42</sup> When in *Pastor aeternus* the Council attributed the *potestas suprema, ordinaria et immediata* to the Roman Pontiff it did not identify it with the power of any absolute monarch here on earth, which overshadowed the authority of bishops. It was meant to refute the innumerable attempts of civil governments to obtain power over local bishops who were directly exposed to their intervention. Thus, the scope of the Roman primacy is unity among the bishops, unity of faith and communion among all the faithful.

This intent of the Council was clarified by the German bishops when Bismarck on 14 May 1872 accused the Pope of claiming absolute power over the local bishops. He wrote: "The bishops are only instruments of the pope, his servants without proper responsibility. The bishops have become vis-à-vis governments, servants of a foreign sovereign, and, in truth, of a sovereign who, by virtue of his infallibility, is a completely absolute sovereign,

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proprio nel 1870?," *Concilium* 4 (1971) 101-111; E. Farrugia, "Vatican I and the Ecclesiological Context in East and West," *Gregorianum* 92,3 (2011) 451-469.

<sup>39</sup> F.J. Cwiekowski, "Gallicanism," in J.A. Komonchak et al. (eds), *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1987, 415-416.

<sup>40</sup> H.J. Pottmeyer, "Recent Discussions on Primacy in Relation to Vatican I," in W. Kasper (ed.), *The Petrine Ministry*, 210-230, esp. 219.

<sup>41</sup> Conciliarism is a term applied to the tendency that affirmed the ecumenical Council as superior to the Pope and as the ultimate instance of appeal.

<sup>42</sup> Febronianism is a theologico-juridical reflection that tried to mitigate the influence of the papal Curia, with the support of the State.

more than any other absolute monarch in the world.” The German episcopate responded in 1875:

According to this doctrine of the Catholic Church, the pope is bishop of Rome, but not bishop of Breslau nor bishop of Cologne, etc. But by his rank as bishop of Rome, he is at the same time pope, in other words, the shepherd and supreme head of the universal Church, head of all the bishops and faithful, and his papal power must be respected and listened to everywhere and always, and not only in special and exceptional cases. In this position, the pope must see to it that each bishop fulfils his duty to the entire extent of his charge. If a bishop is prevented from that, or if some type of need should be felt, the pope has the right and the duty, not by his rank as bishop of the diocese, but by that of pope, to order everything which is necessary for the administration of the diocese.<sup>43</sup>

Pope Pius IX confirmed that declaration of the bishops with many words of praise.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, because of the historical situation of war, the Council had to be terminated and the reciprocity of primacy and collegiality of the bishops, which was to be developed in another document, could not be executed.<sup>45</sup> However, Vatican II paid close attention to the reciprocity between the bishops and papal primacy. It taught that the bishops are successors of the Apostles, without however transferring to the Pope and bishops the extraordinary power of the apostles; it has to be understood in proportionality with Peter/Apostles. LG 22 affirms: “one is constituted a member of the episcopal body by virtue of sacramental consecration and by hierarchical communion with the head and members of the body.” Regarding the “hierarchical communion” *Explanatory Note* 4 affirms: “In every instance it is clear that *the union of the bishops with their head* is contemplated, and never any action of the bishops taken *independently* of the Pope.” The oneness of the episcopate is certainly upheld as Pope

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<sup>43</sup> As quoted in J.-M.R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 1992, 267-268.

<sup>44</sup> DH 3117.

<sup>45</sup> H.J. Pottmeyer, “Recent Discussions on Primacy in Relation to Vatican I,” 225.

John Paul II stated: “The Bishop of Rome is a member of the ‘College’, and the Bishops are his brothers in the ministry” (*Ut Unum Sint* 95). He defends the mission of the individual bishops and does not interfere in their everyday governance. He shows solicitude for the universal Church and acts when the bishops are impeded from performing their duties.

## Conclusion

The main purpose of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome is to strive for the unity of all those who believe in Christ, as our Divine Master desired and expressed it at the Last Supper (Jn 17:21). The popes as successors of Peter have constantly reminded themselves of this great responsibility, which is evident from the words of Benedict XVI addressed to the cardinals on 20 April 2005, the day after his election to the Apostolic See: “With full awareness, therefore, at the beginning of his ministry in the Church of Rome which Peter bathed in his blood, Peter's current Successor takes on as his primary task the duty to work tirelessly to rebuild the full and visible unity of all Christ's followers. This is his ambition, his impelling duty. He is aware that good intentions do not suffice for this. Concrete gestures that enter hearts and stir consciences are essential, inspiring in everyone that inner conversion that is the prerequisite for all ecumenical progress.[...] In carrying out his ministry, the new Pope knows that his task is to make Christ's light shine out before the men and women of today: not his own light, but Christ's.”<sup>46</sup> This is a challenging task. It requires the cooperation and good will of all, both the heads of the churches and State authorities.

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<sup>46</sup> Benedict XVI, “Striving to be the ‘Servus servorum Dei’,” in *L'Osservatore Romano*, n.17 (27 April 2005), 4-5, at 5.