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The history of relationship between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church: the topics of the work of Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church

This article is a review of the some history of the relationship between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church in the context of the work of Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Due to the results of the Comission's work the new level of relationship between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church became possible. The uniatism, proselytism and the issue of primacy at the Church stayed at the main field of the dialogue so far. The Churches began asking themselves how a common witness of faith could be possible in different areas of practical life: in ethics, in social work etc. Therefore, the article shows different aspects and directions of the dialogue that are the most significant.

Keywords: Theological Dialogue, Second Vatican Council, Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church.

During the period of non-communication between the West and the East there were mistrusts, especially connected with the issues of proselytism and *uniatism*. In 1439 the Union of Florence took place and in 1596 Union of Brest was signed (Haleski, *From Florence to Brest (1439–1596)*. Michigan: Fordham University Press, 1958). At that time the Roman Catholic Church saw the idea of unity through the lenses of *uniatism*. One of the biggest issues of this polemics remains the question about the role of the Pope and his primacy. After the meeting of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill, “The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church” came up with the document *Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church*.

These conflicts can only be fully understood when looked at from the point of the differences in rituals, customs and traditions which marked the Churches of East and West. This diversity existing between the East and the West during the first millennium did not lead, nevertheless, to the break of the Church’s Unity. The breaking point was the decision of the Patriarch of Constantinople Michael Cerularius to close the churches of the Latin rite in the capital that celebrated the Eucharist using unleavened bread.

This event, which was in fact the answer to the persecution of the Greeks in the Southern Italian provinces that kept the Byzantine rite, led Pope Leo IX (1049–1054) to ask the papal legates together with Cardinal Humbert to solve this situation (Deno, 1996). But the legates lost the authority, since when they were on their way to Constantinople, the Pope died.

Therefore, the Bull, that Humbert put on the 15th of July 1054 on the altar of Saint Sophia cathedral, though it proclaimed the anathema to the Patriarch Michael Cerularius, did not have any canonical force (Will, 2016). As for the anathema of the council of bishops in Constantinople, it was directed personally to the legates of the Roman Church and not to the Church itself. This conflict between the West and the East should not have led to the break of communion in the Church. For the next centuries the Catholics and the Orthodox didn’t recognize each other until the Second Vatican Council.

When Constantinople was invaded by the Turks in 1453, it became another reference point. The Byzantium Empire ended its existence and a new era began. The Sultan intentionally kept the division between the East and the West, setting a Patriarch who was intolerant to the Catholics. In 1484 the Synod in Constantinople condemned the Union of Florence. After the Union of Lublin (1569) between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Orthodox people who lived in those lands, which were part of the Russian Orthodox Church before, were forced to become Catholics.

In 1724, the Melkite Schism occurred when many Antiochian Orthodox people became Greek Catholics (*William McLoughlin et alii*). In 1828, the Council in Constantinople criticized the Latin faith and abolished the Catholic dogmas. In 1848, the Orthodox signed the Encyclical that condemned the “filioque” as heresy and the all Roman Catholic Church as schismatic.

In 1962 Patriarch Athenagoras used the term “sister churches” describing the attitude to the Roman Catholic Church (*Will, 53*). In 1963 Metropolitan Maximos sent a letter to Pope Paul VI congratulating him on behalf of Patriarch Athenagoras on his election (*Will T. Cohen, 55*). Then the Pope wrote a letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch. It was the first letter of a Pope to a Patriarch since 1584 (*Will, 55*). In 1964 the third pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes allowed the local

Orthodox Churches to provide theological dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church individually (*Will, 57*).

On October 28, 1967, the Common Declaration of Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI announced the next step of the relationship between the Churches (*Will, 67*). In 1972 the *Thomos Agapis* was presented to Paul VI. The name of the publication referred to the sign of love between the Churches. It consisted of the documents that they exchanged from 1958 until 1970 (*Will, 75*). Pope Paul VI also referred to the Letter ('Tome') of Pope Leo the Great of the 5th century to the Emperor that proclaimed the importance of the 4th Ecumenical Council and made the West and the East one in faith.

Patriarch Dimitrios I and Pope St John Paul II were exchanging letters, congratulating each other on the feasts of St Apostle Andrew and St Apostles Peter and Paul. These feasts became essential spiritual events for the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches as a symbol of seeking unity. Also, these dates became the reason of visits of the representatives of Rome to Constantinople and of Constantinople to Rome as well.

Later on, in June 1980 Pope John Paul II reflected on the significance of the *Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church* and its first meeting: "We are entering into a new phase of our relations, since the Theological Dialogue is an essential element in a wider exchange between our Churches. In this Dialogue both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches are involved as a whole..." (*Will, 91*). During the last decades the *Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church* discussed the difficult issues that created challenges in the relationship between the Churches. I will highlight the Commission's work and underline its most important topics.

The history of the relations between the West and the East in the 1970s came to a different level that made it possible to have new basis for the future. A *Joint International Commission* was established in 1979 (*Will, 89*). The dialogue itself began in 1980 with the first session held in Patmos and Rhodes in Greece that produced the first document "Plan to Set Underway the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church" (*Borelli, John Erickson, 47-52*).

The second Statement that theologians agreed on was "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity" (*Munich, 1982*) (*Borelli, John Erickson, 53-64*). The U.S. Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation (existing since 1965) had a positive response to this document. The third plenary meeting in Crete, Greece, in 1984 discussed the project of a document about the Sacraments and unity among the Churches (*Borelli, John Erickson, 65-68*).

During the meeting of the fourth plenary session in Bari (*Italy, 1987*) the Commission prepared the second statement, based on the previous discussion. It was called "Faith, Sacraments, and the Unity of the Church" (*Borelli, John Erickson, 93-104*). The next plenary session in Valamo (*Finland, 1988*) resulted in the release of the document called "The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church, with Particular Reference to the Importance of the Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God".

The Catholic Church formally accepted that Orthodox Church had the Apostolic Succession and the Sacraments. But another issue which affected the relationship between the Catholics and the Orthodox was *Uniatism*, linked to attempts of unity that were initiated by the Roman Catholic Church in the

past. According to those attempts, the Churches could keep Eastern Byzantium liturgical rites but on the condition of accepting the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Later on, such politics was proclaimed to be unacceptable, while the agreement that *Uniatism* is not the method to achieve the unity was reached in 1990 in Freising (Germany) and in 1993 in Balamand (Lebanon) (M.G. Dimitriadou, 3).

Belgrade (Serbia, 2006) discussed the document “The Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church; Conciliarity and Authority in the Church” (Communique of the *Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church* (Belgrade, Serbia, 24 September 2006).

The draft of this document was prepared in 1990 in Moscow and should have been presented at the assembly in Freising. But the political background and new agendas at that time in Eastern Europe addressed the issue of *Uniatism*. It was essentially the reason why the discussion of this ecclesiological document was delayed and came long time after its draft.

The sessions in Paphos (Cyprus, 2009) and in Vienna (Austria, 2010) prepared this discussion on the topic of primacy: “The Role of the Bishop of Rome in the Communion of the Church in the First Millennium.” Communique of the *Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church*. 12th Plenary Session, Vienna, Austria, 20–27 September 2010). The last sessions of the Joint Commission in Amman (Jordan, 2014) and in Chieti (Italy, 2016) were discussing the “Primacy and Synodality in the Church”.

The history of the relationship between Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches passed through very long periods of division and mistrust. The events of the past are witnessing about the most important challenges that Churches faced and continue to face nowadays. These are the issues of *uniatism* and primacy.

Ravenna document “The Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Community, Conciliarity and Authority” (*Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church*, 215–232). The document consists of an introduction, two main parts and a conclusion. The first part, called “The Foundations of the Conciliarity and Authority”, is devoted to the definitions of ‘synodality’ (conciliarity) and ‘authority’ with references to the Scriptures. The document is speaking about the “divine authority” that “cannot *subsist in the church* except in the love between the one who exercises it and those subject to it. It is, therefore the authority without domination, without physical or moral coercion” (*Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church*, 221). There is a direct reference made to *Unitatis Redintegratio*: “We believe that this unity subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time” (Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, paragraph).

This is very important because the Ravenna document linked the ideas of unity and authority in the Church together in the light of God’s love. Also, we see the indirect emphasis on the Apostolic Succession that is also connected here with ‘authority’. The authority goes through the apostles to bishops and then to the whole Church. *Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church*

(Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority. Ravenna, Italy, October 13, 2007 (Documents), 220). Therefore, the document opened a serious perspective for the possibility of communion of the Churches in sacraments.

The second part of the Ravenna document, titled “The Threefold Actualization of Conciliarity and Authority”, speaks about the presence of the Church in the local, regional and universal levels. The definitions of the “local Church” can be understood differently in the East and the West. In the East, under “local Church” we usually understand the Autocephalic Church. This term will be clarified more in the last document of the *Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church* called “Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church” (Chieti, 21st of September 2016).

This statement represents a short and precise summary of the Ravenna document, but goes beyond the understanding and definitions of that one. The issue of the terms “synodality” and “primacy” is shown here from an ecclesiological perspective. The “local Church” unites the people under the bishop with Jesus Christ. The “regional communion of Churches” shows the relations between the metropolitan or “protos” with the bishops of the region with reference to ancient canonical rules (the source of the synodal system). The “Church at the universal level” goes to the issue of taxis of the patriarchates where Rome always historically had the first place (primacy of honour and a court to appeal for bishops in difficult situations). The existence of “pentarchy” (five ancient Patriarchates – Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem) was proved and underlined by Ecumenical Councils and canons. The ancient Church always took into consideration the primacy of honour of the bishop of Rome (Hilarion Alfeyev, Bishop, “Pope’s Title ‘Patriarch of the West’ Removed”, posted online on the 9th of March 2006, <http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles6/HilarionPope.php> (access date: 08.12.2018).

Soborniy and *Sobornost* does not mean “synodal” or “synodality”. Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev treats it as “conciliar” (Hilarion Alfeyev, 430–435). Some other modern theologians, as B. Bobrinskoy and J.-C. Larchet, look into the interpretation of “catholicity” as “conciliarity” as “impoverishment of the notion of catholicity understood in the early Church” (Paul Ladouceur, 221, Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Church [Le Mystère de l’église, Paris, 2003]*. New York: SVS Press, 2012, Jean-Claude Larchet, *L’église, Corps du Christ. Vol. I: Nature et structure*. Paris: Le Cerf, 2012).

“Synodal” is related more to the administrative pattern to the bishops’ councils that make decisions with the inspiration of the work of the Holy Spirit. *Soborniy* (Catholic) means fullness in particularity. It touches the crucial points of the dialogue between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church of the understanding of ecclesiology. What does it mean for the Church to be ecumenical, universal and at the same time true in each place in her diversity? In the Orthodox Church it means that *Sobornost* shows the full truth of the sacramental life of the Church in every parish (for the Roman Catholic Church as well) in every place where Christian communities exist, according to St Ignatius of Antioch’s Epistle to the Smyrnaeans: “Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude of the people also be, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church” (St Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smirnaeans* 8). Here the terms *Sobornost* and “Catholic” are becoming historically and ecclesologically connected.

According to my point of view, the origin of the differences in understanding of ecclesiology in the Roman Catholic and in the Orthodox Church at present times resides not just in the different hierarchical structures of the Churches. But it is also the matter of language and different understanding of the terms and it is related to a certain extent to the term “ecumenical”. The words “ecumenical” and *soborniy* can’t be used interchangeably in the Orthodox Church. Ecumenicity is becoming here the consequence of the Catholicity of the Church. This question should be addressed again, for clarification, in further discussions pertaining to the bilateral theological dialogue.

The *Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church* worked on the difficult and very important topics of this relationship and achieved some very important statements on the way of overcoming the division. The issue of primacy remains still a very essential question in the dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The issue of *Uniatism* stayed one of the most difficult circumstances of the past that is very difficult to overcome to this day.

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История взаимоотношений Римско-католической и православной церкви: аспекты работы Объединенной международной комиссии по богословскому диалогу

В данной статье рассматривается краткая история взаимоотношений Римско-католической и православной церквей в контексте работы Объединенной международной комиссии по богословскому диалогу. Благодаря результатам работы комиссии начался новый период отношений Римско-католической и православной церквей. Темы униатизма, прозелитизма и вопроса примата во Вселенской церкви до недавних пор оставались основными в диалоге между церквями. Католическая и православная церкви начали задаваться вопросом, как общее свидетельство веры возможно в различных сферах жизни: в этике, в социальной сфере и проч. Таким образом, статья демонстрирует различные аспекты, а также направления диалога между церквями, которые имеют наибольшее значение.

Ключевые слова: богословский диалог, Второй Ватиканский собор, православная церковь, Римско-католическая церковь.