

In the Name of Humanity

Introduction

Historical and social realities have impacted upon the ecumenical councils and their subsequent directions. Ecumenical councils are needed to strengthen communion in the church. In the course of two millennia, the Catholic Church has recognised twenty-one ecumenical councils;¹ the Eastern Orthodox Church recognises the first seven as legitimate, namely, Nicaea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus, Chalcedon, Constantinople II, Constantinople III, and Nicaea II. The councils relevant to the discussion in this article are Vatican Council I and

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1. The twenty-one ecumenical councils recognised by the Roman Catholic Church are: (i) Nicaea I (325), (ii) Constantinople I (381), (iii) Ephesus (431), (iv) Chalcedon (451), (v) Constantinople II (553), (vi) Constantinople III (680), (vii) Nicaea II (787), (viii) Constantinople IV (869), (ix) Lateran I (1123), (x) Lateran II (1139), (xi) Lateran III (1179), (xii) Lateran IV (1215), (xiii) Lyon I (1245), (xiv) Lyon II (1274), (xv) Vienne (1311), (xvi) Constance (1414), (xvii) Florence (1438-1443), (xviii) Lateran V (1512-1517), (xix) Trent (1545-1549, 1551-1552, 1562-1563), (xx) Vatican I (1869-1870), and (xxi) Vatican II (1962-65) (Karl Keating, "The 21 Ecumenical Councils", *Catholic Answers: Magazine*, 6/1/1993, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-21-ecumenical-councils>, accessed 11.09.2024).

Vatican Council II, hereafter referred to as Vatican I and Vatican II, respectively.

Vatican I was a unique council for several reasons, including the fact that it focused on doctrine rather than a specific heresy and that it was the first to have representation of bishops from various parts of the world.² It ended abruptly due to the Franco-Prussian war, with only two of the six proposed decrees being addressed, namely, (i) faith and revelation, and (ii) the primacy and infallibility of the Pope stated by the dogmatic constitution of the Church of Christ, *Pastor Aeternus*.³ Although the latter was

Archbishop Job (Getcha) of Telmessos notes that, particularly from the fourth century onwards, whilst the primacy of the See of Rome in the West was traced back to St Peter's role among the Apostles, this notion was not accepted in the East (Archbishop Job (Getcha) of Telmessos, "The Perspectives and Challenges of Primacy and Synodality in the Orthodox Church Today", *The Ecumenical Review* 72(3) (2020): 356–369: 360, <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12521>).

2. The objective of this council was to confront modern ideology that considered faith to be part of the evolution of history. The context was the unfolding political realities – the aftermath of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars and Gallicanism – including the 'Risorgimento', which was a direct threat to the Papal States.
3. Vatican I, "*Pastor Aeternus*, 18 luglio 1870, Costituzione dogmatica", in: Ugo Bellocchi, (ed.), *Tutte le encicliche e i principali documenti pontifici emanati dal 1740*, vol. IV: Pio IX (1846-1878), (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 334-340.

Vatican I was interrupted owing to the intention that it would continue at the end of the conflict. But then Garibaldi reached Rome and occupied it; thus, until February 1929 the Pope was considered 'imprisoned' in the Vatican. The matter was officially and formally declared 'closed' in 1960 by Pope John XXIII during the official opening of the Vatican II.

only invoked once since 1870 – the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption by Pope Pius XII in 1950 – it had repercussions as to the role of the Pope from a legal perspective, which led to an overhaul of the Church in terms of governance and structure. Vatican I opened the doors of the Papacy for dialogue with the contemporary world. It is still considered a framework for today’s Church, notably with respect to the Petrine ministry: “Vatican I was in itself also a kind of ultramontanist ‘modernization’ of the Roman Catholic Church, which paved the way for the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II and still shapes the post-Vatican II church especially for what concerns the Petrine ministry”.⁴

Primacy and Synodality: A Canonical Tradition

In his address at the annual working session of the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working

4. Massimo Faggioli, “Modernization of the Papacy and Catholicism in the Postmodern: Legacy and Challenges to Vatican I”, in *Horizons*, 47, no. 1 (2020):115-119: 115, <https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2020.44>

Contemporary scholars regard Vatican I as the culmination of the ultramontanist movement rather than modernisation of the Church. This movement took shape in France, particularly at the end of the eighteenth century, as a reaction to the revolutionary uprisings.

Group – a team of thirteen Eastern Orthodox and Catholic theologians from different countries invited on the basis of their theological expertise – held at the Institute of Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum, Rome, Pope Francis stated that:

“Through the constructive patience of dialogue, especially with the Orthodox Churches, we have come to understand more fully that in the Church primacy and synodality are not two competing principles to be kept in balance, but two realities that establish and sustain one another in the service of communion. Just as the primacy presupposes the exercise of synodality, so synodality entails the exercise of primacy.”⁵

In the opening chapter of *Ecumenism, primacy, authority and love – faces of a complex theological reality*, Iuliu-Marius Morariu refers to the work of this non-official ecumenical working group, which has met annually since 2004. Morariu’s work is a short anthology of thought-provoking, ecumenical-related themes. He cites the work undertaken by the working group with respect to primacy and synodality in the doctrines of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches which promotes

5. Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group*, (Vatican City: Clementine Hall, 7 October 2021), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211007-gruppo-ortodossocattolico-santireneo.html>, accessed 11.09.2024.

unity between the two Christian traditions. It may be read as a preamble to a few other themes discussed in the anthology ranging from the relation between secularism and political theology to the manner in which ecumenism was understood by the Romanian communist regime.

The permanent representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the World Council of Churches, Archbishop Job (Getcha) of Telmessos, hereafter referred to as Archbishop Job, notes that “the bilateral dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church has focused since 2006 on the issue of conciliarity and the issue of primacy and synodality. It is therefore in the context of synodality that the thorny question of the Roman primacy has since then been addressed.”⁶ His Eminence notes the work undertaken by the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. The *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority*, hereafter referred to as the Ravenna document, defines three levels of ecclesial communion – local,

6. Archbishop Job, “The Perspectives and Challenges of Primacy and Synodality in the Orthodox Church Today”.

regional and universal.⁷ These levels were endorsed in the document *Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church*, hereafter referred to as the Chieti document, which studies primacy and synodality in the first millennium.⁸ During this period both churches were still in full communion: “the history of the Church in the first millennium is decisive. In spite of certain temporary disruptions, East and West Christians lived in communion during this period and, in this context, the essential structures of the Church were instituted”.⁹

7. 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, 13 October 2007), <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo.html>, accessed 11.09.2024.

8. Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church*, (Chieti, 21 September 2016), <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese1.pdf>, accessed 11.09.2024.

9. *Ibid.* Officially there was ‘communion’ during the first five centuries, and its guarantor was the Emperor. From the beginning there were shifts between local churches based upon theological/pastoral approach. For example, the Council of Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles, and later – in the sec-

Three months prior to the publication of the Chieti document, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew stated, in his opening address at the inaugural session of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church:¹⁰

“... the synodal institution that we are today called to serve in its supreme form derives its origin from the depths of the mystery of the Church. It is not merely a matter of canonical tradition, which we have received and preserve, but of fundamental theological and doctrinal truth, without which there is no salvation. In confessing our faith in the holy Creed in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, at the same time we proclaim her synodality which incarnates in history all those characteristics of the mystery of the Church, that is to say, her unity, holiness, universality and apostolicity. Without synodality, the unity of the Church is severed, the sanctity of its members is reduced to mere individual morality and articulation about virtue, catholicity is sacrificed in favour of particular individual, collective, national and other secular interests or

ond-to-third century – two different theological approaches emerged: the theological school of Alexandria and that of Antioch. Also, it is imperative to note that none of the first ecumenical councils could start without the presence of the papal legates.

10. “Opening Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Inaugural Session of the Holy and Great Council,” 20 June 2016, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/opening-ecumenical-patriarch>, accessed 11.09.2024.

intentions, and the apostolic message falls prey to various heresies and ruses of human reason”.

This quotation was used by Archbishop Job in his seminal publication on the perspectives and challenges of primacy and synodality in the Orthodox Church today.¹¹ He noted that “the Orthodox tradition has always emphasized the importance of conciliarity or synodality, which it identifies as being ontologically linked to the very nature of the church”.¹² He also cited the address of Pope Francis at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops: it is “precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium”¹³. The Pope called for greater synodality to establish ways of communion, participation, and mission at every level of the church.

11. Archbishop Job, “The Perspectives and Challenges of Primacy and Synodality in the Orthodox Church Today”.

12. *Ibid*, 356.

13. “Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops: Address of His Holiness Pope Francis,” 17 October 2015. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html, accessed 11.09.2024. In the opinion of Archbishop Job, Pope Francis “suggested that the Catholic Church has to learn from the Orthodox Church on this point” (Archbishop Job, “The Perspectives and Challenges of Primacy and Synodality in the Orthodox Church Today”, 357).

Primacy and Synodality: The Way Forward According to the Catholic and Orthodox Churches

In 2019, the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group published a comprehensive document to complement the official international dialogue between the two churches, entitled *Serving Communion: Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality*.¹⁴ This extensive, well-structured and focused working paper has three dimensions on which it grounds its theological analysis: (i) hermeneutics in the ecumenical dialogue present in specific historical and cultural contexts, (ii) the history of the church, notably during the medieval period, and (iii) systematic theology, notably with respect to the role of church authority and the interpretations of primacy and synodality. This document “brings as an element of novelty in the documents of the ecumenical dialogue the section dedicated to hermeneutics as a theoretical foundation for the theological and historical analysis of the elements that create dissension. ... [It is] a paradigmatic model for tackling church-divisive

14. Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, *Serving Communion: Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality*, (Los Angeles: Marymount Institute Press, 2019). The preface of this study was authored by the two co-chairmen: the German Roman Catholic Bishop Gerhard Feige – a member of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and chairperson of the Ecumenical Commission of the German Bishops’ Conference – and the Romanian Metropolitan Serafim Joantă of Germany and Central Europe.

issues.”¹⁵ In the words of Paul McPartlan – Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology and Ecumenism at The Catholic University of America and member of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church since 2005¹⁶ – this publication is a “balanced and charitable study of the issue of primacy and synodality, happily free from polemic and ideology, and is greatly to be welcomed. It resonates in many ways with the principles of Catholic teaching and theology today, and also with the work of the official international dialogue”.¹⁷

The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and synodality in the ecumenical dialogues and in the responses to the encyclical Ut unum sint is a study published earlier this year by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity within the Holy See.¹⁸ Further to addressing primacy and syn-

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15. Mihail Comănoiu, “Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox–Catholic Working Group. *Serving Communion: Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality*. Los Angeles: Marymount Institute Press, 2019.” in *The Ecumenical Review*, 73, no. 2 (2021): 322-325, <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12596>
 16. The Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church is instrumental in the dialogue between the two Christian churches.
 17. Paul McPartlan, “Serving Communion: Re-Thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality,” in *Ecclesiology*, 16, no. 1 (2020): 3-11, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455316-01601002>
 18. Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and synodality in the ecumenical dialogues and in the responses to the encyclical Ut unum sint*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2024), <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/news/2024/2024-06-13-il-vescovo-di-roma-nuovo-documento-dpuc.html>, accessed 11.09.2024.

odality not as opposing ecclesial dimensions but as mutually interdependent – in the words of the Prefect of the Dicastery Cardinal Kurt Koch, “primacy must be exercised in a synodal way, and synodality requires primacy”¹⁹ – this publication recommends building bridges between dialogues so that they enrich one another: local and international, official and unofficial, bilateral and multilateral, Eastern and Western.²⁰ A commentary on this study was published by Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm – the moderator of the central committee of the World Council of Churches – in *The Ecumenical Review*.²¹ In his commentary, Bishop Bedford-Strohm noted that “the fact that it is simply

This study – published with the approval of Pope Francis and presented at a press conference at the Holy See Press Office on 13 June 2024 (<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/06/13/240613f.html>, accessed 11.09.2024) – discusses primacy and synodality in the ecumenical discourses and includes a synopsis of the reactions at the time to the encyclical *Ut unum sint* (John Paul II, *Ut unum sint: On Commitment to Ecumenism* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 25 May 1995, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051_995_t-unum-sint.html, accessed 11.09.2024).

19. Andrea Tornielli, “Koch: Papal primacy is service, exercised in a synodal manner,” in *Vatican News*, 13 June 2024 (<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-06/koch-papal-primacy-is-service-exercised-in-a-synodal-manner.html>, accessed 11.09.2024).
20. This document concludes with a proposal from the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity to identify “the most significant suggestions for a renewed exercise of the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome, ‘recognized by one and all’” (“The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in the Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*,” in *The Ecumenical Review*, 76, no. 3 (2024): 273-281: 273, <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12863>
21. *Ibid.*, 276-281.

entitled 'The Bishop of Rome', and not 'The Vicar of Christ' or 'The Primacy of the Pope', is itself an expression of a serious attempt ... to respond in a spirit of love to the various testimonies of ecumenical dialogues".²²

The dogmatic definitions included in Vatican I represent a significant hurdle in the synodal path.²³ Besides clarifying the Catholic doctrine with respect to the philosophical tendencies of the time, they addressed the doctrine of the primacy (supremacy) and infallibility of the Pope.²⁴ Massimo Faggioli argued that *Pastor Aeternus* "is not about papal infallibility, but about papal primacy. ... It is the papal primacy of jurisdiction that has acquired a greater scope than it actually had in 1870".²⁵ Kristin Colberg noted that

22. Ibid, 273.

23. Some dialogues appreciate the unique historical context surrounding Vatican I. It was convoked under the rising threat of the Kingdom of Italy encroaching on the Papal States and was adjourned after Italian soldiers marched on Rome.

24. The council called for the consolidation of papal authority, a position widely supported by all forces within the church: "In each step, Pius IX found strong backing from ultramontane forces within the church, not just among the bishops, but from clergy, religious (especially the Jesuits!), laity, and the Catholic press, who saw the strong assertion of papal authority as the necessary response to the crisis the church faced" (Jeffrey von Arx, "Vatican I's Teaching on Papal Infallibility: Nineteenth-century historical context and twenty-first century relevance," in *Horizons*, 47, no. 1 (2020): 109-114: 112, <https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2020.43>)

25. Faggioli, "Modernization of the Papacy and Catholicism in the Postmodern: Legacy and Challenges to Vatican I", 115. With respect to the latter statement, Faggioli refers to Margaret O'Gara ("Three Successive Steps toward Understanding Papal Primacy in Vatican I," in *The Jurist*, 64 (2004): 208-223)

“proponents of synodality often interpret Vatican I’s definition of papal primacy as an obstacle to the synodal path. Recent scholarship, however, suggests ways that Vatican I need not present a stumbling block; rather, when properly contextualized and interpreted, *Pastor Aeternus* has the potential to illumine the inherent dynamism between primacy and synodality”.²⁶

In her study she proposed approaches to Vatican I and synodality which encourage towards “more responsive ecclesial structures in the diverse and changing church of today”.²⁷ The document issued by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity suggested that redefining, or possibly rewording, the original dogmatic definitions ensured the original meaning was comprehensible and acceptable in the contemporary ecumenical context.²⁸ This suggestion is worth noting, notwithstanding Colberg’s valid argument that rather than reading primacy and synodality as competing concerns, one should re-envision the relation between

who, in turn, followed Klaus Schatz (*Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present*, trans. John A. Otto and Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996)).

26. Kristin Colberg, “Expanding Horizons 150 Years after Vatican I: Toward a Renewed Relationship between Synodality and Primacy”, in *Theological Studies*, 83, no. 1, (2022): 70-83: 70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639221075054>

27. *Ibid.*

28. This point was noted in Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and synodality in the ecumenical dialogues and in the responses to the encyclical Ut unum sint.*

the two “by broadening three horizons: the meaning of ‘synodality’, the interpretations of Vatican I’s teaching on papal primacy, and the exercise of primacy in a synodal church.”²⁹ Whilst addressing the legacy and challenges of Vatican I, Faggioli noted that

“The role of the papacy as the agent of reconciliation among religions is a post-Vatican II development. ...

Pope Francis’ grand opening ... of the debate on ecclesial synodality in the Catholic Church is an act of reception of Vatican II, but also of Vatican I because it leverages a Petrine ministry”.³⁰

Implementation of Synodality

Archbishop Job maintained that

“The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in 2016 should be perceived and received as a genuine manifestation of synodality at the beginning of the 21st century. It has reminded us that it is within the exercise of primacy and synodality at the universal level that the unity and the orthodoxy of

29. Colberg, “Expanding Horizons 150 Years after Vatican I: Toward a Renewed Relationship between Synodality and Primacy”, 71.

30. Faggioli, “Modernization of the Papacy and Catholicism in the Postmodern: Legacy and Challenges to Vatican I”, 118, 119.

the church is guaranteed. Its message referred to the proposal for the Holy and Great Council to become a regular institution to be convened every seven or ten years. By saying this, the Holy and Great Council has perhaps inaugurated a new era of synodality in the Orthodox Church on the universal level. This is perhaps the greatest contribution of the Holy and Great Council in an era of globalization, when the pastoral problems encountered by each local autocephalous church, due to a growing secularization of the world, are very similar and need a common synodal response".³¹

Morariu presented the Romanian Orthodox Diocese in Canada as, de facto, an illustration of secularism and political theology in a society where

"compared to other countries from the European space, for example, the level of secularisation is deeper. Events like the 'revolution tranquille'³² have shifted the approach on religion and there are still debates related to the situation of the indigenous people and how certain Catholic priests abused them."³³

31. Archbishop Job, "The Perspectives and Challenges of Primacy and Synodality in the Orthodox Church Today", 356.

32. For more information about this theme, Morariu refers to Réjean Pelletier, "La Révolution tranquille", in *Le Québec en jeu*, (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1992), <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pum.15288>

33. See Iuliu-Marius Morariu, *Ecumenism, Primacy, Authority and Love: Faces of a complex theological reality* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2024), 71.

Archbishop Job argued that, unlike in the Catholic church, “the implementation of synodality at the local level and universal level remains problematic or challenging in the Orthodox Church today”.³⁴ Although, in theory, most Orthodox theologians welcomed the three levels of synodality outlined in the Ravenna and Chieti documents, synodality is far from being implemented at a local and universal level. This seems not to be the case with the Romanian Orthodox Diocese in Canada, as Morariu outlined in a chapter of his work.³⁵ This diocese is working hard to implement synodality at least at the local level. The initiatives mentioned by Morariu include gracious listening to each individual as a member of the Church and options to take on activities like youth camps that bring together other members of the community. These are pragmatic, achievable ways of putting synodality into practice; they are proposed as a response to the realities of and feedback from the community which compelled the church to take action. Reading the signs of the times and actively engaging with and responding to them is an optimal form of consciously driven synodality at the local level.

34. Archbishop Job, “The Perspectives and Challenges of Primacy and Synodality in the Orthodox Church Today”, 360.

35. See Morariu, *Ecumenism, Primacy, Authority and Love: Faces of a complex theological reality*, 59-72.

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine: A case of Ethnophyletism?

One can trace the present war in Ukraine to the outbreak of civil war in the country in February 2014 which was instigated and supported by foreign powers. The war (to use the language of the West) or special military operation (to use Russia's) which commenced in February 2024 in Ukraine is a continuation of the 2014 events. The genesis of the problem pre-dates the Second War; it can be personified in the antagonism between the Greek Catholic West falling under the jurisdiction of the Holy See versus the Orthodox East falling under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. Besides the Ukrainian Head of State, the other two main heads of states involved are the presidents of the United States and of the Russian Federation, namely the Catholic Joe Biden – who was US Vice President during the outbreak of the 2014 civil war and subsequently³⁶ – and the Orthodox Vladimir Putin, respectively. All are lawyers by education. Due to limitations arising from the current professional

36. Biden was Vice President of the United States for both terms of the Barack Obama presidency; the first ran from 2009 to 2013 and the second from 2013 to 2017.

position held by the author,³⁷ I cannot delve further into this sensitive topic.³⁸

Notwithstanding my professional constraints, there is no harm in putting forward the following, certainly not exhaustive, list of questions related to the subject of this academic writing:

1. Both the Ukrainian government and the newly formed Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) claim to support democratic values and religious freedom, yet they implement restrictive measures against the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate, arguably infringing on minority rights. How does one reconcile these actions with the presumed commitment to democratic principles, especially when they mirror the same criticised oppressive tactics displayed by Russia in its approach to the church?
2. Considering that the establishment of the OCU is mainly a national project backed by the Ukrainian government, do the nationalistic motivations within

37. The author has served in the role of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of his homeland, Malta, to the Balkans since 2014.

38. The civil war in Ukraine between the pro-Russia and pro-West factions was further nourished by the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to establish the Orthodox Church of Ukraine an autocephal diocese in those territories when he knew that the jurisdiction was not his but that of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

the OCU and the government undermine the Orthodox ideal of ecclesial unity? Could this nationalism not only alienate minority Orthodox communities – such as the one affiliated to Moscow and others (Bulgarian, Romanian, etc.) – but also damage Ukraine’s standing in the global Orthodox world?

3. In recent times, some Orthodox theologians raised concerns regarding ethnophyletism, that is, prioritising national identity within the church. With respect to national Orthodox churches emerging in Ukraine and other regions, how do we perceive the border between healthy national identity and potential ethnophyletism within Orthodoxy? Could national churches inadvertently elevate national interests above ecclesial unity?
4. Given that the calling of the Orthodox Church is to transcend earthly divisions, how should one view, from a theological perspective, the close alignment between certain national Orthodox churches and their respective governments, especially when political tensions drive ecclesial separation? Could this alignment be seen as compromising the Church’s mission, or is it simply a contextual necessity? For example, it is a fact that the Romanian Patriarchate wanted to create a religious non-governmental organisation in Ukraine but approval is still pending.

Fascism, Communism and Ecumenism

Although in the mid-first century Christianity appeared as a religious group within Judaism – one of the earlier monotheistic religions in world history – worshipers of both faiths co-existed. Later, the relationship between them, notably with respect to the Catholic Church, became more complex. Historically it is grounded in Christian theology, which blamed the Jews for killing Jesus. The rulers of Catholic territories practiced antisemitism, which led to persecution, violence and discrimination against the Jews, including their expulsion from Catholic lands.³⁹ With the rise of nationalism and industrialisation in Europe, political antisemitism increased due to economic conflicts between Jews and non-Jews. In the early twentieth century, hatred towards the Jews peaked during the Great Depression and was manifested through the Holocaust – a statement of ultimate human evil – when millions of European Jews were systematically exterminated in occupied Poland by Nazi Germany and its collaborators.⁴⁰ Vatican II improved the rela-

39. The reason was neither theological nor religious but one of financial interests. The Jews had monopoly on the banks, and it was only in the latter part of fifteenth century – on the initiative of some Franciscan friars – that the Catholic Church institutionalised the so-called ‘Monte di Pietà’ in order not to leave hegemony over the finances of Europe in the hands of the Jews.

40. Other groups were also exterminated during this purge based on their ethnicity (notably the Roma and Sinti), political beliefs, disability or sexual orientation.

tionship between the Catholic Church and Judaism. *Nostra aetate*⁴¹ is the first declaration in the history of the Catholic Church focused on the relationship of the Church with the Jews. It repudiated the accusation of Jewish deicide and officially condemned antisemitism. Later, it established the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jewish community to address the harm caused by past persecutions, with the Vatican formally apologising for its lack of action and silence during the Holocaust.⁴²

Whilst Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) personified the radical far right in Germany, Stepan Andriyovych Bandera (1909–1959) and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (1899–1938) represented the far-right in today’s Ukraine and Romania, respectively. Bandera, the son of a Ukrainian Greek Catholic priest, was the leader of the militant wing of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists.⁴³ He was a highly controversial figure – some hail him

41. Pope Paul VI, “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions – *Nostra aetate*”, 28 October 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html, accessed 11.09.2024.

42. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *We Remember: A reflection on the Shoah*, 16 March 1998, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/en1.html>, accessed 11.09.2024.

43. David R. Marples, “Stepan Bandera: The resurrection of a Ukrainian national hero”, in *Europe-Asia Studies*, 58, no. 4 (2006): 555-566, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130600652118>

as a hero while others denounce him as a fascist and/or Nazi collaborator; his legacy gained traction following Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2022. During World War II, his followers – the Banderites – exterminated Polish and Jewish civilians.⁴⁴ Codreanu was the leader of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, also known as the Legionary Movement, which he founded in 1927 at a time when Romania was Franco-ophile. The Legion – “arguably the most unusual mass movement of interwar Europe”⁴⁵ – was a Romanian religious, anti-democratic, anti-capitalist, anti-communist, and anti-Semitic, fascist movement “based on the millennialist cult of the Archangel Michael. ... [It is] generally considered an unusual ‘variety of fascism’ mostly because of its mysticism and religious ritualism”.⁴⁶ Unlike other European contemporaries, the Legion “willingly inserted strong elements of Orthodox Christianity into its political ideology to the point of becoming one of the rare modern European

44. Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

45. Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914–1945*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 279-280.

46. Constantin Iordachi, “Charisma, Religion, and Ideology: Romania’s Interwar Legion of the Archangel Michael,” In: John R. Lampe, Mark Mazower, (eds), *Ideologies and National Identities*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 19-53: 19. This book chapter was later expanded into the following monograph: Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The legion of the ‘Archangel Michael’ in inter-war Romania*, Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, No. 15, 2004, https://www.ntnu.edu/documents/1295900401/1295966101/Nr%2B15_B5.pdf

political movements with a religious ideological structure."⁴⁷ Codreanu promoted a xenophobic, exclusive ultra-nationalism. He rejected French ideals in favour of the restoration of authentic Eastern Orthodox values and the glory of Romania's folk culture, which he celebrated as a statement of "Romanian genius".⁴⁸ Following the Legion's support for the ultranationalist and authoritarian vision of Ion Antonescu (1882–1946), Romania was declared a "National Legionary State", with the Legion as the only legal party in the country. Once in power, the Legion intensified existing anti-Semitic legislation which led to violence against and executions of Jews.

According to Morariu, both the Legionary Movement and the post-World War II communist regime in Romania had their own messianisms. Codreanu and the only two Communist leaders – Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1901–1965) and Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918–1989) – had charisma and enjoyed a cult of personality. Both regimes used religion as a medium, but Ceaușescu used it in an ecumenical context. As Morariu pointed out in his conclusions, the communists understood that religion can be used as a tool to create the appear-

47. Radu Ioanid, "The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard," in *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions*, 5, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 419-453: 419, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1469076042000312203>

48. Richard J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 115. Instead of Romanian traditional folk dress, the Romania's Francophile elite opted for Parisian style of the time.

ance of religious freedom and therefore accepted the Romanian Orthodox Church. He noted that despite political pressures, its involvement “in the Ecumenical Movement bore fruits that are still important today and that contributed to the creation of bridges of dialogue with other Churches”.⁴⁹

Morariu supported his claim by referring to Andrei Scrima (1925–2000), a prominent Romanian Orthodox theologian whom he has been researching in recent years.⁵⁰ Scrima became the personal delegate of the ecumenical patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople to Vatican II after refusing to return to Communist Romania. As an archimandrite of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, he was involved in the meeting between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I in Jerusalem in 1964 which led to the rescinding of the excommunication of 1054 AD, the year of the Great Schism between the churches of the Greek East and the Latin West. The retraction of this excommunication was a major leap in restoring the relations between Rome and Constantinople, along with other Eastern Orthodox patriarchates. As a re-

49. See Morariu, *Ecumenism, Primacy, Authority and Love: Faces of a complex theological reality*, 97.

50. See, Iuliu-Marius Morariu, “Ecumenism and Communism in the Romanian Context: Fr. Andre Scrima in the Archives of the Securitate”, in *Religions*, 12 (2021), 719, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12090719>; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, “Elements of Father Andrei Scrima’s Ecumenical Activity as Reflected in File No. 0005468 from the ‘Securitate’ Archives”, in *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, 12, no. 3 (2020): 497-511, <https://doi.org/10.2478/ress-2020-0035>

sult, the Joint Catholic-Orthodox Declaration was issued and read simultaneously at a public meeting of Vatican II and at a special ceremony in Istanbul (Constantinople).⁵¹ Why was Scrima so relevant to the government of Bucharest at the time? The Romanian authorities were interested not only in his ideas about ecumenism but also in the aspiration “to create a good image using the Ecumenical Movement, the World Council of Churches and the [sic] dialogue with the Catholic Church as tools in the accomplishment of this purpose”.⁵² The government of Bucharest was interested in using ecumenism “in order to create the illusion of democracy and freedom”⁵³ and it attempted “to use the ecumenical dialogue platform to simulate transparency and democracy [of its government]. This is one of the reasons why today, in [Eastern European] countries, there is a certain reticence (especially among the Eastern-Orthodox people, who are in the majority there), towards Ecumenism”.⁵⁴

51. Pope Paul VI, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I, “Joint Catholic-Orthodox Declaration of his Holiness Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I”, Vatican City, 7 December 1965, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651207_common-declaration.html, accessed 11.09.2024.

52. Morariu, “Elements of Father Andrei Scrima’s Ecumenical Activity as Reflected in File No. 0005468 from the ‘Securitate’ Archives”, 510-511.

53. Morariu, “Ecumenism and Communism in the Romanian Context: Fr. Andre Scrima in the Archives of the Securitate”, 719.

54. Morariu, “Elements of Father Andrei Scrima’s Ecumenical Activity as Reflected in File No. 0005468 from the ‘Securitate’ Archives”, 497.

In the Name of Humanity

Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti*⁵⁵ called for human fraternity and solidarity – universal fraternity without borders – and appealed for a rejection of war. Although there is no mention of “Islam” or “Muslims”, this topic was tackled in the subsequent *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*⁵⁶, co-issued by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azha Sheik Ahmed el-Tayeb. According to the former, this joint statement was “no mere diplomatic gesture, but a reflection born of dialogue and common commitment”.⁵⁷

Noting in *Fratelli tutti* that the “conditions that favour the outbreak of wars are once again increasing”,⁵⁸ His Holiness reiterated his position, which he shared

55. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On fraternity and social friendship*, 3 October 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html, accessed 11.09.2024.

56. Pope Francis, Sheik Ahmed el-Tayeb, *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-unana.html, accessed 11.09.2024.

57. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, para 5. This statement was also highlighted in the *Catholic Herald* (Christopher Altieri, “Pope Francis releases Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti”, in *Catholic Herald*, 4 October 2020, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/pope-francis-releases-encyclical-letter-fratelli-tutti/>, accessed 11.09.2024).

58. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 257.

with the members of the United Nations General Assembly.⁵⁹

“war is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment. If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and peoples. To this end, there is a need to ensure the uncontested rule of law and tireless recourse to negotiation, mediation and arbitration, as proposed by the Charter of the United Nations, which constitutes truly a fundamental juridical norm”.

Wars and military conflicts are driven by greed, power and ideology; religion is not a cause but an excuse. They are sadistic acts. Gratification is derived from inflicting pain, suffering and/or humiliation on the other, elements which are not even found in the rules of the jungle. Predators in the animal realm kill to eat, which is a survival instinct; they do not hunt in order to torture. Wars and military conflicts happen when diplomacy fails.

A conflict that has been ongoing for several decades, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, indicates that no one

59. Pope Francis, *Meeting with the members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation: Address of the Holy Father*, (New York: United Nations Headquarters, 25 September 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html, accessed 11.09.2024.

wants a resolution.⁶⁰ In this case, the war is not about religion – Judaic Israel versus Islamic Arab states – but about land and the self-determination of Palestinians (including those of Christian faith) within the territory of the former Mandatory Palestine.⁶¹ Historically,

60. The Israeli–Arab military and political conflict dates to the first arrival of Jewish settlers in Ottoman Palestine in 1882 and was later supported by the 1917 Balfour Declaration which agreed to the setting up of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

61. Although Scrima supported the Arab cause, “his attitude towards the Palestinians and the Arab situation influenced neither the Jewish authorities to act against him, nor the Occidental societies to expel him from the universities where he was a teacher. His arguments were most probably well-sustained, and his attitude was perceived as a personal honest perspective, which was not meant to upset anyone” (Morariu, “Elements of Father Andrei Scrima’s Ecumenical Activity as Reflected in File No. 0005468 from the ‘Securitate’ Archives”, 509.

In the same spirit of Scrima, and while aware of the peace-loving Jewish people whom I have utmost respect, I will be morally failing if I were not to put some questions with respect to the actions of the Israeli authorities: Isn’t the establishment of Jewish settlements in occupied territories a form of expansionism expressed through the Nazi concept of *Lebensraum*, “living space”? Palestinian neighbourhoods are systematically disappearing, as happened to Jewish ones in Nazi Germany. Have the ultra-nationalist Jewish settlers brought far-right political ideologies to power in Israel? With such an ideology in government, will the people of Palestine be subject to a holocaust such as the Jewish people endured during the World War II? The Palestinians have for decades been subject to persecution by the Israeli Government; its present conduct in Gaza tantamount to genocide. With moral clarity, Stephen Kapos – 87-year-old Holocaust survivor from Budapest – unequivocally stated that “Israel is committing genocide in Gaza” (Owen Jones, “Holocaust Survivor Tells Me: Israel is committing genocide”, in YouTube, 26 April 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4PFmz4MNdg>, accessed 11.09.2024).

after the founding of Islam, the relationship between Judaism and Islam was respectable. When Christians persecuted the Jews, Muslims offered them refuge and protected them. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all Abrahamic monotheistic religions; they have a common origin which grounds their respective intrinsic value systems. Not only do they all worship one God, but they also value moral life based on prayer, almsgiving and fasting. They all share similar values, teachings and morality, as their spiritual traditions have the same roots. Moses, the foremost Hebrew prophet in Judaism, is acknowledged by both Christianity and Islam as one of their major prophets.

The Joint Catholic-Orthodox Declaration of 1965 between the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches did not halt the schism but was a public manifestation of an aspiration for reconciliation. It rejected more than nine centuries of hostility. Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I's decision to adhere to such a declaration was bold. Not all Orthodox leaders agreed with the idea of rapprochement. He was publicly challenged by Metropolitan Philaret, President of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, in 1965 in an open letter, where he argued that

“no union of the Roman Church with us is possible until it renounces its new doctrines, and no communion in prayer can be restored with it without a decision of all churches, which, however, can hardly

be possible before the liberation of the Church of Russia which at present has to live in catacombs. ...

May such treason against Orthodoxy not enter between us".⁶²

Metropolitan Philaret concluded his plea by requesting His Holiness

“to put an end to the confusion, because the way you have chosen to follow, even if it would bring you to a union with the Roman Catholics, would provoke a schism in the Orthodox world. Surely even many of your spiritual children will prefer faithfulness to Orthodoxy instead of the idea of a compromising union with the heterodox without their full harmony with us in the truth.”⁶³

Nowadays, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches are not in “full communion” because of enduring doctrinal and ecclesiastical differences. Yet nearly six decades after this declaration, the relations between the two have improved; certainly, neither side calls the other heretic. No schism within the Orthodox Church arose because of this declaration. On the contrary, in February 2016, Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow

62. Metropolitan Philaret, *A Protest to Patriarch Athenagoras: On the Lifting of the Anathemas of 1054*, (Orthodox Christian Information Center, December 2/15 1965), http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/philaret_lifting.aspx, accessed 11.09.2024. Metropolitan Philaret was the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia from 1964 until his death in 1985.

63. Ibid.

and all Russia and Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, the largest of the Eastern Orthodox churches, met in Cuba and issued a Joint Declaration,⁶⁴ the first of its kind, which called for fraternity and solidarity. Although no immediate rapprochement is foreseen, both primates called for restoration of Christian unity. The declaration includes references to the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, wars in the region, the Greek Catholic Churches and the conflict in Ukraine:

“25. It is our hope that our meeting may also contribute to reconciliation wherever tensions exist between Greek Catholics and Orthodox. It is today clear that the past method of ‘uniatism’, understood as the union of one community to the other, separating it from its Church, is not the way to re-establish unity. Nonetheless, the ecclesial communities which emerged in these historical circumstances have the right to exist and to undertake all that is necessary to meet the spiritual needs of their faithful, while seeking to live in peace with their neighbours. Orthodox and Greek Catholics are in need of reconciliation and of mutually acceptable forms of co-existence.

64. Pope Francis, Patriarch Kirill, “Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia”, in *Activities of the Holy Father Pope Francis* (Havana, 12 February 2016), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco_20160212_dichiarazione-comune-kirill.html, accessed 11.09.2024. The meeting was made possible through Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev and Cardinal Koch, for the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, respectively.

26. We deplore the hostility in Ukraine that has already caused many victims, inflicted innumerable wounds on peaceful inhabitants and thrown society into a deep economic and humanitarian crisis. We invite all the parts involved in the conflict to prudence, to social solidarity and to action aimed at constructing peace. We invite our Churches in Ukraine to work towards social harmony, to refrain from taking part in the confrontation, and to not support any further development of the conflict".⁶⁵

These are only two points of the 30-point declaration; both call for ecumenism. Nevertheless, point 25 upset the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, whilst point 26 was disapproved of by the Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, a "schismatic group" according to the Moscow Patriarchate. The present context consists of one of the bloodiest, deadliest conflicts since the World War II, where civilians bore the brunt of violence.

As history repeats itself and war rages, we should aim to exploit that which strengthens human civilisation, not support acts that bring about its destruction. The way forward goes beyond the strict Christian understanding of the term ecumenism, that is, the aim to bring different Christian denominations closer. Its Greek-Latin etymology is expressive of the more inclusive essence of the term: the Greek word 'oik-

65. Ibid.

oumenē' translates as 'the inhabited world' whilst the Latin 'oecumenicus' translates as 'worldwide'. In this sense, one may read ecumenism as a term aimed at reconciling, building bridges to enrich one another irrespective of one's local or international, official or unofficial, bilateral or multilateral, Eastern or Western, Northern or Southern position.

Reconciliation is not a negotiated peace, nor is it the result of deals to safeguard individualistic, or even worse, egoistic interests. Diversity in ethnicity, denomination, ideology, social status, language, culture or nation is inspirational. Reconciliation brings humanity together in a unity enriched by differences not uniformity. Reconciliation represents metaphorical bridge-building between peoples based on their essence and humanity; it is an opportunity to express humanity.⁶⁶ In national and international fora, one may argue for the Darwinian axiom of "survival of the fittest",⁶⁷ with the national interest prevailing,

66. This is in line with the teachings of Pope Francis: "It is good to cultivate a unity enriched by differences that will not yield to the temptation of a bland uniformity, which is never good. In this spirit, ... discussions centre on appreciating how differing aspects present in our traditions, rather than giving rise to disagreements, can become legitimate opportunities for expressing the shared apostolic faith. ... The Lord's peace is not a 'negotiated' peace, the fruit of agreements meant to safeguard interests, but a peace that reconciles, that brings together in unity" (Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group*).

67. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1869), 91-164.

but it is imperative to recall that beyond nationality there is humanity. The same applies to the distinct categories within a given society: ethnicity, denomination, ideology, social status, language and culture. Just co-existence amongst all is the future of humanity. Reconciliation is a process; the first step is a desire to maintain amicable relations and the second is finding the courage to take such a step; it is based on mutual respect.

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September 2024