

## CURRENT THEOLOGY

### PAPAL PRIMACY IN CONTEMPORARY ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

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Issues concerning papal primacy occupy a significant place in recent theological literature. Ecumenical dialogues have addressed the challenge implied by the oft-cited lament of Pope Paul VI, "The Pope . . . is undoubtedly the most serious obstacle on the path of ecumenism,"<sup>1</sup> and have found, as Karl Lehmann notes, that the relative lack of qualification and nuance in official Catholic doctrine on papal jurisdiction tends to make primacy a more intractable topic than infallibility in their effort to reach consensus on different aspects of the papal office.<sup>2</sup> Even apart from explicitly ecumenical contexts, varying understandings of papal primacy are a major factor in the recent intra-Catholic debate on the theological status and proper canonical role of such church structures as national and regional episcopal conferences.<sup>3</sup>

In an effort to provide background for discussion of these issues, this paper seeks to present major elements of the treatment of papal primacy on the part of contemporary Roman Catholic theologians. Several limitations should be noted from the outset. In view of the nature of the issue, the complexity of the discussion, and the abundance of literature, no examination of infallibility has been attempted.<sup>4</sup> Even with regard to primacy, the paper makes no claim to be exhaustive; yet enough authors have been studied to convey a picture of the range of current Catholic

<sup>1</sup> AAS 59 (1967) 498. Cf. esp. *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*, ed. P. Empie and T. A. Murphy (Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 5; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), and Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report: Windsor, September 1981* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Karl Lehmann, "Grundlinien und Probleme des ökumenischen Petrusdienstes," in *Das Petrusamt: Geschichtliche Stationen seines Verständnisses und gegenwärtige Probleme*, ed. K. Lehmann (Munich: Schnell & Steiner, 1982) 144-45. The chief official text is the First Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution *Pastor aeternus*, July 18, 1870 (DS 3050-75); the substance of this doctrine, situated in a somewhat broader context, is repeated by the Second Vatican Council (cf. esp. *Lumen gentium*, nos. 22-25).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Avery Dulles, "Bishops' Conference Documents: What Doctrinal Authority?" *Origins* 14 (1984-85) 528-34.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. John T. Ford, "Infallibility: A Review of Recent Studies," *TS* 40 (1979) 273-305.

thought on the subject and to demonstrate some characteristic emphases. Official documents are considered only insofar as they are reflected in the writings of theologians.

To supply a context for viewing current conceptions, the paper will begin (I) with a summary of the theology of papal primacy developed by Charles Journet (1891–1975), an influential and, in many respects, representative Roman Catholic theologian of the recent past. It will then (II) consider, in more thematic fashion, contemporary Catholic treatments of the major issues discussed by Journet; an effort will be made to show both elements of continuity and shifts in understanding. After noting some recent ecumenical proposals (III), the paper will conclude (IV) with suggestions for further consideration.<sup>5</sup>

## I

Papal primacy occupies a prominent position in Charles Journet's systematic ecclesiology, which is characterized by strong emphasis on jurisdiction and by an inclination to analyze realities in terms of their causes. Operating, as his title suggests,<sup>6</sup> within a consciously incarnational perspective, Journet devotes the first volume of his study to the apostolic hierarchy, which he considers the immediate efficient cause of the Church and of her apostolicity.

Journet, convinced that "the Church received her definitive jurisdictional constitution immediately from the hands of Christ" (387), distinguishes between the intransmissible privileges of the apostles (= members of the Twelve) and their "ordinary and permanent powers concerned with preserving the Church" (384); the latter powers, of orders and jurisdiction, pass on to their successors.

These gifts are equal in each of the apostles. In addition, however, Journet interprets Mt 16:18-19 and Jn 21:16-17, each taken without further ado as actual words of Jesus, as Christ's direct conferral on Peter of "a regular ordinary power, transmissible for all time" (387), by virtue of which Peter's "relation to the other Apostles was not one of equality, but the relation of a shepherd to his flock" (388) as far as government of the universal Church is concerned. Even the special apostolic privileges, "since they were granted only in view of the foundation of a Church which was essentially destined to be governed by a single visible ruler,

<sup>5</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 32nd session of the Eastern Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation at St. Vladimir's Seminary, Crestwood, N.Y., June 2-4, 1986. While some revisions have been made for publication, the basic form of the original presentation has been retained.

<sup>6</sup> *The Church of the Word Incarnate: An Essay in Speculative Theology 1: The Apostolic Hierarchy* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955).

... tended of themselves to place the Apostles, in all that concerned the government of the Church, in dependence on the trans-apostolic powers entrusted by Christ to Peter" (383).

Journet offers two reflections on the suitability of Christ's decision. First, he argues that Christ had originally organized the Church around himself as a visible center; prior to the Ascension, he was faced with the choice of altering this constitution or singling out one of the apostles with a special assistance enabling him to "become a permanent visible center of organization for the universal church" (388; cf. 399). The latter option, which Christ chose, has the advantage of adhering as closely as possible to the Church's original structure. Second, Journet maintains that if it is a structural law of the local church that a single bishop manifest the authority of Christ and continue his visible and corporeal presence, it is all the more fitting that comparable provision be made for the universal Church (397-99). These, however, are arguments for the appropriateness of the structure chosen by Christ, not for its necessity; that the Church is so organized is derived from a distinct and explicit act of Christ's foundational will.

By a provision of "divine law" (389), Peter's regular power passed on to his successors, who receive their jurisdictional power immediately from Christ—unlike other bishops, who receive theirs "mediately, through the Pope" (404; cf. 421). The link between the universal pastorate and the episcopate of the local church at Rome derives from "an unforeseeable decree of Providence" (429) and from Peter's exercise of his "exceptional privilege" of determining "the conditions that would make the line of his succession recognizable" (427). Journet considers this fusion indissoluble, a matter of divine right, though he also notes the existence of different opinions (429-33) on this matter.

To specify the characteristics of papal jurisdiction, Journet has recourse to the vocabulary of the First Vatican Council. "Ordered . . . to the good of the universal Church" (411), truly pastoral and episcopal, "it is, in the universal Church, what the jurisdiction of the bishop is in a local Church: plenary, immediate, proper or ordinary" (423). Plenary: it extends in act to the universal Church and in potency to the whole universe. Immediate: it can be exercised over each one of the faithful, without recourse to any intermediary. Proper: though vicarious as exercised in the name of Christ, it resides primarily in the pope alone, and only secondarily and by participation in the episcopal college united to him as body to head. Ordinary: it is permanently attached to an office rather than being delegated.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 423-24.

Journet's theology of the papacy, like his ecclesiology in general, is oriented primarily toward the Church universal and strongly focused on juridical questions. Sharp distinction is made between the position of the pope and that of other bishops, whose collegial role is understood as derivative from the primacy. Papal primacy, like other elements of the Church's structure, is traced directly to the will of Christ, in a fashion which precludes much allowance for subsequent historical development. Nonetheless, despite this concentration on the papacy in isolation, it would be inaccurate to charge Journet with exalting the papacy for its own sake. Papal authority "is given to the Pope for no other end than the service of the Church. . . . The Papacy is for the Church, not the Church for the Papacy" (423-24). "Jurisdiction . . . derives all its greatness from the fact that it is meant to serve the purpose of love."<sup>8</sup>

## II

While contemporary Catholic theologians typically affirm the need for this office of the universal Church, their theologies of the papacy differ significantly from Journet's analysis in understanding its origin, providing a theological assessment of its development, conceiving its status *de iure divino*, and specifying its nature and limits within an overall ecclesiology.

### *Origin*

Representative contemporary Catholic authors envision Jesus' foundation of the Church, especially with regard to its structural elements, in quite nuanced fashion.<sup>9</sup> Corresponding to this, biblical studies detect in the NT foundations for a Petrine office, function, or ministry, often specified as service to church unity, but find its beginnings less fixed in form than Journet conceived them. Two examples must suffice.

1. An ecumenical study of Peter in the NT distinguishes between the historical career of Simon Peter and images of Peter in NT thought. During Jesus' ministry Simon was one of the first called, a very prominent figure among Jesus' followers; he probably made a confession of Jesus in terms of Jewish expectations, but with equal probability failed to understand Jesus. Later he became known as Peter, a name probably given

<sup>8</sup> C. Journet, *The Primacy of Peter: From the Protestant and from the Catholic Point of View* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1954) xii.

<sup>9</sup> For a survey of the literature and a recent constructive proposal on the foundation of the Church, cf. Francis Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 57-192; on the diversity of church structure in the NT period, cf. Raymond E. Brown, "Episkopē and Episkopos: The New Testament Evidence," *TS* 41 (1980) 322-38, and *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist, 1984).

him by Jesus. He was accorded an appearance (probably the first appearance) of the risen Christ, was the most important of the Twelve, and had a missionary career; in the early Church his theological stance probably mediated between those of James and Paul. During and after his lifetime, Peter also became a symbol; the NT includes images of him as the great Christian fisherman, the shepherd of the sheep, the Christian martyr, the recipient of special revelation, the confessor of the true Christian faith, the guardian of the faith against false teaching, and as a weak and sinful man.<sup>10</sup> In this regard the study speaks of discovering “the importance of the trajectory traveled by Peter’s image, a trajectory that even in the New Testament is not coterminous with his historical career,” and concludes that “an investigation of the historical career does not necessarily settle the question of Peter’s importance for the subsequent church” (168).

2. In a recent monograph Rudolf Pesch speaks of Simon’s special position within the circle of Jesus’ followers and among the Twelve, and sees in this “one essential presupposition of his leadership role in the primitive Church.”<sup>11</sup> Peter, as spokesman of Jesus’ disciples, confessed Jesus to be the Messiah; he later received from Jesus the command to strengthen his brothers (9–48). Presented in the oldest traditions as the first witness to the Easter faith, he served as leader of the church at Jerusalem, engaged in missionary activity among Jews and Gentiles, and was martyred at Rome (48–134). Diverse portions of the NT (135–52, 160–62) and apocryphal texts (152–60) reflect considerable interest in him after his death. Thus it is legitimate to speak of a “primacy” of Peter with regard to both the historical Peter and the NT’s Petrine images (163). Some aspects of this “primacy” (those pertaining to the origin of the Church) are historically unique, as is also true of the position of the other apostles, and the NT speaks of no immediate successors. Yet future developments cannot be rejected a priori without denying the legitimacy of development in church history in general. The NT leaves open the question of leadership of the universal Church, but insofar as this question can be envisioned at all, the NT witness as a whole would classify it as a question of succession to Peter (cf. 163–70).

Despite variations in detail—Pesch is notably more confident than the ecumenical task force in making assertions about Peter’s activity during Jesus’ public life—exegetical studies of this sort commonly attribute to

<sup>10</sup> Raymond E. Brown et al., *Peter in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973) 157–68.

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Pesch, *Simon-Petrus: Geschichte und geschichtliche Bedeutung des ersten Jüngers Jesu Christi* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1980) 34.

Peter a distinctive and important position in the early Church and identify substantial biblical interest in a "Petrine function" after Peter's death. They differ considerably from interpretations of the type exemplified by Journet; parallel differences exist with regard to emergence of the episcopacy. What theological implications are seen in such analyses of the NT depend in large part on views of the relationship of Scripture and tradition, conceptions of the nature of the Church, and positions on the permanence of its structures. They necessarily entail theological concern with postbiblical historical development.<sup>12</sup>

### *Development*

In contrast to Journet, for whom all basic questions seem settled in the Church's first generation, contemporary Catholic authors manifest greater theological interest in later history. While few would wish to assess papal primacy on the basis of *sola scriptura*, the precise theological evaluation of subsequent development—not only with regard to the papacy, but also as far as other church offices are concerned—remains controverted, as different theologians apply different norms. Thus Karl Rahner notes that the papacy "has not 'always' been exactly what it now is";<sup>13</sup> for this reason, among others, Rahner argues for critical theological assessment of concrete historical forms—past and present—of jurisdictional primacy to determine whether they correspond fully to all essential characteristics of Roman primacy, to its dogmatic relationship to other ecclesial institutions of divine law, and to the requirements of justice, love, and freedom in specific historical conditions.<sup>14</sup> J. M. R. Tillard attributes normative status to the "Great Tradition" of the undivided Church of the first millennium, in comparison to which the biblical period represents only the Church's infancy, while some later Western developments are classified as accretions.<sup>15</sup> Heinrich Döring speaks approvingly of rereading the Scriptures in the light of subsequent history, and of appropriating the Scriptures in the context of lived faith; he finds this procedure in accord both with the ancient Church's understanding of revelation and inspiration and with the principles of modern hermeneutics.<sup>16</sup>

While not directly contradictory, these assessments are somewhat at

<sup>12</sup> This point is explicitly noted in *Peter in the New Testament* (167–68) and by Pesch (163, 170).

<sup>13</sup> "Papst," *LTK* 8, 46.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 45.

<sup>15</sup> *The Bishop of Rome* (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> "Papsttum," in P. Eicher, ed., *Neues Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe* 3 (Munich: Kösel, 1985) 318–19.

variance with one another; it is not clear how Tillard would justify his selection of a norm, nor how Döring's approach can avoid delivering theological legitimation for any and all eventualities. The doctrinal significance of the historical development of the papacy—an issue which involves basic questions of theological methodology—remains an important topic for future study.

### *Ius divinum*

In this context the status of the papacy as an institution which exists within the Church *de iure divino* has inevitably been addressed anew; this discussion is embedded in the general contemporary reassessment of the meaning to be attributed to the term *ius divinum*.<sup>17</sup> On the whole, Catholic theologians agree that the papal primacy exists within the Church by God's will, and not due solely to human factors. They differ in more specific conception of the papacy's status and in choice of terminology to describe its position.

Karl Rahner, for example, has proposed that historical developments which correspond to the nature of the Church may be *iuris divini*, even if not strictly required by the Church's nature, at least if they occurred in the apostolic Church.<sup>18</sup> In keeping with this general principle, he has suggested considering the possibility that the papacy might involve a *ius divinum* "which has its foundation and possibility in the words of Jesus, but is at the same time an irreversible decision of the primitive church (and not simply the logical unfolding of such words of Jesus)."<sup>19</sup> Through such considerations Rahner hopes to attenuate the tension between the plurivalent origin of the primacy and its later development. In the historical forms which the papacy has assumed he envisions a mixture of *ius divinum* and *ius humanum*, for "the *ius divinum* of the Church always and wherever it exists has a concrete embodiment which is not itself *iuris divini*."<sup>20</sup>

Rahner's understanding of *ius divinum* is contested, inasmuch as others would hesitate to refer to *ius divinum* in such situations and are

<sup>17</sup> For surveys and evaluations of the literature, cf. Avery Dulles, "Ius divinum As an Ecumenical Problem," *TS* 38 (1977) 681-708; J. Michael Miller, *The Divine Right of the Papacy in Recent Ecumenical Theology* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. esp. "Reflection on the Concept of 'ius divinum' in Catholic Thought," *Theological Investigations* 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 220-43; Rahner explicitly leaves open the possibility of decisions *iuris divini* in the postapostolic Church (241-43).

<sup>19</sup> "Papst" 46.

<sup>20</sup> "Basic Observations on the Subject of Changeable and Unchangeable Factors in the Church," *Theological Investigations* 14 (New York: Seabury, 1976) 20; Lehmann ("Grundlinien" 141-43) applies this idea to the primacy.

unwilling to classify such developments as irreversible.<sup>21</sup> As a possible resolution, J. Michael Miller has proposed distinguishing between "divine institution" and "divine design" or "divine ordination"; as far as primacy is concerned, Miller would reserve the term "divine institution" for reference to the Petrine function and speak of "divine design" or "divine ordination" in regard to the embodiment of that function in the historical papacy.<sup>22</sup> How this terminological proposal will be received by other theologians remains to be seen. In this issue, as in others, discussion of the papacy is inseparable from consideration of the status of other ecclesial structures.

### *Nature and Limits of Papal Primacy*

While the juridical emphasis of the ecclesiology of the recent past has now largely fallen into disfavor,<sup>23</sup> general ecclesiological orientations vary widely among Catholic theologians; these variations inevitably exert considerable influence on their conceptions of the papal office. The two major approaches may be distinguished by respective inclinations to concentrate on the local church or on the universal Church. With reference to understanding of papal primacy, the first type, which tends to be oriented on patristic thought, is represented by Joseph Ratzinger and J. M. R. Tillard; the second, developed chiefly with reference to

<sup>21</sup> For references, especially to the work of Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx, cf. Dulles, "*Ius divinum*" 690-98; Miller, *The Divine Right* 156-61. This literature is not concerned primarily with the papacy; more frequently the threefold structure of church office (bishop-priest-deacon) is the immediate issue under discussion.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *The Divine Right* 280-85; *What Are They Saying about Papal Primacy?* (New York: Paulist, 1983) 86-92. That the boundaries are rather fluid is evident from Miller's explanation (*The Divine Right* 282): "When an ecclesial structure is considered *ex institutione divina*, its existence is attributable directly to God, more precisely in matters of Church polity, to Christ. In this case the emphasis is on the *divine* intervention by which a given institution comes into being; human and historical factors, though always necessarily present, are secondary considerations. A structure held to be *ordinatione divina* also derives from the divine will, from the Lord's design for his Church. Nonetheless, the formative role of the community in determining its ecclesial polity is given far greater prominence. The term *ordinatio divina* emphasizes the elements of human decision and historical factors at the origin of an institution." For historical precedent at the Council of Trent (DS 1776) for similar use of *ordinatio divina*, cf. Piet Fransen, "Ordo, Ordination," *LTK* 7, 1214, and Karl J. Becker, *Der priesterliche Dienst 2: Wesen und Vollmachten des Priestertums nach dem Lehramt* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970) 100-103.

<sup>23</sup> For strong criticism of this approach, cf. Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967); Küng's theology of the Petrine ministry is presented on pp. 444-80. For two recent efforts to consider the primacy in broader perspective, cf. John Wilcken, "The Papacy and Christian Unity," *Compass Theology Review* 19, no. 4 (Summer 1985) 20-33; and Cuthbert Rand, "The Universal Pastoral Ministry of the Bishop of Rome: A Roman Catholic Approach," *One in Christ* 22 (1986) 4-23.



more speculative theological considerations, is reflected in most of Karl Rahner's writings on the papacy.<sup>24</sup>

1. An influential line of thought in contemporary ecclesiology seeks to revive an ecclesiology of communion as the primary focus for its understanding of the Church. Joseph Ratzinger identifies the Church's origin as normative; the standard "is not limited to the Scriptures, but includes the basic form of the ancient Church."<sup>25</sup> Pursuing the historical approach implied by this principle, he has developed over a period of years an understanding of the Church as a *communio* of local churches, in which the Eucharist is celebrated under the leadership of a bishop.<sup>26</sup> While each local church is truly church, no local church is self-sufficient, for the oneness of Christ requires that it exist in communion with the other churches: "Unity of the communities which celebrate the Eucharist is therefore not an external addition to Eucharistic ecclesiology, but its internal condition."<sup>27</sup>

The papacy is seen in this context. The pope is pope precisely as bishop of Rome,<sup>28</sup> who exercises in the universal Church a primacy as point of orientation and standard of unity.<sup>29</sup> This primacy, which must be distinguished more clearly than it has been in the past from his regional primacy (patriarchate) in the West, implies no need for centralized administration,<sup>30</sup> its embeddedness in the Church subjects it to

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Ratzinger ("Die bischofliche Kollegialität nach der Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils," *Das neue Volk Gottes Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* [Dusseldorf Patmos, 1969] 185–87) distinguishes in similar fashion two types of theology of collegiality. For Ratzinger's critique of Rahner's approach to the theology of the episcopacy, cf "Primat und Episkopat," *Das neue Volk Gottes* 136–37, n 30

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* 121, n 1 For further development of this principle, cf J Ratzinger, "Die Bedeutung der Vater im Aufbau des Glaubens," *Theologische Prinzipienlehre Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie* (Munich Wewel, 1982) 139–59

<sup>26</sup> Several of Ratzinger's essays on the subject are collected in *Das neue Volk Gottes* 49–71, 121–224, cf also "Primacy, Episcopate, and Apostolic Succession," in Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy* (New York Herder, 1962) 37–63 "Der Primat des Papstes und die Einheit des Gottesvolkes" (*Dienst an der Einheit Zum Wesen und Auftrag des Petrusamtes*, ed J Ratzinger [Dusseldorf Patmos, 1978] 165–79) suggests a martyrological understanding of papal primacy For a summary of Ratzinger's earlier writings, cf Patrick J Burns, "Communion, Councils, and Collegiality Some Catholic Reflections," *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church* 152–58

<sup>27</sup> "Die Ekklesiologie des Zweiten Vatikanums," *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 15 (1986) 46 The English translation of this lecture ("The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," *Origins* 15 [1985–86] 370–76) is not always accurate Cf also J Ratzinger, "Probleme und Hoffnungen des anglikanisch-katholischen Dialogs," *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 12 (1983) 250

<sup>28</sup> "Die bischofliche Kollegialität" 182

<sup>29</sup> "Primat und Episkopat" 131

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* 132–33, 135, 142

inherent limits more stringent on a moral level than they appear to be in the juridical formulations of Vatican I and Vatican II.<sup>31</sup> In Ratzinger's judgment, such limits are acknowledged in the desire of Vatican I to be understood "according to the ancient and constant faith of the universal Church" (DS 3052), "as it is also contained in the acts of the ecumenical councils and sacred canons" (DS 3059), "as the perpetual practice of the Church attests" (DS 3065).<sup>32</sup> They are reflected again in the Prefatory Explanatory Note appended to *Lumen gentium* by decision of higher authority, as the assertion that the pope "can at all times exercise his power at will" is qualified by the phrase "as required by his office itself."<sup>33</sup>

Building on the work of Ratzinger, Yves Congar, and others, J. M. R. Tillard has presented in more detail a theology of the papacy within an ecclesiology of communion.<sup>34</sup> Appealing largely to the "Great Tradition" of the undivided Church of the first millennium, he argues that the church of Rome occupies a distinctive position, once clearly recognized by an undivided Christianity, "in the preservation of the unity of faith and communion between the churches" (188) because of its unique connection with the primary apostles Peter and Paul. Corresponding to the primacy of the Roman See, the bishop of Rome (according to Tillard, the basic title of the pope) holds "an 'apostolic' primacy, special and unique in the heart of the universal episcopal college" (49), as well as a regional primacy and a patriarchal primacy as patriarch of the West. These three primacies, often confused, must now be disentangled in order to clarify the true nature of the pope's "apostolic" primacy as a "service of communion between the churches" (123), "a visible foundation for the unity of faith and communion" (124). The First Vatican Council's definitions of papal primacy and infallibility, while remaining a permanent part of the Catholic theology of the papacy, require "re-reading" in the light of both Vatican II and the Church's ancient traditions. While

<sup>31</sup> "Die bischofliche Kollegialität" 187-88

<sup>32</sup> "Primat und Episkopat" 140 For an informative (and humorous) account of the awareness of such limits at Vatican I, cf G Sweeney, "The Primacy The Small Print of Vatican I," *Clergy Review* 59 (1974) 96-121 For sharp criticism of the decisions made at Vatican I (without any charge that the conciliar teaching is erroneous), cf Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Klarstellungen Zur Prüfung der Geister* (Freiburg Herder, 1971) 94-99, esp 95-96

<sup>33</sup> "Summus Pontifex, utpote Pastor Supremus Ecclesiae, suam potestatem omni tempore ad placitum exercere potest, sicut ab ipso suo munere requiritur" For Ratzinger's comments on this text, cf "Die bischofliche Kollegialität" 196 and "Announcements and Prefatory Notes of Explanation," in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 1 (New York Herder, 1967) 303-4, on the whole, Ratzinger considers the formulation unfortunate

<sup>34</sup> *The Bishop of Rome* (n 15 above)

authoritative intervention in case of need is always possible, the pope's universal episcopal authority is intrinsically limited by its nature as a service to ecclesial communion; it must therefore be exercised by "supporting the churches in their confession of the true apostolic faith, and ensuring respect for the privileges proper to each of the churches" (123). Renewed in the light of the ecclesiology of communion, the papacy may yet shed the distortions which have disfigured it in recent centuries, and assume a form at once more in accord with the Church's true nature and more amenable to the legitimate concerns of non-Catholic Christians.

2. In contrast to the approach of Ratzinger and Tillard, Karl Rahner's theology of the papacy is oriented more directly on the universal Church. Rahner envisions the apostolic college with Peter as its head as the basic form of church office, and sees in the episcopal college with the pope as its head the successor to this body. The episcopal college as such thus enjoys a certain priority over its individual members.

Against this background Rahner identifies the office of the pope precisely as that of head of the college of bishops—in a specific sense which enables the pope to perform *ex officio* acts of the college and which does not reduce him to being the college's delegate.<sup>35</sup> The purpose of the papal office is to represent and guarantee the unity of the Church, though the papacy is not the only principle of the Church's unity.<sup>36</sup> In this conception the papal office is intrinsically limited by several factors, especially the nature of the Church and the existence of the episcopal college *iure divino*. Ultimately, however, the preservation of the proper relationship among the various authorities in the Church, for which unity and pluralism are equally essential,<sup>37</sup> depends upon the Holy Spirit, not a juridical guarantee, for the moral norms to which the papacy is bound are far more stringent than its juridical limitations.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> K. Rahner, "On the Divine Right of the Episcopate," in Rahner and Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy* 99; "Papst" 46–47; "On the Relationship between the Pope and the College of Bishops," *Theological Investigations* 10 (New York: Herder, 1973) 50–70. Rahner denies that the content of the papal office can be deduced solely from an abstract and formal notion of the head of a society's collegial leadership (*ibid.* 56; "On the Divine Right" 100, n. 23), and acknowledges that the relationship of the pope to the other bishops can legitimately be approached in a variety of ways (*ibid.* 104–5). He also suggests that the relationship of the pope to other bishops parallels the unique relationship of the Church universal to local church ("The Episcopate and the Primacy," in *The Episcopate and the Primacy* 20–30; "On the Divine Right" 80).

<sup>36</sup> K. Rahner, "Die Träger des Selbstvollzugs der Kirche," in F. X. Arnold et al., ed., *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1964) 196.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 197–98; "On the Divine Right" 110.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 129–35; cf. "Papst" 46–47; "Chapter III, Articles 18–27," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 1, 201–4; "On the Relationship" 56. For a study of Rahner's earlier

While both of these types differ from the ecclesiology represented by Journet, they offer distinctive avenues of access to the issue of papal primacy; each in its own way may contain elements fruitful for ecumenical discussion.

### III

In addition to more general reflections on the theology of the papacy, several Catholic theologians have offered specific proposals regarding the position of the papacy in a unified Christianity. Thus Heinrich Döring has insisted that acceptance of this office of the universal Church is binding on a Catholic, and that a solution to ecumenical problems must be sought through consistent pursuit of the reform of Vatican II by turning from primarily hierarchical-judicial definitions of the Church, accenting the ministerial character of church office, and more clearly reaccepting the ancient ecclesiology of communion.<sup>39</sup> More concrete suggestions have been advanced by Joseph Ratzinger and in a joint proposal of Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner.

1. In a widely-noted address delivered at Graz in 1976 and republished in 1982, Joseph Ratzinger stated:

Rome need not require from the East more of a doctrine of the primacy than was formulated and lived in the first millennium. When, on July 25, 1967, Patriarch Athenagoras addressed the pope visiting in the Phanar as Peter's successor, the first in honor among us and the presider in charity, this great church leader was expressing the essential content of the declarations of the first millennium on the primacy; and Rome need not require more.<sup>40</sup>

Ratzinger insists that, while Catholic theologians cannot declare the doctrine of the primacy null and void, neither can they view the form which the primacy has assumed in the 19th and 20th centuries as its only possible form and as something necessary for all Christians. He

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writings on the papacy, cf. Charles H. Henkey, "Episcopacy and Primacy," *CTSA Proceedings* 19 (1964) 187-209; for his later reflections—informal but thought-provoking—cf. "Die unvergängliche Aktualität des Papsttums," *Schriften zur Theologie* 16 (Zurich: Benziger, 1984) 249-70.

<sup>39</sup> "Papsttum" 326-27.

<sup>40</sup> "Die ökumenische Situation—Orthodoxie, Katholizismus und Reformation," *Theologische Prinzipienlehre* 209. Cf. Ratzinger's similar earlier (1974) observations on the same theme in "Rom und die Kirchen des Ostens nach der Aufhebung der Exkommunikationen von 1054," *ibid.* 228-29; here, commenting on the same address of Patriarch Athenagoras, Ratzinger observes that it would be worthwhile considering "whether this ancient confession, which knows nothing of a 'primacy of jurisdiction' but confesses a priority in 'honor' (*timē*) and agape, could not be evaluated as a view of Rome's position in the Church that is adequate to the core of the matter" (229). Even prior to this, Ratzinger had held that "unification with Eastern Christianity would have to change nothing, absolutely nothing, in its concrete ecclesial life" ("Primat und Episkopat" 142).

envisions the possibility of unification of East and West "on the basis that, on the one hand, the East refrain from attacking the Western development of the second millennium as heretical and accept the Catholic Church as legitimate and orthodox in the form which it has achieved in this development, while, conversely, the West recognize the Church of the East as orthodox and legitimate in the form which it has maintained for itself."<sup>41</sup> More recently, Ratzinger seems to have altered this position in some respects; while acknowledging false developments in Catholic theology and practice of the primacy, he criticizes conclusions drawn in pursuit of his original line of thought, insists that mere return to the ancient Church is not a viable theological program, and recommends instead a hermeneutics of unity which would enable deeper understanding of Scripture and tradition.<sup>42</sup>

2. Ratzinger's lecture at Graz and the results of bilateral ecumenical dialogues on the papacy<sup>43</sup> have strongly influenced portions of the recent proposal of Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner for church unification in which all "acknowledge the meaning and right of the Petrine service of the Roman pope to be the concrete guarantor of the unity of the Church in truth and love."<sup>44</sup> As a counterpart to this thesis, Fries and Rahner envision formal papal recognition of a proper autonomy of the particular churches. Far from being an arbitrary compromise, this is "a recognition to which the pope is clearly committed by the nature of the church";<sup>45</sup> though historically variable in detail, in principle it is necessary *iuris divini*. Here the nature and limitations of papal primacy are conceived not primarily by reference to past history but from reflection on the nature of the Church and its various constituent dimensions, and suggestions of ecumenical significance are advanced on this basis.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> "Die ökumenische Situation" 209.

<sup>42</sup> J. Ratzinger, "Probleme" 244-59, esp. 250-58. For a summary of Ratzinger's current position and further references to his recent work, cf. Avery Dulles, "Paths to Doctrinal Agreement: Ten Theses," *TS* 47 (1986) 42.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. esp. "Differing Attitudes toward Papal Primacy," *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church* 9-38.

<sup>44</sup> *Unity of the Churches: An Actual Possibility* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 59.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 99.

<sup>46</sup> For critique of the Fries-Rahner proposal and summary of its reception by other theologians, cf. A. Dulles, "Paths to Doctrinal Agreement," esp. 37-39. The book's treatment of the papacy has not been the central point in this discussion. In a published interview Ratzinger has dismissed the Fries-Rahner proposal as a "stunt of theological acrobatics which unfortunately does not stand up to reality" ("Luther und die Einheit der Kirchen: Fragen an Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger," *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 12 [1983] 573; cf. also 577). It should be noted that Ratzinger has long classified the division between East and West in a different category than divisions resulting from the Reforma-

## IV

The writings here summarized reflect major tendencies in contemporary Catholic theologies of the papacy: preference for nonjuridical expression of the primacy's nature; willingness to distinguish between the principle of a Petrine office and concrete forms of its realization; awareness of the variability of the Petrine office over the course of history and attention to possible further flexibility in the future; widespread, though not universal, inclination to envision primacy within an ecclesiology of communion. It remains to be determined what promise these developments might bear for contemporary ecumenical efforts.

While convinced in general that the current rethinking of the papal office represents an advance, I would offer the following thoughts for further consideration.

1. The principles operative in many forms of theological argument about the papacy remain unclarified to such a degree that their adequacy is open to serious question. To address this problem, there is need to relate the discussion of the papacy more directly to contemporary thought on the respective doctrinal significance of Scripture and of postbiblical tradition and to address the issue of the development of dogma. In addition, closer connection of the discussion of primacy to contemporary theological assessments of the dogmatic status of the Church's episcopal structure seems necessary.

2. While the reaction against preoccupation with juridical categories in ecclesiology is in part justified, the preference for more general vocabulary (e.g., "service") may mask more problems than it solves.<sup>47</sup> Journet's insistence that papal primacy is a form of service to the Church can serve as a timely reminder to avoid facile construction of false dilemmas. Also pertinent in this regard is Ratzinger's observation (originally made in the context of discussing church membership) that "in some circumstances legal thinking can give more flexibility and openness than a 'mystical' conception."<sup>48</sup>

3. While the widespread option for an ecclesiology of communion, with its focus on the local church, initially seems highly conducive to profitable discussion between East and West, I remain skeptical that it

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tion; in his judgment, the former, unlike the latter, did not in principle abandon the basic form of the ancient Church ("Die ökumenische Situation" 203-8). Fries has replied to criticisms in an appendix to the second German edition, *Einigung der Kirchen—Reale Möglichkeit* (Freiburg: Herder, 1985).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Der antiromische Affekt* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 47, 106-7.

<sup>48</sup> "Die Ekklesiologie des Zweiten Vatikanums" 48. Ratzinger wisely notes that some forms of "mystical" ecclesiology may serve to immunize official church actions from legitimate criticism (49).

will, at least by itself, prove sufficient for addressing all pertinent ecclesiological questions. It may well at least be necessary to supplement this approach with more direct focus on the Church universal. Despite the likelihood of initial difficulties in understanding an unfamiliar pattern of thought, this perspective, which has considerable biblical precedent, may in the long run provide more satisfactory principles for concrete progress on complicated issues.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Cf. the reflections of Wolfhart Pannenberg (*Thesen zur Theologie der Kirche* [Munich: Claudius, 1970] 46–47; “The Unity of the Church: A Reality of Our Faith and an Ecumenical Goal,” *The Church* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983] 31–33; “An Ecumenical Understanding of the Church’s Offices,” *ibid.* 106), who accents the responsibility of church office—on all levels—for the unity of the Church.