

**Martino Mortola, *Il dialogo cattolico-ortodosso sul primato dal 1995 al 2016. Analisi storica e teologica del suo svolgimento e della sua recezione*, Dissertatio series romana 62, Milano, Edizioni Glossa 2019, 588 p., ISBN: 978-8871054322**

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Martino Mortola's dissertation is a truly interesting and careful examination of the bilateral dialogue between the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches, with particular reference to the complex questions of Petrine primacy, primacy in general, and the connection with the related theme of synodality. It focuses on the history of the effects of the important encyclical letter of John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, from its date of release, 1995, until 2016, a pivotal year for ecumenism, which saw the celebration of two important events: the 14<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue in Chieti – that represented a significant step toward a more substantial agreement on the questions of primacy and synodality – and the Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete. Mortola does not confine himself to providing academic arguments on the necessity of the ecumenical dialogue. His work is in itself both *ecumenical* and *dialogical*; in fact, it is evident how the contribution of the Orthodox perspectives on the age-old problem of the relationship between power and service within the Church has been, here, taken fully into account.

Hence, he relates and offers illuminating comments about all the challenging attempts at reconciliation that characterized the era of the renovated dialogue that the Second Vatican Council represented and had the merit to inaugurate. Moreover, he somehow draws his way of proceeding from the documents of the Council itself, in particular from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, and the Decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, and the methods which he sees pursued there. He finds in “receptive ecumenism” not only the key-perspective of the Second Vatican approach to ecumenical issues, but also the only effective way of surpassing longstanding impasses and many aspects of division among Christians. Thus, we read in *Unitatis Redintegratio* 17:

In the study of revelation East and West have followed different methods, and have developed differently their understanding and confession of God's truth. It is hardly surprising, then, if from time to time one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation

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of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has expressed it to better advantage. In such cases, these various theological expressions are to be considered often as mutually complementary rather than conflicting. Where the authentic theological traditions of the Eastern Church are concerned, we must recognize the admirable way in which they have their roots in Holy Scripture, and how they are nurtured and given expression in the life of the liturgy. They derive their strength too from the living tradition of the apostles and from the works of the Fathers and spiritual writers of the Eastern Churches. Thus, they promote the right ordering of Christian life and, indeed, pave the way to a full vision of Christian truth.

All this heritage of spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and theology, in its various traditions, this holy synod declares to belong to the full Catholic and apostolic character of the Church.

*Unitatis Redintegratio* is, according to Mortola, one of the first examples of "receptive ecumenism" prompted by the Catholic Church thanks to the conciliar Fathers (see p. 46). He outlines this method according to the definition provided by P. Murray in his well-known *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, as follows: the exercise of focalizing oneself on what can be drawn, learnt, and even fully embraced from another Christian tradition without endangering one's own proper faith. This concerns not only the theological dimension but also the level of concrete life which every confession shapes and fosters. Then, according to Hagan, this perspective requires the achievement of at least three steps: first, conversion, based on the passion for Christian unity; second, reassessment of one's own tradition; third, the reevaluation and even the reception of the main standpoints of other confessions (see p. 45).

Mortola considers John Paul II's document in the light of the theological discussions, which *Unitatis Redintegratio* promoted. Taking into particular account paragraphs 95-96 of *Ut Unum Sint*, in which the Pope, as Bishop of Rome, officially requested other Christian denominations, on the basis of the contemporary ecumenical achievements, to find together some new ways of interpreting the papal role, Mortola attentively recapitulates and scrutinizes the reactions to this appeal the Orthodox Churches provided in the past two decades.

The exposition is clearly organized. Chapter 1 is totally dedicated to the presentation of the genesis and the development of the conciliar Decree on ecumenism. Here, Mortola illustrates how the choice of founding his entire discussion about primacy on Second Vatican Council has also some

evident apologetic intentions; above all, in contrasting the opinions of those who, within the Catholic Church, objected to John Paul II's, Benedict XVI's, and Francis's ecumenical openings as not always in line with the true Catholic faith. On the contrary, Mortola furnishes some doctrinal and pastoral evidences that demonstrate the continuity of these papal teachings on the matter of ecumenism with what the Second Vatican Council established in this regard. The conciliar Fathers themselves, not differently from what those Popes attempted, tried to receive and incorporate within the Catholic discourse what the ecumenical movement already envisioned, both in the Protestant and the Orthodox Churches. Moreover, the ecclesiology expressed in *Unitatis Redintegratio* fully and genuinely depends on the lesson of *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

The post-conciliar phase has been essentially characterized by the several, emotional encounters between Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, and the subsequent removal of the reciprocal excommunications.

Chapter 2 is devoted, primarily, to the analysis of *Ut Unum Sint*, the first papal encyclical letter in history to be entirely dedicated to the matter of ecumenism; then, to the general impact of John Paul II's papacy on ecumenical relationships. Here, Mortola is especially attentive to reconstructing the reasons and the historical conditions for which the Pope envisioned this solemn intervention, not forgetting to underline the essential contribution of the famous Dominican theologian Jean-Marie Roger Tillard in drafting a preliminary schema. Subsequently, Mortola reviews several academic symposia and conferences, including some documents of the Congregation of the Faith that manifest a notable, although not always easy, reception of this document within the Catholic Church itself. Then, Mortola gives voice to an important Orthodox theologian and his reactions, Olivier Clément, who, in his *Rome autrement*, offers a profound reflection on the relevance of the papal primacy for all Churches but, at the same time, on the necessary, substantial reformation of this ministry.

Between 2000 and 2005, the dialogue between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches saw a new, unexpected, interruption due to the Roman pastoral policies on the matter of the Oriental Churches *sui iuris* and the opening of several new dioceses within the territory of jurisdiction of some Orthodox Churches. These Orthodox Churches mostly perceived those interventions as intrusive and in support, again, of what, previously, the Catholic Church declared to disapprove: uniatism and proselytism. Both the celebration of Jubilee in 2000 (which saw a series of unprecedented signs of reconciliation) and the apostolic journeys of John Paul II in many countries,

in which Orthodox citizens represented the vast majority, were significant although not quite capable of fully reestablishing the relationships between the two parts.

Chapter 3 considers Benedict XVI's ecumenical contributions as a theologian, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the Pope, besides the reception of *Ut Unum Sint* during his Pontificate. First, Mortola recalls the positive impact that the new *Ordo Missae* for the beginning of the Petrine ministry had on some ecumenical observers, with all its symbols and liturgical language carefully adherent to the theological framework of the first millennium of the undivided Church. Then, his attention focuses on a new case of conflict, represented by the removal of the papal title of "Patriarch of the West" from the traditional list reported in the Pontifical Yearbook. Mortola reconstructs the complex debate about the theological appropriateness of this title which predates Benedict XVI's Pontificate, through the recognition of two symptomatic works but with opponent visions: that of Magee, who sponsors the adoption of this title, but not without significant adjustments with some new ecclesiological assumptions, and that of Garuti who, on the contrary, considers it innerly contradictory and no longer applicable. Mortola offers important insights on the different modes of considering the role of the Patriarch within the Eastern and the Western traditions. Fortunately, Benedict XVI's ministry has been also characterized by some remarkable attempts at ecumenical reconciliation, especially with the Orthodox Churches: in 2008, the Synod of Bishops was celebrated, for the first time in history, in the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I. It had already been established in 1965 by Pope Paul VI through the Letter *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, with the intention of concretely embodying what the Second Vatican Council envisioned about the collegiality and the spirit of reciprocal care between Pope and Bishops. Then, after the interruption in 2000, the work of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches finally set off again. It was thanks to this important work that we had, as a pivotal outcome, the Document of Ravenna on the ecclesiological and the sacramental nature of the Church. Mortola investigates the origins of the document by recalling and commenting on the results which the sub-committees had previously reached, not without discussions and interruptions. Starting from the sacramental comprehension of the mystery of the Church, the Document of Ravenna eventually describes the dimension of conciliarity in conjunction with that of authority, never forgetting to consider how these two aspects can possibly interact at the local, regional, and universal levels. Unfortunately, the agreement of

Ravenna did not have an easy reception: some of the Orthodox Churches left the meeting and did not sign the final declaration, not to mention the recurrence of the conflict between the delegations of Constantinople and Moscow. However, Mortola studies the interesting case of the Northern-American Commission, which, on the contrary, precisely on the basis of the Ravenna statements, found a solid accord.

Chapter 4 follows the ecumenical involvement that Pope Francis manifested from the beginning of his Pontificate until 2016. This was the year of the meeting of the Mixed Commission in Chieti which finally saw the converging of the Orthodox Churches toward a more solid agreement with the Catholic Church. Pope Francis' contribution can be summarized as follows: first of all, he called for a "pastoral conversion" at all levels of the life of the Church, the Papacy included; indeed, he described the Church as an upside-down pyramid with the summit, the Primate, positioned at the bottom. Without conversion there could not be even the necessary conditions for the accomplishment of other crucial aspects of the ecumenical path that he described as the walk towards unity, praying and working together. Pope Francis has distinguished himself by the knowledge that he demonstrates in reference to the repertoire of teachings and traditions of the Orthodox Churches throughout his magisterial interventions. Moreover, both the constitution of the Council of Cardinal Advisers (C9) and the launch of the Synod on the Family reveal his intentions of interpreting his role in a new way, in particular with regard to what he labels, in an unprecedented way, "synodal conciliarity", to define the relationships that he intends to reshape both with the bishops and the Church in general.

Mortola takes into consideration the ecumenical underpinnings of two fundamental papal documents, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si*. Then, he observes how much the several encounters Pope Francis had with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and the historical meeting with the Patriarch of Moscow, Kirill, in Cuba significantly contributed to create an atmosphere of more confidence. After that, some other apostolic journeys had a relevant ecumenical impact, such as those in the Holy Land and in Turkey.

The last section of this chapter is entirely dedicated to the study of the Document of Chieti (September 2016) on synodality and primacy in the first millennium, from its preparation, through the redaction of the text, to the final evaluation from both sides. It was intended to be only the first step of a more comprehensive work on the evaluation of the debated theme of primacy within the Church, which will include, as its natural sequel, a future reflection on the second millennium. This latter, of course, will be

more challenging, given the distinct visions both parts have elaborated in this tense period of history. However, the presence of all the Autocephalous Churches, except the Bulgarian Patriarchate, determined the success of this meeting. Interestingly, the Document of Chieti relies on the 3<sup>rd</sup> canon of the Council of Sardica (343), which seems to have included the possibility of referring to the Church of Rome as a Court of appeal for all the other ecclesiastical provinces. Mortola, ultimately, pays particular attention to Sardica (see pag. 230-232), since it is the only Council in history in which both the Churches of the East and the West were able to recognize a kind of primacy that would have been substantially relevant for the entire Church, with a recognized canonical form.

Finally, Chapter 6 pauses on the special event that was celebrated before the meeting of Chieti, between June 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> 2016, which, somehow, represents its precondition: The Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete. Here, Mortola studies two of the documents that more concern the theme of primacy and its implications, those that tackle the question of diaspora (with the related problems of the determination of jurisdiction and the creation of the Episcopal Assemblies), and the relationships between the Orthodox Churches with the other Christian denominations.

Mortola's conclusions are particularly significant. After recalling how the present condition of division among the Churches is a moral sin that derives, more radically, from human fallacy but from which we all must convert, he affirms that, despite all difficulties, the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches are possibly more connected and concretely related at present than they were during the first millennium. Perhaps, it can be helpful to recall that division pertains to the nature itself of the Church (see 1 Cor 11, 19: "Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine"). Then, sometimes, differences which per se can represent an opportunity are never easy to handle. However, precisely this aspect opens the possibility of a mutual understanding and reception that is quite different from ecclesiological relativism. Where the difference of the Christian others does not become part of my own horizon, there indifferentism lies. On the contrary, where variety stimulates my own comprehension, here we can truly accomplish what we label "reconciled unity". Reception is, therefore, intrinsic to the dynamics of the Church's life; it is just enough to consider, for example, how tradition is innerly structured. However, we are naturally prone to pay more attention to spreading the content of faith than to be attentive to the opposite movement, that of reception. Thus, ecumenical dialogues teach us something that is inherent to the dynamic of evangelization: it is vital to feel responsible for the transmission

of a given theological content as much as, at the same time, for its reception and the difficulties that it entails.

Reflecting on “words” is, consequently, of primary importance: the ecumenical partners often speak different languages. Moreover, they usually adopt a theological linguistic pattern that obviously depends on a long-standing history. At times, Eastern and Western Churches were not able to understand each other simply because they relied on a quite distinct linguistic register, like symbolism and juristic vocabulary. Whereas these two nuances can come to coexist, we should generally privilege the symbolic way of expression, particularly considering how the Gospel itself uses it to denote and describe the power within the Church. Here, our constructive criticism proves necessary. With regards to language, the subtitle Mortola chose for his work can be misleading to the academic reader. Here, there is no “historical *and* theological” analysis; rather, simply a “historical-theological” one. In fact, the emphasis should fall only on the second element of this expression, since we are dealing with a well-informed and commented chronicle rather than a strict historiographic discourse. For the facts under examination, the time span has not been large enough to permit a *historic* analysis. What is more, Mortola, not differently from what we observe in the documents of the bilateral dialogue that he studies, does not consider the Biblical language as normative as it should be. Exegesis is intentionally put aside because it is not sufficiently disambiguating, and references to the Biblical texts are not yet the *real* framework within which these dialogues are conceived. Therefore, the traditional material risks, despite the undeniable results we have reached, becoming more relevant than Jesus’ words themselves: “Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves” (Lk. 22.26).