

PRIMACY AND COLLEGIORITY IN THE WORKS OF JOSEPH RATZINGER

• Richard G. DeClue •

“If the bishop of Rome enjoys any primacy whatsoever, it is only because the Church as a whole is primary.”



Whether and how the bishop of Rome possesses primacy has been the subject of much discussion and heated debate throughout the centuries. It was a major issue in the events culminating in the schism of 1054, and it is likewise the central theme of current Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, which is fueled by the desire to reestablish full ecclesial communion. The bishop of Rome's claim to primacy is also considered one of the foremost—if not *the* foremost—issue dividing Catholics and Protestants. The fact that the Catholic Church proposes the papal office as an essential element in the Church's constitution, while other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities frequently perceive it as a great obstacle to full ecclesial union, renders the investigation of papal primacy a matter of paramount importance. Moreover, the significance of the issue is enhanced by the presence of theological disputes among Catholic theologians themselves.

Recognizing the ecumenical importance of the question of the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul II wrote of the need “to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is

nonetheless open to a new situation”¹ in his encyclical letter on the Church’s enduring commitment to ecumenism, *Ut unum sint*. This statement resounds as a call to theologians from all sides to investigate the issue more closely in the hopes of achieving such a “new situation” in which the primacy could be exercised more effectively as an office of unity and become less of an obstacle to full communion.

One of the key questions about the papacy leading up to and flowing from the Second Vatican Council concerns the relationship between papal primacy and episcopal collegiality. This question is particularly important for Catholic–Orthodox relations. Clarity regarding their respective stances is required if there is to be meaningful dialogue. In this regard, the theological perspective that the current Roman pontiff brings to his office is of special interest. While recognizing the distinction between Joseph Ratzinger’s private work as a theologian and both his previous post as Cardinal Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and his current role as pope, one can still say that investigation into his private work is certainly helpful for understanding the vantage point from which one can expect him to carry out his present duties, particularly as regards collegiality and ecumenical affairs.

Joseph Ratzinger’s treatment of these issues is immensely valuable even apart from the fact that he is the current pope. The breadth of his approach is itself noteworthy. In his vast body of writings on the pope and the bishops, he demonstrates great familiarity with scripture and tradition, and, the same time, is also well aware of contemporary scholarship and engages it effectively. In addition, he has a tremendous ability to examine particulars in light of the whole. This habit significantly helps to clarify the issues. Ratzinger also considers the ecumenical dimensions of the topic, and he has a real concern for furthering the fruitfulness of Catholic–Orthodox dialogue. In short, his writings on the papacy and the episcopate are among the best theological resources available on this topic.

For all these reasons, the present article seeks to present—in summary form—the main lines of Ratzinger’s theology of papal primacy, episcopal collegiality, and the relationship between them. This work will unfold in three stages. First, a preliminary investiga-

¹Pope John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* (1995), 95.

tion into Ratzinger's interpretation of biblical references to Peter and the apostles will be conducted. Flowing from this, the questions of apostolic succession and the successor of Peter will be handled from Ratzinger's perspective. Within the second part, the theological import of bishops as successors to the apostles will be examined with particular emphasis on the collegial character of the episcopate and the divine right of the episcopal office. Correspondingly, the notion of the bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter will be explored. Finally, building upon the first two sections, there will be a more direct treatment of the relationship between papal primacy and episcopal collegiality. There, particular emphasis will be placed on primacy as the center of collegiality, which corresponds to Ratzinger's own assessment of the proper ecclesial locus of the pope's Petrine ministry.

Since sources spanning multiple decades are consulted, an occasional mention of both continuity and shifts within Ratzinger's thought might be warranted. However, because the present author perceives more agreement than disparity on this matter throughout Ratzinger's theological corpus, little mention of such shifts will be made here.²

1. Peter and the apostles

Let us proceed with some of Ratzinger's principal hermeneutical points surrounding the scriptural significance of the apostles as a whole and Simon Peter in particular.

Ratzinger suggests that the expression "twelve apostles" is comprised of two originally distinct terms, each of which possesses its own significance: 1) "the twelve" and 2) "the apostles." "The twelve" is understood in connection with Israel's hope for "a final restoration of the twelve tribes."³ From this perspective, Ratzinger

²For a detailed treatment of the question of the consistency of Ratzinger's thought, see: Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007). In particular see chapter three ("Consistency in Ratzinger's Theological Thought," 184–205) of part two of the same work. There, one can find references to arguments on both sides.

³Joseph Ratzinger, "The Pastoral Implications of Episcopal Collegiality," in *Concilium*, vol. 1: *The Church and Mankind* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1965),

insists that the original function of “the twelve” was simply to be an eschatological symbol of the restoration of God’s people. “We deduced from this that the first ‘office’ in the growth of the nascent Church was to signify the new community”; “these men represent not only the future bishops and officials but also, indeed primarily, the ‘new People’ that will be called ‘the Church.’”⁴ In other words, their election as twelve signifies the inception of the long-awaited fulfillment of Old Testament promises made by God to the People Israel. It is important to point out, however, that, as Maximilian Heim explains, “In saying this, he is not advocating a Protestant interpretation, which sees in the Twelve only the universal priesthood of all believers. . . . Instead, Ratzinger sees in this very act of choosing the Twelve a foreshadowing of the fact that the officeholders and the People of God *belong together inseparably*, since as the Twelve they are appointed to be patriarchs of the new People of God, by analogy with the twelve sons of Jacob, the patriarchs of Israel.”⁵ Thus, the unity of the People of God, the new Israel, is accomplished through the hierarchical structure. The hierarchy represents and effects the unity of the People of God.

The title “apostles” brings a new dimension to the sign of the eschatological restoration of God’s People. As those sent forth to all corners of the world, the significance of “the twelve” is no longer limited to the Jewish people. The apostles are called to bring together all peoples into covenant with God and with one another in Jesus Christ in order to comprise a new Israel that transcends national and racial boundaries. The task of symbolizing the new Israel as “the twelve” is thus joined to the apostolic mission, which was from the beginning a universal mission: “It is their mission to carry the message of Christ ‘to the end of the earth’ (Acts 1:8), to go to all nations and to make all men his disciples (Mt 28:19). The sphere allotted to them is the world. Without any restriction as to locality, they work for the building up of the body of Christ.”⁶

40.

⁴Ibid., 41.

⁵Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, 445–46.

⁶Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 187.

The twelve became the twelve apostles and thereby collectively shared in a worldwide mission to unite all peoples in Christ.

On this basis, Ratzinger concludes that “the office of apostle is a universal office”⁷ in counter-distinction from local offices. As he insists, “The apostles were not bishops of particular local Churches but simply ‘apostles’ and were commissioned as such for work in the whole world and in the whole Church to be built up in the world.”⁸

Since Paul was not one of “the twelve,” it is curious that in the context of discussing “the twelve-become-apostles” Ratzinger uses Paul as a concrete example to demonstrate his position: “Paul was never the bishop of any particular place and never wanted to be.”⁹ However, the fact that Paul is not one of “the twelve”—yet is nevertheless considered an apostle—implies a distinction between what it means to be one of “the twelve” and what it means to be an “apostle” without losing the significance of the fusion of the two terms in the expression “the twelve apostles.” It also provides an early illustration of the possibility of someone’s sharing in the apostolic mission without being one of the original twelve, which is of undoubted importance for the notion of apostolic succession.

We must keep in mind a few key points from these considerations as we proceed: 1) The twelve apostles represent the People of God, the new Israel, which the whole Church spread throughout the world makes visible; 2) the apostolic office is ordered toward the Church universal and indeed toward the whole world in its missionary activity; and 3) the apostles form a collective group (i.e., “the twelve”) and therefore each of them must be understood in light of his relationship to the others.

Now that we have given brief attention to the apostles in general, we can turn our attention more specifically to the apostle Peter. Of course, Peter must be understood as one of the twelve. Whether and how Peter enjoyed primacy among the twelve is the crucial question that must be addressed here.

The significance of the twelve as an eschatological sign of the new Israel has already been introduced. In parallel fashion, Ratzinger asserts that the title “*Petrus*,” which Jesus gives to Simon, bears comparable symbolic value. He maintains that “to the eschatological

⁷Ibid., 188.

⁸Ibid., 187–88.

⁹Ibid., 188.

sign of 'the twelve' is added the sign of the Rock which is likewise taken from the eschatological symbolism of Israel. From these resulted, after the resurrection of Christ, the twofold office: the office of the witnesses and the office of the *first* witness in which St. Peter figures in the resurrection accounts and in the lists of the apostles."¹⁰ Thus, while the twelve symbolize the entire new People of God collectively, Peter also does so individually.

This relation also holds true for missionary activity. When the twelve were given the apostolic mandate to witness to the resurrection, the apostles (including Peter) took on this universal missionary task collectively, while Peter also assumed it individually as "the rock." Ratzinger points to the distinctively Petrine passages of scripture as evidence to support this interpretation. Peter is listed first among the apostles, given special attention and authority by Christ, and plays a pre-eminent role among the twelve throughout the New Testament.

Ratzinger treats the scriptural evidence for Peter's primacy in *Called to Communion*, where he attributes much theological weight to the fact that such references pervade the New Testament. He writes: "It is immediately striking that all the major groups of texts in the New Testament are acquainted with the subject of Peter, which is thereby proven to be a topic of universal significance whose importance cannot be restricted to a particular tradition limited to one person or place."¹¹ To demonstrate this universal significance, Ratzinger points to passages in the Pauline tradition, the Johannine texts, and the synoptic gospels.¹² Only a select number of points from Ratzinger's presentation can be handled here.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3–7, Paul reports that the risen Christ *first* appeared to "Cephas" (Aramaic for "rock") and *then* to the "the twelve." According to Ratzinger, the fact that Peter is the first witness to Jesus' resurrection is significant, because for Paul to be an apostle principally means to be a witness to the resurrection. As further support from the Pauline corpus, Ratzinger employs

¹⁰Ratzinger, "Pastoral Implications," 51. Ratzinger cites the following biblical passages in support of this statement: 1 Cor 15:5; Lk 24:34; Mk 16:7 and 16:12; and Mt 10:2–4.

¹¹Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 49.

¹²See *ibid.*, 48–65.

Galatians, where Paul states, “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to confer with Kephias and remained with him for fifteen days.”¹³ Later in the letter, Paul writes of his public correction of Peter regarding his self-distancing from Gentiles when Jewish Christians were around.¹⁴ Thus, even in a text where Paul speaks of a dispute with Peter, Ratzinger sees evidence of Peter’s importance. In fact, for Ratzinger, “it is precisely this polemical context that gives the Letter’s witness to Peter all the greater significance. Paul goes up to Jerusalem to ‘meet Peter.’ . . . The aim of the visit is limited precisely to encountering Peter.”¹⁵ The implied argument here is that Paul would not find it necessary to go meet Peter if Peter himself were not a particularly significant figure. Whether one could conclude Petrine primacy based on this text alone is, of course, questionable. While it is actually a weaker reference regarding Petrine primacy than is 1 Corinthians 15, the value of this text is that it shows another reference to Peter’s importance in Pauline literature.

To broaden his appeal to scriptural evidence, Ratzinger asserts that “alongside Paul, the Johannine strand of tradition also offers quite unmistakable evidence for the awareness that Peter enjoyed a position of primacy that came to him from the Lord.”¹⁶ As one example of this, Ratzinger turns to John 21:15–19, where Jesus gives Peter the threefold command to tend his flock. To show that

¹³Galatians 1:18. The text is cited here from *The New American Bible* (NAB), St. Joseph Edition (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, Co., 1991).

¹⁴See Gal 2:11–14.

¹⁵Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 50. While the letter to the Galatians contains references to Paul both conferring and disputing with Kephias, the dispute came at least fourteen years later and in Antioch, not Jerusalem (the place of conferring). Thus, the context of Paul’s conferring with Kephias is not that of the dispute. Furthermore, the conferring itself takes place in a larger context where Paul is highlighting the fact that he did not immediately “go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me” (Gal 1:17a). Thus, the beginning of the following verse (v. 18: “Then after three years”) is meant to show that he went three years without conferring with Peter or the other apostles, not to highlight Paul’s need for such conferring. This view is augmented by verse 19, where he says, “But I did not see any other of the apostles, only James the brother of the Lord.” Therefore, the larger context in which this reference to Paul conferring with Peter takes place minimizes Paul’s need to confer with other apostles, since Paul’s own apostolicity comes from God directly (Cf. footnote on 1:16 in the NAB).

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 52–53.

such an interpretation is not limited to Catholic exegetes, Ratzinger points out that “no one less than R. Bultmann has stated plainly that in this text Peter is ‘entrusted with the supreme leadership of the Church.’”¹⁷

Turning to the synoptic gospels, Ratzinger references multiple passages in which Peter is figured as primary, not only within “the twelve” but also among the smaller group of the three pillars: Peter, James, and John.¹⁸ He goes on to discuss more deeply Matthew 16:17–19,¹⁹ the Aramaic background of which is, for Ratzinger, quite apparent. He even uses von Harnack²⁰ and Bultmann²¹ as examples of liberal exegetes who concur with this conclusion. Highlighting the specifically Aramaic characteristics, Ratzinger continues: “The introductory phrase ‘blessed are you’ is Aramaic, as is the unexplained name Barjona, and, furthermore, the terms ‘gates of the netherworld,’ ‘keys of the kingdom of heaven,’ ‘bind and loose,’ ‘on earth and in heaven.’ The play on the word ‘rock’ . . . does not work with complete success in Greek . . . we can thus hear even through this pun the Aramaic word *kepha* and perceive the voice of Jesus himself.”²² The last phrase of this quote is the key conclusion drawn from the heavily Aramaic quality of the

¹⁷Ibid., 52. Ratzinger takes the Bultmann quote from R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 15th ed. (Göttingen, 1957), 552, n. 3.

¹⁸See *ibid.*, 53–56.

¹⁹The passage is quoted here from the NAB: “Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’”

²⁰Ratzinger quotes von Harnack from J. R. Geiselman, *Der petrinische Primat* (Münster, 1927), 9. The quote is as follows: “There are not many longer sections in the Gospels from which the Aramaic basis shines through in form and content so surely as from this tightly compact pericope” (cited in Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 60).

²¹Ratzinger cites a quote from Bultmann also taken from Geiselman, *Der petrinische Primat* (51), “I cannot see that the conditions for its composition would have existed anywhere other than in the primitive community at Jerusalem” (cited in Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 60).

²²Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 60.

passage. For Ratzinger, it reveals Peter's primacy as directly established by Christ, and therefore, of divine right.

From the Catholic perspective, the power of the keys, which draws upon Isaiah 22:22, is particularly noteworthy in this regard. Ratzinger makes the following comments about the keys:

As the faithful steward of Jesus' message, Peter opens the door to the Kingdom of Heaven; his is the function of the doorkeeper, who has to judge concerning admission and rejection (cf. Rev 3:7). In this sense, the significance of the reference to the keys clearly approximates the meaning of binding and loosing. This latter expression is taken from rabbinic language, where it stands primarily for the authority to make doctrinal decisions, and on the other hand, denotes a further disciplinary power, that is, the right to impose or to lift the ban. The parallelism "on earth and in heaven" implies that Peter's decisions for the Church also have validity before God—an idea that also occurs in an analogous sense in the Talmudic literature.²³

Thus, Ratzinger argues that Peter's possession of "the keys" points to Peter's doctrinal and juridical authority, an authority given to him by Christ and confirmed as binding on all the faithful in the sight of God. It also includes the very grave power of deciding who is excluded from communion with the Church and who is readmitted to full communion via the imposition and lifting of the bans respectively.

We can draw some further conclusions from the power over the enforcing and the lifting of the ban. The imposition of the ban or its repeal are subsequent to baptismal incorporation into the Church, which itself could be administered by officials other than Peter. Thus, one's initial incorporation into the Church is not limited to Peter's authority. However, incorporation into the Church entails communion with Peter. Otherwise Peter's imposition of the ban would not affect one's ecclesial membership. In other

²³Ibid., 63–64. Benedict Viviano makes a similar reference to rabbinic literature and its significance for understanding this passage: "What is the nature of this authority? Binding and loosing are rabbinic technical terms that can refer to . . . the juridical acts of excommunication and of definitive decision making (a form of teaching through legislation, policy setting)" (cited in Benedict T. Viviano, O.P., "The Gospel According to Matthew," *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., et al. [Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990]: 42:105 [p. 659]).

words, if one were not already in communion with Peter, then excommunication by Peter would be meaningless. The fact that Peter possesses by divinely given authority the right to determine whether one is or is not a member of the Church is extremely important. Even if the powers of binding and loosing are also given to the apostles as a group, Christ's endowment of this power to Peter as an individual is anything but superfluous, especially since he is given authority not given to the others. As Benedict Viviano states, "The authority to bind and loose is given to the disciples in [Mt] 18:18, but to Peter alone are accorded the revelation, the role of the rock of foundation (Eph 2:20), and especially the keys."²⁴

While Matthew 16 is particularly important, it in no way stands alone. According to Ratzinger, "We find in each one of the synoptic gospels independent traditions regarding the same subject, so that it once again becomes plain to what degree this motive belongs to the basic form of Christian proclamation and is present in all the streams of New Testament tradition: among the Jewish Christians, in Antioch, in Paul's missionary territory and in Rome."²⁵ Peter's special place within the apostolic college is attested to throughout the New Testament, and as such, must have been a firmly established and widely recognized aspect of the Church in the early Christian consciousness.

2. Apostolic succession and the successor of Peter

We now direct our attention to Ratzinger's treatment of apostolic succession and the successor of Peter. We will handle the notion of bishops as successors to the apostles before we tackle the more controversial claim that the bishop of Rome is Peter's successor.

First, it is both interesting and important to note that for Ratzinger the "overseers"—in the beginnings of the episcopate—possessed a local office distinct from the universal office of the apostles. Both levels were present, but hitherto separate. Thus, in its origins, the office of bishop was not the same as the apostolic office. Within this early context, Ratzinger argues that the universal office

²⁴Viviano, "The Gospel According to Matthew," 42:105 (p. 659).

²⁵Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 53.

had priority over the local office: “In the initial phase, their [i.e., the bishops’] position as bearers of responsibility for the local Churches is clearly subordinate to the catholic authority of the apostles.”²⁶

In the postapostolic age, however, the bishops took on the universal office as an addition to their local office: “They now assumed a responsibility whose scope transcended the local principle.”²⁷ This newly acquired role of the bishops ensured that the missionary mandate given to the apostles to preach to all nations did not end with the death of the last apostle. Thus, bishops now have concern, not only for their own local Churches, but also for the Church as a whole spread throughout the world.

To draw out more completely the importance of the apostolic dimension of the episcopal office, it is helpful to present some of Ratzinger’s reflections on the term “succession.” For him, “succession” is closely related to tradition. Ratzinger maintains that *successio* and *traditio* were virtually synonymous terms in the early Church. In fact, he holds that they “were expressed by the same word διαδοχη.”²⁸ For Ratzinger, “succession” highlights the personal dimension of tradition, which “is never a simple anonymous passing on of doctrine, but is personal, is the living word, concretely realized in the faith.”²⁹ From this perspective, tradition is not merely an external reality standing over and against individual believers but also a living reality realized in the personal faith of those who receive it. This point does not deny objective content to Christian faith, but it does highlight the fact that the faith-tradition is transmitted in and through the faith of those who first receive and subsequently hand on the faith. The very term “tradition” means a handing over, and the personal means of this process is indispensable. The tradition’s integrity requires more than a subjective reception and dissemination of the faith, to be sure, but tradition as such can never be conceived apart from the very subjects from whom, to whom, and ultimately *for whom* it is handed on.

In dialectical fashion, Ratzinger supplements his insistence on the personal dimension of tradition with a consideration of its

²⁶Ibid., 85.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, trans. Kenneth Barker et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), 46.

²⁹Ibid., 46–47.

objective dimension. After all, the handing on of tradition must have an objective quality that persists in the process of passing on the faith in order to remain the self-same faith received from the apostles. To this extent, the person charged with the propagation of the faith must subject himself to the faith received in the tradition. Only in this way can it be *the* faith (i.e., of the apostles and the Church). Ratzinger asserts this point when he says, “Succession is not a taking over of official powers, which then are at the disposal of their possessor, but is rather a dedication to the word, an office of bearing witness to the treasure with which one has been entrusted. The office is superior to its holder, so that he is entirely overshadowed by that which he has received; he is . . . only a voice which renders the word articulate in the world.”³⁰ To put it another way, authentic “handing over” of the faith, which we call the living tradition, is properly accomplished only by a prior and perpetual handing over of oneself to the very faith that is to be handed over as it has been received in the tradition. Phrased more simply: one hands over the faith tradition authentically only by being handed over to it. Exercised in accordance with the tradition, the episcopal office constitutes an objective way of handing on the faith in and through the personal subject of the officeholder.

Quite interestingly, Ratzinger contends, “Christians had already formulated the principle of *successio-traditio* before they yet understood the New Testament as “Scripture.”³¹ In the apostolic and early Church period, the Old Testament was the scripture, “While the gospel of Christ is precisely ‘Spirit,’ which teaches understanding of the Scripture.”³² The relationship between scripture and tradition is explained further when Ratzinger says, “This Scripture [i.e., the Old Testament] needed a canon, that is, a rule of interpretation, in accordance with the New Christian Covenant. This the Church found in *tradition*, guaranteed by *succession*.”³³ Ratzinger carefully points out, however, that succession and tradition were not considered parallel to scripture but were emphasized by the early Church to combat the gnostics. For the

³⁰Ibid., 47.

³¹Ibid., 49.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., 50.

Church, tradition (παραδοσις or διαδοχη) did not mean “exhaustive doctrines of apostolic origin,” but “the connection of the living faith with the authority of the Church, embodied in the episcopal succession.”³⁴

From this perspective, the bishop establishes a personal, living connection with the apostolic faith, and therefore, is a guarantor and protector of the tradition. The bishop is connected with his predecessors and through them with the apostles. It is through communion with the bishop that members of the Church are brought into living continuity with the tradition and the apostolic faith that it perpetuates throughout the centuries. Thus, the episcopal office is at once an objective and personal means of maintaining diachronic and synchronic unity within the Church. For Ratzinger, then, “apostolic succession means first of all . . . guaranteeing the continuity and the unity of the faith—in a continuity we call sacramental.”³⁵ Apostolic succession in the episcopal office is indispensable for the orthodoxy of the faith. Aidan Nichols summarizes Ratzinger’s point as follows: “Ratzinger enquires, how, unless obedience to the apostolic ministry is an intrinsic feature of the Church, we are to determine what counts . . . as ‘pure’ teaching and ‘right’ sacraments.”³⁶ Thus, apostolic succession is needed as a trustworthy guide to the faith, especially in times of great dispute over one matter or another.

The bishop as an apostolic successor must be explained further. When it is said that bishops are successors to the apostles, this does not mean that *this* bishop is the successor of *that* apostle. Rather, as Ratzinger explains, “The bishop himself did not succeed to a determined apostle, but to the apostolic group, with and through the episcopal college.”³⁷

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship*, 190.

³⁶Aidan Nichols, O.P., *The Thought of Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (New York: Burns & Oates, 2005), 139.

³⁷Joseph Ratzinger, “La collégialité, développement théologique,” *L’Église de Vatican II: Études autour de la Constitution conciliaire sur l’Église*, vol. 3 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 774. The original text reads: “L’évêque, lui, ne succède pas à un Apôtre déterminé, mais au groupe apostolique, avec le collège épiscopal et par lui.”

A question of consistency arises in relation to this last point when compared with Ratzinger's distinction between apostolic and non-apostolic sees. Apostolic sees are "those sees where apostles had once worked or which had received apostolic letters. In other words not every see was apostolic, but only that limited number which stood in a unique and special relationship to the apostles."³⁸ In making this distinction, he does not deny that all bishops are successors to the apostles. However, he does make the daring claim that "the majority of bishops, those not in apostolic sees, succeed only by a circuitous route, i.e., through an apostolic see. . . . They are legitimately apostolic only because they are in communion with an apostolic see."³⁹ On the one hand, he argues that the weight of a see is dependent on the fact that a particular apostle either worked there or presented a letter to it and that the bishop of this see therefore has a more direct apostolic succession and correspondingly more ecclesial weight. On the other hand, he argues that a bishop does not succeed to a particular apostle. Following this point, one would have to conclude that the bishop of an apostolic see is not the successor of the apostle with whom the apostolic see is associated. But that seems to be exactly what Ratzinger implies by the notion of direct versus indirect apostolic succession. This discrepancy raises interesting questions that must be left for another study, which could have further ramifications for understanding communion between various sees.

We now turn to the implications of apostolic succession for the episcopal office. Just as it was asserted earlier that the apostles constitute a collective group with which they are always related as individuals, so too, bishops must be understood in relation to the college of which they are members. Ratzinger expresses this succinctly as follows: "Since the office of the apostles is collegial and the bishops are the successors of the apostles, the bishops are also collegial insofar as their *collegium* has taken the place of the *collegium* of the apostles. And just as each apostle had his function by belonging to the others who together with him formed the apostolic community, so each bishop has his office only by belonging to the *collegium* which is the post-apostolic continuation of the apostles."⁴⁰

³⁸Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, 55.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁰Ratzinger, "Pastoral Implications," 43.

Ultimately, this means that no bishop is a bishop without reference to the college of bishops as a whole; no bishop can stand in isolation from the other bishops. Furthermore, because of the universal dimension of the apostolic office mentioned earlier, a bishop—as a successor to that universal office—cannot content himself with being concerned with his own local Church alone; he must also have concern for the worldwide Church as a whole, which he cares for in conjunction with the other bishops with whom he forms the episcopal college. Additionally, as Aidan Nichols explains, “A bishop’s job is to preserve his community within the greater unity of the whole Church.”⁴¹ Furthermore, episcopal collegiality encompasses a reality beyond the present time; it includes diachronic communion in addition to synchronic communion. As Ratzinger explains, “The bishop is not the bishop alone but only in the Catholic community of those who were bishops before him, are bishops with him, and will be bishops after him.”⁴²

From this vantage point, one can see certain implications that the relationship between the local and universal dimensions of the episcopal office has for the relationship between the local Church and the universal Church. Ratzinger makes the connection as follows: “One is a bishop, not as an individual, but in belonging to a body, to a college, which for its part signifies the historical continuity of the *collegium apostolorum*. To that extent, the office of bishop arises from the one Church and leads into her. . . . The bishop, within the local Church, represents the one Church and he builds up the one Church by building up the local Church and rousing her particular gifts for the benefit of the body as a whole.”⁴³ Quite the opposite of expressing absolute self-sufficiency and radical autonomy on the part of local bishops, collegiality, declares Ratzinger, “serves to represent the inner unity of the episcopal office.”⁴⁴

We have already drawn the conclusion that the bishops constitute a college precisely as the successors of the apostles, who themselves constituted a collective group. Now another significant

⁴¹Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, 247.

⁴²Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,” trans. Stephen W. Arndt, *Communio: International Catholic Review* 13 (1986): 246.

⁴³Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 143–144.

⁴⁴Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship*, 143.

aspect to the episcopal office can be affirmed in the light of apostolic succession. Since Christ himself established the apostolic office, that office exists by divine will and not merely by human invention. Similarly then, as successors to the apostles, the bishops “are ‘instituted by the Holy Ghost’ and they are ‘of divine right.’”⁴⁵ The existence of the episcopal office is not dissolvable by any human authority. It remains a permanent fixture of the Church as an element instituted according to the will of Christ. Just as Jesus built his Church on the rock of Peter, so too, did he provide her with an episcopal office as a means for promoting ecclesial unity on both the local and universal levels.

Now that we have explored some ecclesiological implications of the apostolic succession of bishops, we can direct our attention to the more controversial notion of the bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter. It is useful to begin with a qualification. As Ratzinger points out, “The pope is not apostle, but bishop; he is not Peter, but pope; he is not placed in the original order, but in that of succession.”⁴⁶ The distinction made here between apostle and bishop may lie in their different relationships to the resurrection. As mentioned earlier, for Paul to be an apostle is primarily to be a witness to the resurrection as one who encountered the resurrected Lord personally. Bishops, on the other hand, witness to the resurrection by handing on the apostolic witness, which they themselves did not directly experience.

As we proceed with this topic, some objections to the papal claim to Petrine succession may be raised. Even if one admits Peter’s primacy is a biblical fact (as previously outlined), the question still remains whether there is such a thing as Petrine succession. Ratzinger himself admits, “There is no explicit statement regarding Petrine succession in the New Testament.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, Ratzinger has already declared that a particular bishop is not to be considered the

⁴⁵Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, 40. Note that this assertion has important implications for the treatment of the relationship between papal primacy and episcopal collegiality to be discussed later.

⁴⁶Ratzinger, “La collégialité,” 774. The original text reads: “Le pape non plus n’est pas Apôtre, mais évêque; il n’est pas Pierre, mais pape; il n’est pas placé dans l’ordre originel, mais dans celui de la succession.”

⁴⁷Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 65.

successor of a specific apostle.⁴⁸ How, then, can he make the claim that *this* bishop, the bishop of Rome, is the successor to *that* apostle, Peter?

In response to the first objection that there is no biblical evidence of Petrine succession, Ratzinger replies that the lack of direct scriptural evidence “is not surprising, since neither the Gospels nor the chief Pauline epistles address the problem of the post-apostolic Church.”⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Ratzinger argues even more boldly: “The Roman primacy, or, rather, the acknowledgement of Rome as the criterion of the right apostolic faith, is older than the canon of the New Testament.”⁵⁰ To those who would regard such an appeal to extra-biblical tradition as weak argumentation, Ratzinger insists, “Scripture became Scripture through tradition.”⁵¹ He argues further that this tradition not only attests to Petrine succession, it also depends on it: “The formative development of tradition and of the Church supposed the continuation of Peter’s authority in Rome as an intrinsic condition.”⁵²

It could be argued, however, that this last point makes the argument circular. If the authenticity of tradition is based upon Petrine authority, then an appeal to said tradition for the purpose of establishing Petrine authority is itself an appeal to Petrine authority. Yet, this approach is not surprising if one recalls that for Ratzinger succession and tradition are two aspects of the same reality. From this vantage point, the circularity is avoided, because he is not appealing to one to support the other so much as showing how they are intrinsically linked realities that cannot be separated. If one accepts tradition, one must accept succession and vice versa. For him, this includes Petrine succession.

What sort of evidence exists in the tradition in support of the bishop of Rome understood as the successor of Peter? Once again we see Ratzinger employ the distinction between apostolic and non-apostolic sees. He claims that patristic sources verify his assertion: “These [apostolic sees] were centers of apostolic witness, with which

⁴⁸See 652f., above.

⁴⁹Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 66.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 70.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²*Ibid.*, 72.

all other sees had to align themselves. Tertullian, for example, expresses this very clearly when he refers each area to its respective apostolic see. . . . Irenaeus too envisages the Church as covered with a network of apostolic sees, among which the See of Peter and Paul possesses unequivocal pre-eminence as the criterion of the succession-tradition.”⁵³ Additionally, he appeals to Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History*: “It [i.e., the *Ecclesiastical History*] was to be a written record of the continuity of apostolic succession, which was concentrated in three Petrine sees—Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria—among which Rome, as the site of Peter’s martyrdom, was in turn preeminent and truly normative.”⁵⁴ He concludes that “Rome was the standard of the authentic apostolic tradition as a whole.”⁵⁵ Ratzinger explains this another way as follows: “Among the apostolic sees, there is in turn the apostolic see, Rome, which bears approximately the same relation to the other apostolic sees as they do to those which are not directly apostolic. Thus, Rome is the final, proper, and self-sufficient criterion of Catholicity.”⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the second objection has not been entirely answered. If none of the other particular apostles is succeeded by a particular bishop, then why is it said that Peter is succeeded by a particular bishop? The basis for the answer lies in the scriptural evidence about Peter and the twelve already discussed. Just as the apostles as a whole need successors to preserve their office, so too Peter needs a successor. The office of Peter’s successor exists, not because of human volition, but “because the Lord himself established beside and together with the office of ‘the twelve,’ also the special office of the Rock.”⁵⁷

Interestingly enough, however, Ratzinger admits that the use of “primacy” and “successor of Peter” as terms describing Rome and

⁵³Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, 55.

⁵⁴Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 69. In a footnote on this point, Ratzinger directs the reader to the following source: Vincent Twomey, *Apostolikos Thronos: The Primacy of Rome as Reflected in the Church History of Eusebius and the Historico-Apologetic Writings of Saint Athanasius the Great* (Münster: Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie, 1982). For an analysis of this book, cf. Pierre Nautin’s review in *Revue de l’histoire des religions* (3/1985): 315–16.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁶Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, 57.

⁵⁷Ratzinger, “Pastoral Implications,” 51.

its bishop developed slowly. Furthermore, the term “primacy” was not originally limited to Rome. “The word ‘primatus’ . . . to my knowledge appears in connection with the Roman see for the first time in Canon 6 of the Council of Nicea, where, however, it characteristically occurs in the plural and describes not only the function of Rome, but at the same time that of Alexandria and Antioch.”⁵⁸ As already mentioned, however, according to the early fathers, such as Ignatius of Antioch and Tertullian, Rome enjoyed a special place among these three. They all had a connection to Peter, but as the place of Peter’s martyrdom (along with Paul’s martyrdom) Rome enjoyed particular apostolic weight. In addition to this, Ratzinger thinks that “in the fourth and fifth centuries there was consensus about the fact that Rome itself had kept free from heresy, that it was the place of an unaffected, guaranteed tradition and therefore could be called upon in special measure as authenticator of right faith, as a measuring stick of undistorted tradition.”⁵⁹

While the connection with Peter is undoubtedly a major part of Rome’s claims to primacy, it is interesting that the term “successor of Peter” was not employed in the beginning. As Ratzinger says, “It is well-known that this primacy was not initially based on the fact that the Roman bishop was the successor of the apostle Peter. . . . This idea, which emerged for the first time at the beginning of the third century and gradually gained clearer shape in the course of the fourth in Rome, was (by way of example) yet unknown to St. Augustine.”⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Rome’s apostolic primacy had always

⁵⁸Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes: Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1969), 122. The original reads as follows: “Das Wort ‘primatus’ . . . taucht meines Wissens im Zusammenhang mit der Funktion des Römischen Stuhles erstmals im Kanon 6 des Konzils von Nizäa auf, wo es aber bezeichnenderweise im Plural steht und nicht nur die Funktion Roms, sondern gleichzeitig die von Alexandria und Antiochia schildert.”

⁵⁹Ibid., 127. The original German reads: “Im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert bestand Übereinstimmung darüber, daß Rom sich von Häresien freigehalten hatte, daß es der Ort einer unberührt gewahrten Tradition sei und daher in besonderem Maß als Wahrerin des rechten Glaubens, als Maßstab unverfälschter Tradition angerufen werden konnte.”

⁶⁰Ibid. The original is as follows: “Es ist bekannt, daß dieser Primat zunächst nicht darauf gegründet wurde, daß der römische Bischof Nachfolger des Apostels Petrus sei. . . . Dieser Gedanke, der sich erstmals zu Beginn des 3. Jahrhunderts abzeichnet und im Laufe des 4. in Rom allmählich deutliche Gestalt gewinnt, war

been related in some way to Peter and still enjoyed a certain primacy even without the explicit use of the term “successor of Peter.” In other words, Ratzinger does not regard this development as inconsistent with the earlier tradition.

Having thus presented Ratzinger’s basic arguments for Petrine primacy of the Roman bishop, we may ask what sort of primacy this ultimately entails and how it relates to the episcopal college in carrying out its office of “the rock.”

3. Papal primacy and episcopal collegiality

We come now to the climactic portion of the article, which treats the relationship between papal primacy and episcopal collegiality. Some argue that the renewed focus on episcopal collegiality in recent decades negates papal primacy as traditionally understood in the West. Ratzinger, on the other hand, argues that collegiality qualifies, but does not eradicate, papal primacy. What is more, he thinks collegiality uncovers papal primacy’s “central theological significance” and may even “make it more understandable to our Orthodox brethren.”⁶¹

In order to avoid any over-exaggerations about the papal office, Ratzinger states that “the primacy cannot be patterned on the model of an absolute monarchy as if the pope were the unrestricted monarch of a centrally constituted, supernatural State called Church.”⁶² Rather, its proper place resides in “the official center of the collegiality of bishops.”⁶³ Maximilian Heim explains the basis for this understanding in Ratzinger’s thought as follows: “Just as Peter belongs to the company of the apostles and at the same time assumes

beispeilsweise dem heiligen Augustinus noch unbekannt.” Note: The development of Petrine succession in the third century does not render the thought less valid than that of *collegium*, since, as Ratzinger notes, “As a matter of fact, the word *collegium* itself appears in the third century as a designation for all the bishops as well as of partial communities within the episcopate” (cited in Ratzinger, “Pastoral Implications,” 47).

⁶¹Ratzinger, “Pastoral Implications,” 51.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

a special role within it, so too the successor of Peter in the *communio* of the college of bishops.”⁶⁴

In this view, the episcopate and the primacy are intrinsically linked with one another; there cannot be one without the other. As for the bishops, “Only communion with Rome gives them Catholicity and that fullness of apostolicity without which they would not be true bishops. Without union with Rome one cannot be in the *Catholica*”; “on the other hand, the episcopal see of Rome itself does not stand in isolation, devoid of relationships. It creates their Catholicity for other sees, but precisely for this reason it also needs Catholicity.”⁶⁵ This complement to episcopal dependency on Rome is at its zenith when Ratzinger says, “Rome needs their Catholic testimony, the testimony of real fullness, in order to remain true,” for without this, “Rome would negate its own meaning. A pope who would excommunicate the entire episcopate could never exist, for a Church which had become *only* Roman would no longer be Catholic.”⁶⁶

How exactly does the bishop of Rome relate to collegiality? First of all, the pope is the bishop of a local Church alongside other bishops of local Churches. In that capacity, he necessarily stands alongside them as one of the members of the episcopal college. Yet, as Ratzinger points out, “The office of Peter’s successor is a special instance of the office of bishop and is directed in a particular way toward responsibility for the whole Church.”⁶⁷ Just as the office of “the rock” was instituted alongside the office of “the twelve,” so too does the pope bear in an individual way a universal office alongside the episcopal college that bears a universal mission collectively.

In fact, the pope’s primary role is to unite the college of bishops so that they remain united even as they are spread throughout the world. Every bishop that is in communion with the pope is thereby in communion with all the other bishops that are in communion with Rome. Ratzinger believes that “the same idea lies behind the famous saying of St. Irenaeus concerning the *potentior*

⁶⁴Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, 451.

⁶⁵Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, 60.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship*, 144.

principalitas of Rome, with which all other Churches must agree.”⁶⁸ The basic function of the bishop of Rome, then, is to attest to the ecclesial communion of the other bishops. He affirms whether or not a bishop is, in fact, in communion with the whole Church.

The need for the Churches to agree with Rome refers to the need for each Church to maintain orthodoxy, that is, the apostolic faith. Thus, when the bishop of Rome attests to the communion of other bishops, he is also testifying to the authenticity of their faith. As such, he has an obligation to ensure that their teaching remains faithful to the apostolic tradition and to the Gospel. This task can be seen in primordial form in the Last Supper account in Luke’s gospel. There, Jesus says to Peter, “I have prayed that *your own faith may not fail*; and once you have turned back, *you must strengthen your brothers*.”⁶⁹ Who are Peter’s brethren if not the other apostles? The faith of Peter must strengthen the faith of the others. Likewise, the pope must strengthen the faith of the other bishops.

Ratzinger treats this necessity in *Episcopate and the Primacy* when he sets out what must be accepted by Catholics regarding the papal office. He presents the affirmations about the papal office in summary form as follows:

First, it is the certain teaching of the Church that the pope has immediate, ordinary, truly episcopal power of jurisdiction over the whole Church. The [First] Vatican Council calls the primacy of the pope the apostolic primacy, and the Roman See the apostolic see. Thus in the realm of doctrine the pope, in his official capacity, is infallible, his *ex cathedra* decisions being irreformably *ex sese* and not in virtue of the Church’s subsequent confirmation. So far as *communio* is concerned, the other pillar of the Church, it follows that only he who is in communion with the pope lives in the true *communio* of the body of the Lord, i.e., in the true Church.⁷⁰

Even the doctrine of papal infallibility is meant to be a source of unity in the Church. It belongs to the pope’s office to secure the orthodoxy of the faith, which necessarily requires the ability to teach definitively on matters that pertain to the faith so that the Churches

⁶⁸Ratzinger, *Episcopate and Primacy*, 55.

⁶⁹Luke 22:32 (emphasis added). See also Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 53.

⁷⁰Ratzinger, *Episcopate and Primacy*, 39.

spread throughout the world may be able to profess the same faith in the midst of doubts raised about one point or another.

Thus, the primacy of the bishop of Rome is at the service of the Church as a whole; its purpose is to protect and promote the catholicity of each local Church. The inner reason for papal primacy is for the good of the Church as a whole. If the bishop of Rome enjoys any primacy whatsoever, it is only because the Church as a whole is primary. From this perspective Ratzinger highlights the need for the primacy to be “seen from the viewpoint of the primacy of the real mission of the Church and is at all times a part of that and is subordinated to it: . . . the task of bringing God to men and men to God.”⁷¹ The office is carried out appropriately only if it considers its primacy as a service to ecclesial unity through faithfulness to the apostolic tradition.

Furthermore, in order to carry out this mission properly, the pope must remain in solidarity with the other offices. He has a role of primacy, but he is not the only one with rights and divinely given responsibility. Thus, his power is limited by the rights of other offices. Ratzinger cites another source to express certain limits to the pope’s authority. He lists seven key statements as follows:

1. The pope cannot arrogate to himself the episcopal rights, nor substitute his power for that of the bishops;
2. the episcopal jurisdiction has not been absorbed in the papal jurisdiction;
3. the pope was not given the entire fullness of the bishops’ powers by the decrees of the [First] Vatican Council;
4. he has not virtually taken the place of each individual bishop;
5. he cannot put himself in the place of a bishop in each single instance, *vis-à-vis* governments;
6. the bishops have not become instruments of the pope;
7. they are not officials of a foreign sovereign in their relations with their own governments.⁷²

Ratzinger readily admits the difficulty in maintaining a balanced view of papal primacy in relation to episcopal collegiality. In looking

⁷¹Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship*, 144.

⁷²Ratzinger, *Episcopate and Primacy*, 41. The quote comes from a German translation of the following: O. Rousseau, “La vraie Valeur de l’Épiscopat dans l’Église d’après d’importants documents de 1875,” *Irenikon* 29 (1956): 121–50. The German version appeared in *Una Sancta* (1957): 227.

at *De R. Pontificis et episcoporum jurisdictione*, Ratzinger notes in this connection that “once again there are two series of statements confronting each other and not easily brought into a simple unity. Only as they stand can they approximately express the whole, no less complicated, in reality. To borrow the expression of Heribert Schauf, the Church is not like a circle, with a single center, but like an ellipse with two foci, primacy and episcopate.”⁷³

Here, however, a question arises. If the primacy is like one foci in relation to another foci, the episcopal college, does this not place the primacy outside of the college as a complementary reality rather than within it as its “center”? Does not the analogy of the “two foci” conflict with the notion of “the center of collegiality”?⁷⁴ There is a definite tension here. Yet, one must admit that holding the two analogies simultaneously does correspond to the quote given earlier wherein Ratzinger states that “the Lord himself established *beside* and *together* with the office of ‘the twelve,’ also the special office of the Rock.”⁷⁵ “Beside” corresponds to the “two foci” analogy, while “together with” corresponds to the expression “center of collegiality.”

Taken individually or together, both these notions show that, for Ratzinger, papal primacy does not signify the negation of episcopal collegiality at all. It works alongside collegiality dialectically and within it as a center of unity. Again, this mirrors the twofold nature of Peter himself, who was both one of “the twelve” and in parallel fashion, “the rock.”

For Ratzinger, a balanced relationship is required of the pope not only in relation to the episcopal college taken collectively, but also in relation to the local Churches as such. On the one hand, “The office of the Petrine succession breaks open a structure based merely on the local Church; the successor of Peter is not merely the

⁷³Ratzinger, *Episcopate and Primacy*, 43.

⁷⁴At first, one may wonder if the conflict between the two analogies is due to a shift in thought. However, the two works in which these analogies appear are fairly close. The “two foci” analogy appears in 1962, and the “center of collegiality” description of primacy comes in 1965. It is also helpful to recognize that the “two foci” analogy is not his own. He adopts it from Heribert Schauf (See Ratzinger, *Episcopate and Primacy*, 43). It seems most likely that Ratzinger simply finds both expressions useful for understanding the primacy’s relationship to collegiality and does not view them as mutually exclusive.

⁷⁵Ratzinger, “Pastoral Implications,” 51 (emphasis added).

local Bishop of Rome; rather, he is bishop for the whole Church, and in the whole Church.”⁷⁶ On the other hand, “The Petrine office, again, would not be rightly understood, and would become ossified as a monstrous exceptional case, if we were to load onto the person occupying that office sole responsibility for enforcing the universal dimension of the apostolic succession.”⁷⁷ Ratzinger admits that other offices and ministries must exist in the Church that also possess a universal mission. “The pope is dependent upon these ministries, and they on him, and, in the existence side by side of the two kinds of mission, the symphony of Church life comes to fulfillment.”⁷⁸ Ratzinger takes the point even further when he says, “The primacy of the successor of Peter is there to guarantee the presence of these essential components of Church life and to bring them into an ordered relationship with the structures of the local Church.”⁷⁹ From these considerations, one can see that the pope’s main purpose is to secure the presence and existence of other offices and to mediate between them so that they work together in harmony. Again, we see that the primacy does not exist for its own sake, but for the sake of the unity-in-diversity of the Church as a whole.

There is, however, always the possibility that in certain cases the relationship between primacy and episcopal collegiality will not be properly respected. For this relationship “is realized through men and is the mold, ever open to human violation, of the divine data and commands.”⁸⁰ There is a particular danger of this in relation to administrative functions.

Ratzinger believes that one of the greatest causes of division between the Christian East and West was the unfortunate confusion and mixture of three distinct functions enjoyed by the pope. As Ratzinger says, “the bishop of Rome in fact unites three offices in his person; he is: 1) bishop of the diocese of Rome (and Metropolitan of the Roman province of the Church); 2) Patriarch of the Latin

⁷⁶Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship*, 201.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 202.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰Ratzinger, *Episcopate and Primacy*, 45.

Church;⁸¹ 3) holder of the office of the Rock established by the Lord.”⁸²

The following quote is particularly useful for highlighting the difference between patriarchal and apostolic primacy and the damage done when such a distinction is not maintained:

It is clear that the duality, set up by the earliest theology of succession with its emphasis on apostolic sees, has nothing to do with the later patriarchal theory. Confusion between the primitive claim of the apostolic see and the administrative claim of the patriarchal city characterizes the tragic beginning of conflict between Constantinople and Rome. The theory of patriarchal constitution, which especially since the council of Chalcedon, has been held up against the Roman claim and which has tried to force the latter into its own mold, mistakes the whole character of the Roman claim, which is based on an entirely different principle. The patriarchal principle is post-Constantinian, its instinct administrative, its application thus closely tied up with political and geographic data. The Roman claim, by contrast, must be understood in the light of the originally theological notion of the apostolic sees. The more New Rome . . . obscured the old idea of the apostolic see in favor of the patriarchal concept, the more Old Rome emphasized the completely different origin and nature of its authority. . . . The overshadowing of the old theological notion of the apostolic see . . . by the theory of five patriarchs must be understood as the real harm done in the quarrel between East and West.⁸³

⁸¹Ratzinger's use of the title *Patriarch of the Latin Church*, as opposed to *Patriarch of the West*, may indicate an early concern for the imprecision of the latter, which is the primary reason the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity gives for the removal of the title "Patriarch of the West" from the *Annuario Pontificio*. That decision, made in 2006, may have been foreshadowed by this quote from 1963. Cf. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, "Communiqué concernant la suppression du titre «Patriarche d'Occident» dans l'Annuaire pontifical 2006"; available online at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/general-docsrc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20060322_patriarca-occidente_fr.html; accessed 14 April 2009.

⁸²Joseph Ratzinger, "Primat," *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed., vol. 8, ed. Josef Höfer and Karl Rahner (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1963), 761. The German reads: "der Bischof v. Rom faktisch drei Ämter in seiner Person vereinigt; er ist 1. Bischof des Bistums Rom (u. Metropolit der röm. Kirchenprovinz); 2. Patriarch der lat. Kirche; 3. Inhaber des vom Herrn gesetzten Felsenamtes."

⁸³Ratzinger, *Episcopate and Primacy*, 58–59.

For him, confusion emerged as a result of the mixing of the patriarchal office with the apostolic office as Peter's successor. The patriarchal office is an administrative office exercised over a given region.⁸⁴ According to Ratzinger, the office of patriarch is of ecclesial right, not divine right. In this regard, Rome is a patriarchate that has administrative jurisdiction over the Latin West. However, Antioch and Alexandria enjoy the same type of patriarchal jurisdiction in their respective areas. This leads Ratzinger to conclude: "Thus, on *this* level, the Bishop of Rome stands not over, but next to Alexandria and Antioch, or if he is also first here, then still first among equals."⁸⁵

The distinction Ratzinger makes between the two forms of primacy (apostolic and patriarchal) could prove invaluable to the process of ecumenical dialogue. Ratzinger himself attests to this fact when he writes: "It becomes additionally clear that an extensive patriarchal 'autonomy' is compatible with the true essence of primacy, and perhaps the Eastern Churches would hardly need to change anything in terms of concrete juridical structure."⁸⁶

The last two quotes certainly provide a significant starting point for enhancing Catholic-Orthodox relations. Yet, a tremendous amount of work still remains to be done in order to delineate precisely the bishop of Rome's administrative (patriarchal) jurisdiction relative to the Eastern patriarchs. Distinguishing the apostolic and patriarchal⁸⁷ roles is quite difficult in the concrete. This is

⁸⁴See Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 132.

⁸⁵Ratzinger, "Primat," 761. The original text reads: "Auf *dieser* Ebene steht also der Bischof v. Rom nicht über, sondern neben Alexandrien u. Antiocheia, bzw. wenn er auch hierin Erster ist, so doch Erster unter Gleichen."

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 763. The original text reads: "Es wird weiterhin deutlich, daß mit dem wahren Wesen des P. eine weitestgehende patriarchale 'Autonomie' vereinbar ist, die an der konkreten Rechtsstruktur etwa der Ostkirchen kaum etwas zu ändern bräuchte."

⁸⁷Given that the title "Patriarch of the West" has been dropped under Pope Benedict XVI's pontificate, one may wonder whether this distinction made in his early years still has any potential at present. The current author sees two possible ways in which this distinction can still be maintained. First, since the reasons given for dropping the disputed title seem to focus on the part "*of the West*," then it may be possible that this could be replaced by "*of the Latin Church*." In the second place, if a strong objection against reapplying the term "patriarch" to the bishop of Rome were to remain, then one could still clarify the same issues in other terms, perhaps simply speaking of the *administrative* role of the pope vis-à-vis the patriarchs (not

especially true considering the First Vatican Council's clear affirmation that the apostolic role of Peter's successor does grant the Roman Pontiff immediate jurisdiction "not only in matters that pertain to faith and morals, but also in matters that pertain to the discipline and government of the Church throughout the whole world."⁸⁸ From the Catholic side, then, one cannot deny the pope's ability to act in a juridical manner in Eastern Churches when necessary. This is based upon his supreme apostolic authority over the whole Church. Nevertheless, one could provide a more detailed theological presentation on the kinds of circumstances that would be required to render such juridical interjection *morally* justifiable. In doing so, one would be employing the sound principle of subsidiarity, which is certainly compatible with the nature of papal primacy. This process would also involve providing a more specific explication of the relative patriarchal autonomy that the Eastern patriarchs enjoy. This would help ease the minds of Eastern patriarchs, who worry about undue intervention from Rome, as well as provide future popes with a useful tool that could help them to discern more readily when to intervene and when to allow the other patriarchs to exercise their proper role.

In conclusion, we have seen that Ratzinger's understanding of the relationship between papal primacy and episcopal collegiality is rooted in his interpretation of the New Testament texts concerning Peter's special importance vis-à-vis the apostles as a whole. He maintains that this relationship persists through the centuries in the successors of both the office of "the rock" and the office of "the twelve," that is, through the pope and the bishops respectively. Since both these offices are of divine right, neither can replace the other. The two must exist together in order to guarantee the unity-in-diversity that is the hallmark of ecclesial communion. In order to clarify the relationship between the pope and the other bishops and patriarchs, the distinction between the "apostolic" authority (which principally—although not exclusively—pertains to matters of the faith on a universal level) and "patriarchal" authority (which is

other patriarchs). Determining which option is preferable lies beyond the scope of this article.

⁸⁸The First Vatican Council, *Pastor Aeternus* (1870) in *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Jacques Dupuis, S.J., 7th ed., rev. and exp. (New York: Alba House, 2001), no. 826.

essentially administrative and regional) must be firmly articulated and maintained. Such a distinction may be advantageous for relations between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

We have thus come full circle in our discussion insofar as we have now touched upon the possible value Ratzinger's thought has for ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox Church, which was one of the chief points of interest justifying this study. However, if this thought is to contribute to ecumenical progress in a significant way, the theoretical treatment of these issues must be applied to concrete ecclesial structures and practices. The task of clearly defining and implementing the bishop of Rome's administrative competency relative to the Eastern patriarchs is massive and complex indeed. But the enormity of the task should not prevent sincere attempts to accomplishing it. The possible benefits are too great to be ignored. □

RICHARD G. DECLUE, JR., is a priest of the diocese of Charlotte, North Carolina.