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BENEDICT XVI'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE WITH THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

The author of this article presents the involvement of Benedict XVI in the ecumenical dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Church as a whole based on speeches, declarations and homilies delivered to representatives of this Church. Undoubtedly, it is significant. As a pope, he encouraged this dialogue by his authority, fraternal treatment filled with friendship and love, meetings, communal prayer and teaching. He overcame various difficulties and contributing to the progress of this dialogue. He emphasized joint theological research, because without the unity of faith there is no complete and visible unity. As always – as the theologian and as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – he taught that common celebration of the Eucharist could take place only in full unity: when will it happen? It is God's gift for which we have to pray and work at the same time: to evangelize together, to resist ideologies hostile to Christianity and humanity, to care for peace and justice among Christians and followers of other religions, and to cooperate in charitable work for the poor, the sick and the needy.

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Ratzinger's contribution as a theologian to the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue is known to the Polish reader thanks to the publication of his *Opera omnia*.¹

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¹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Opera omnia*, vol. VIII/2: *Kościół – znak wśród narodów. Pisma ekumeniczne i ekumeniczne*, ed. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, Lublin 2013, p. 699–715; cf. P. Rabczyński, „*Fides querens dialogum*”. *Prymat biskupa Rzymu w dialogu z Kościołami Wschodu*, „Teologia w Polsce” 13,2 (2019), p. 166–172.

Ratzinger writes there about the milestones that were laid in this dialogue before, during and after the Second Vatican Council. He is also known thanks to some studies. However, we are probably less familiar with his pontifical teaching, which he presented when speaking at meetings with representatives of the Orthodox Church. And although these speeches are not theological dissertations, they do refer to biblical data and the theological problems which were dealt with by the Theological Commissions and which stand in the way of achieving full communion; in fact, they promote this dialogue in various areas. It seems therefore worthwhile to examine them and to bring them closer to the reader.

During less than eight years of his pontificate (2005–2013), Benedict XVI gave more than twenty speeches to patriarchs, archbishops and Orthodox delegations of Constantinople, Greece, Cyprus, Jerusalem, Tirana, to the Mixed International Commission for dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, signed two declarations, preached several ecumenical homilies, thus making a major contribution to the promotion of this dialogue, not to mention meetings with delegations of Eastern Churches having unity (perhaps imperfect) with the Pope.²

ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE AS THE PRIORITY OF THE PONTIFICATE

One could expect from the great theologian and prefect of the Congregation of Faith that he would try to promote ecumenical dialogue. All the more so because, while already a Pope, he admitted that as a lecturer of theology and a bishop he “got to know and love the Orthodox Churches more deeply, and as a Pope he has the opportunity to see the growth of Orthodox parishes in Western Europe with a positive and well-meaning attitude.”³ In Warsaw, at an ecumenical meeting – attended by representatives of the Orthodox Church in Poland – in the church of the Holy Trinity, Benedict XVI confessed that right at the beginning of his pontificate he made a strong decision to make the restoration of full and visible Christian unity a priority of his papal ministry.⁴ To express this, on the day he officially took up the ministry of Peter, he went to the tomb of St. Peter together with the

² Papal speeches, homilies and declaration included in this article were taken either from the Italian Vatican website (discorsi – easy to find by the date of being delivered by Benedict XVI), or from the Polish edition of “L’Osservatore Romano”.

³ Cf. Speech at the meeting with the Orthodox Community in Freiburg, 24.09.2011.

⁴ Cf. Speech at the ecumenical meeting in the Holy Trinity Church in Warsaw, 25.05.2006.

Eastern Patriarchs in communion with his successors.⁵ He repeatedly assured the Delegation of the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Holy Ecumenical Synod that he was determined to seek the full and visible unity of all Christians and expressed his joy that the Patriarch Bartholomew I also had similar intentions.⁶ His trip to Istanbul (28.11.–1.12.2006) also served this purpose. It was primarily a matter of renewing the common commitment to restore, by God's grace, full communion between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople, and ultimately to respond to Christ's will for all to be one.⁷

During subsequent meetings with representatives of the Orthodox Church, Benedict usually stressed the importance of joint achievements in the past, especially in the agreement between the Vatican and Constantinople, emphasizing that they mean a commitment to take further actions. Among the milestones in the ecumenical dialogue he repeatedly mentioned: the pilgrimage of Paul VI and Atenagoras to Jerusalem,⁸ the participation of a delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the last session of the Second Vatican Council, the removal of the excommunication on the eve of the Council (7.12.1964),⁹ which brought about a radical change in relations between the Churches, the publication of *Tomos Agapis*, the establishment of the Mixed International Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church and the issuing of documents of great importance for dialogue, the visit of John Paul II to Constantinople (1979), and his meeting – a kiss of peace with Patriarch Dimitrios I shortly before the death of the Polish Pope.¹⁰ Benedict XVI himself promoted the participation of mutual delegations at the celebrations of Peter and Paul and Andrew, the patron saint of the Church in Constantinople, because, as he thought, it enabled the exchange of visits, allowed for fraternal conversations and common prayers. The participants were thus able to get to know each other better, to harmonise their initiatives, and thus to increase the hope that full unity in obedience to the Lord's commandment would soon be achieved.¹¹

⁵ Cf. Speech in the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, 9.06.2007, "L'Osservatore Romano" 9 (2007), p. 48.

⁶ Cf. Speech at the meeting in Rome with the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 30.06.2005.

⁷ Cf. Homilia in Fanar on 30.11.2006, "L'Osservatore Romano" 2 (2007), p. 25.

⁸ Cf. Speech at the meeting in Rome with the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 30.06.2005.

⁹ Cf. Declaration of 30.11.2006, "L'Osservatore Romano" 2 (2007), p. 28. Let us remark that J. Ratzinger wrote about all of this, *Opera omnia*, vol. VIII/2: *Kościół – znak wśród narodów...*, p. 699–715; cf. P. Rabczyński, „*Fides querens dialogum*”..., p. 166–168.

¹⁰ Cf. Speech at the meeting in Rome with the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 30.06.2005.

¹¹ Cf. Speech during the meeting with Bartholomew I, 29.06.2008.

ECCLESIAL FRATERNITY

Benedict XVI often used expressions such as: fraternal relations, fraternal encounters, fraternal conversations, fraternal collaboration, authentic friendship and fraternity, deepening of the fraternity, fraternal spirit,¹² which may indicate that, in his opinion, these expressions play an important role in ecumenical dialogue. Thus in his address to the delegation of the Patriarchate about the planned visit to Turkey, following the example of Paul VI and John Paul II, he expressed his confidence that this exchange would strengthen ecclesial fraternity and facilitate cooperation in undertaking common initiatives.¹³

Indeed, in the joint declaration¹⁴ of Benedict XVI and Bartholomew I, signed on 30.11.2006, the introduction expresses gratitude to God for the gift of the meeting, for the possibility of common prayer and dialogue, and for the joy that they could feel themselves brothers and that they could enjoy the renewal of their common commitments to strive for full unity. They interpreted this as the will of God and an expression of the responsibility resting on the shepherds of the Church of Christ. This awareness should inspire them to be guided in the future by the same feelings and to adopt the same attitude of brotherhood, cooperation and communion in love and truth. In this attitude, they have expressed their confidence that the Holy Spirit will help to prepare the great day of restoration of full unity, and this will happen when and as God wills.

It should be emphasized that for Benedict XVI the term “fraternity” used for Catholic-Orthodox relationships was not an empty word, but it expressed an authentic attitude of spiritual friendship and had a deep biblical and theological justification. He presented this justification extensively and referred to it on other occasions, during his visit to Constantinople in his homily¹⁵ on the Feast of St Andrew the Apostle, in the Patriarchal Church of St George, during the “Divine Liturgy” on 30.11.2006. It is based on the fact that Christ called brothers Peter and Andrew to be Apostles, that is “fishermen of men” (Matt 4:19; Mk 1:17). John the Evangelist shows Andrew as the first of the called ones – *ho protoklitos* and this term is used by the Byzantine tradition. It was Andrew who brought his brother Simon to Jesus (John 1:40). Although Peter and Andrew were both called, the

¹² Cf. Speech at the meeting with Chrisostom II, the Archbishop of Cyprus, 5.06.2010.

¹³ Cf. Speech at the meeting in Rome with the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 29.06.2006.

¹⁴ Cf. Common Declaration of Pope Benedict XVI and Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I signed in Fanar in Istanbul, 30.11.2006, “L’Osservatore Romano” 2 (2007), p. 28.

¹⁵ Cf. Homily in the patriarchal church of St. George during the Divine Liturgy in Fanar, Istanbul, 30.11.2006, “L’Osservatore Romano” 2 (2007), p. 25.

same task of being “fishermen of men” took on a different form in each of them. Simon, despite his human weakness, was called “Peter” or the Rock, on which the Church was to be built, and it was to him that the keys of the kingdom of heaven were entrusted in a special way (Matt 16:18). This path led from Jerusalem to Antioch and from there to Rome, so that he could later exercise universal authority in this city. Unfortunately, it is precisely the matter of the universal ministry of Peter and his successors that still causes the discrepancy between East and West. The two Churches, however, hope to overcome these difficulties through a recent reopening of theological dialogue.

Apostle Andrew, on the other hand, received another task from Christ, which is indicated by his very name (Greek name Andros – man). For, as the Gospel testifies, thanks to his knowledge of the Greek language, he became, together with Philip, the apostle, the advocate of the meeting with the Greeks who came to Jesus (Jn 12:20). According to tradition, Andrew was a missionary in Asia Minor and in areas south of the Black Sea, in the regions of Constantinople, and also in Greece, where he died a martyr's death. For this reason, Andrew is a symbol of the encounter between early Christianity and Greek culture, which culminates in the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers. It is the Cappadocian Fathers' theology which, by combining these two streams, enriched the liturgy, theology and spirituality of both the Eastern and Western Church.¹⁶ Thus also the encounter between the successor of Peter and the head of the Church founded by Andrew the Apostle, a brother in episcopal ministry is based on the fraternity of the blood of the apostles, and at the same time on their common and at the same time different vocation. This fraternal encounter shows clearly the special bond between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople as sister Churches, and gratefulness is due to God that he revives these fraternal and sisterly relations between the Church of Rome and Constantinople. The Pope also expressed the hope that fraternity, alongside trust and respect, is the basis on which further significant progress can be made in the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue.¹⁷

One can ask what kind of Churches did Benedict XVI have in mind when he talked about the sister Churches: only the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople, or other Eastern Orthodox Churches? Well, the Pope, who worked out the *Information* on this subject as the Prefect of the Congregation of Faith, who taught that this term can be used in mutual relationships by the particular Churches, and not the universal Church and the particular Churches, said this

¹⁶ Cf. Homily on 30.11.2006. quoted, “L'Osservatore Romano” 2 (2007), p. 25.

¹⁷ Cf. Address to the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 28.06.2010, “L'Osservatore Romano” 8–9 (2010), p. 42.

precisely both in the aforementioned homily and in an interview given during the flight to Istanbul. He announced: “This will be a qualitatively important meeting of the two sister Churches, Rome and Constantinople, and therefore an important moment on the road to Christian unity.” He pointed to the general opinion that Constantinople is considered to be “another Rome.” When it comes to spiritual influence, there is a similarity to the influence of Rome. “It has always been a point of reference for Orthodoxy, it has given us the great Byzantine Orthodox culture and continues to be a point of reference for the whole Orthodox world and likewise for all Christianity. So the Patriarchate of Constantinople retains its symbolic meaning even today... It is a landmark for the whole Orthodox world.” But “the Patriarch does not have the power of the Pope”¹⁸ and so there is no power over the universal Church, and this is a fundamental difference in the perception of the office of Pope and Patriarch and the Church of Rome and the Orthodox Church of Constantinople.

BONDS BETWEEN THE CHURCHES OF THE EAST AND WEST

What does the Catholic Church essentially have in common with the Orthodox Church? It is known that there are many unifying elements. Benedict XVI pointed to them frequently, on various occasions and in various ways. Although he did not present them in the form of a systematic lecture, some of them are undoubtedly worth mentioning.

Perhaps the most optimistic opinion about the reconciliation of the Churches was expressed by the Pope in his speech in Freiburg,¹⁹ when he quoted a keenly repeated opinion that “undoubtedly among the Churches and Christian communities, Orthodox Churches are theologically closest to us.” He then explained that this is indeed the case, since Catholics and the Orthodox have both maintained the same structure of the Church of the first centuries, so that both of them are “the Church of the first centuries, which is always present and yet new.” He then added that, despite the difficulties that have arisen from the human point of view, he trusts that in the not so distant future Catholics and Orthodox will be able to celebrate the Eucharist together as an expression of full communion.²⁰

And the Pope, while visiting Albania, mentioned those elements of faith which are shared by both our Churches.²¹ And these are: the common Nicene-

¹⁸ Interview during the flight to Istanbul, 29.11.2006, “L’Osservatore Romano” 2 (2007), p. 17.

¹⁹ Cf. Speech in Freiburg, 24.09.2011.

²⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Światłość świata, rozmowa z Peterem Seewaldem*, Kraków 2011, p. 111.

²¹ Cf. Speech at the meeting with Anasthasius, the Archbishop of Tirana and all Albania, 4.12.2009.

Constantinopolitan creed, a common baptism for the remission of sins and for our inclusion in Christ and the Church, the same legacy of the first ecumenical councils, a real but not fully perfect communion that the Churches already share today, and finally a common desire, as well as joint efforts to cooperate, to build on what already exists, especially learning about Scripture and promoting mutual understanding and cooperation between Catholics and Orthodox and other religions.

It is a fact that the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches share ecclesial legacy which dates back to the apostolic times and the first centuries of Christianity. The Pope therefore stressed that it is precisely this “heritage of experience” that should shape the future, “guiding our common path towards the restoration of full communion” (US 56).²² He also expressed his gratitude to God for the fact that the theologians of both Churches, after 1500 years of division, still find in ecumenical dialogue a consensus on the sacramental nature of the Church, on the apostolic succession in priestly ministry, and on the urgent need to bear witness to the Gospel about Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world, as expressed in a text drafted jointly between 2003 and 2009 and entitled: “The nature, the system and the mission of the Church.”²³

In the aforementioned homily delivered during the “Divine Liturgy” celebrated in the Church of St. George in Fanar according to the rite of St. John Chrysostom, Benedict XVI emphasized the sacramental character of the Orthodox Eucharist in the following words: “the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ have been made mystically present. For us Christians this is a source and sign of constantly renewed hope.”²⁴ In this way the Pope confirmed the real transubstantiation and the real sacrificial character of the Eastern Mass, the real presence of Christ and its paschal character, and that it is the prelude of eternal life. Finally, he expressed the wish that daily prayer and activity should be inspired by a fervent desire not only to be present at the Divine Liturgy, but to be able to celebrate it together, to take part in the one table of the Lord, sharing the same bread and the same chalice. May our encounter serve as an impetus and joyful anticipation of the gift of full communion.²⁵

It is significant that both the Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches celebrate the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul on the same day. The question is: why? The Pope noted that this feast is one of the oldest celebrations of the

²² Cf. Address to the members of the Mixed International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, 1.02.2007.

²³ Cf. Address to the Mixed Commission, 28.01.2011.

²⁴ Homily in Fanar on 30.11.2006, “L’Osservatore Romano” 2 (2007), p. 26.

²⁵ Cf. *ibidem*.

liturgical year and thus bears witness to a time when both communities still lived in full mutual communion.²⁶

On another occasion²⁷ Benedict XVI emphasized that the preaching of the apostles Peter and Paul, supported and sealed by the witness of martyrdom, is a lasting, strong and solid foundation on which the Church was built. And the Churches today find the roots of the communion they experience among themselves in fidelity to their deposit of faith. Through the intercession of Peter and Paul, they therefore implore God, rich in mercy, to allow the happy day to come as soon as possible when the faithful of both churches will be able to share the Eucharistic table and give thanks for the journey of peace and reconciliation that he has been made possible to go together.

At the headquarters of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, the Pope repeated that “we have almost everything in common, and above all a sincere desire for unity” (OL 3).²⁸ And he added that this quest for unity is important also because it is about restoring the full picture of the universality of the Church (OL 1).²⁹

And addressing the Delegation of the Patriarchate, he said that the Church of Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarchate are connected by friendship and authentic fraternity³⁰ and that these are bonds firmly anchored in the faith received through the testimony of the apostles. The deep spiritual closeness experienced at each meeting therefore fills the Pope with joy and gratitude to God. At the same time he stressed that this incomplete community should mature until it reaches full, visible unity.

An extremely important element connecting East and West is also the cult of Our Lady of Panaghia – Hodegetria – the guide on the way, revered as the guide for Christians. The Pope emphasized that it was God in the Trinity who gave people Mary, the Virgin Mother, to guide Christians through all times and show the way to perfection through her intercession. Finally, he encouraged us to entrust ourselves to her and to present our petitions to her so that all may become a community in Christ, more and more internally unified, in honour and glory of God’s name.

²⁶ Cf. Speech to the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 28.06.2010, “L’Osservatore Romano” 8–9 (2010), p. 42.

²⁷ Cf. Address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, 28.06.2012.

²⁸ Cf. Speech in the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, 9.06.2007, “L’Osservatore Romano” 9 (2007), p. 49.

²⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 48.

³⁰ Cf. Address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, 28.06.2011.

PRINCIPLES OF ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

What are the requirements that the Pope set for ecumenical dialogue? It seems that the first and fundamental one is that it should be a dialogue of love. This most important requirement was already found in the joint and still important ecumenical declaration of Atenagoras and Paul VI,³¹ then also in the declaration of Benedict XVI and Bartholomew I, who stressed that a true dialogue of love should be the basis and inspiration for all relations between people and between the Churches themselves.

The second fundamental requirement of this dialogue turns out to be the requirement of truth, so closely linked to the requirement of love that the Pope mentioned it together with the former.³² Already in his first address to the delegation from Constantinople, he stressed³³ that theological studies would be needed to analyse various complex issues and to identify some non-superficial solutions. For if Christ calls his disciples with all his might to build unity in love and truth, then this serious challenge of rebuilding a broken unity between all Christians cannot be avoided. It is not appropriate to simply evade the task, that is, to examine with all clarity and goodwill all differences in order to rectify them, because it is known that existing divisions reduce the effectiveness of preaching the Gospel to every creature (UR 1).

The next requirement for dialogue that the Pope saw was that of prayer. Following John Paul II Pope Ratzinger recognized that its pulsating heart was to be spiritual ecumenism, expressed in prayer and penance; “Christian unity is and will remain prayer and it lives in prayer.”³⁴ For it expresses the awareness that full union can only be a gift from God and that it is God who will lead to union when He wishes. The Pope has often spoken about this in the context of theological works and has stressed that intellectual effort is not enough, but that this effort must be accompanied by the awareness that the unity of Christianity itself is of supernatural character. This God’s gift will not be given if Christians do not zealously strive for this unity.

And so, before the plenary session of the Mixed Commission, which was to take place in Belgrade in 2006, Benedict XVI expressed most of all the hope that this dialogue could be the beginning of a new phase on the ecumenical road. At the same time, he gave encouragement to pray that the Holy Spirit would enlighten and

³¹ Cf. Declaration of 30.11.2006, “L’Osservatore Romano” 2 (2007), p. 28.

³² Cf. *ibidem*.

³³ Cf. Address to the Delegation of the Patriarch of Constantinople, 30.06.2005.

³⁴ Address to the members of the plenary session of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, 18.11.2010.

inflame hearts and strengthen the common will to respond, as much as possible, to the fervent prayer of Christ: “that they may be one,” that His disciples, united, may proclaim His Gospel to the world together, so that, believing in Him, all may be saved.³⁵ He also expressed his confidence that with God’s help progress will be made, that at some point there will be a day when Catholics and Orthodox will be able to celebrate together the Holy Eucharist of the Lord as a sign of full unity.

Before the next session of the International Mixed Commission in 2007, which was to continue the research on the main and decisive issue, namely the ecclesiological and canonical consequences of the sacramental structure of the Church, and in particular of collegiality and authority in the Church, he encouraged the Orthodox delegation³⁶ to pray together for light for the members of the Commission, so that, on the basis of the Scripture and the Tradition of the Church, they could prepare proposals for solutions to take important steps towards full communion. He also expressed his joy that the Patriarch Bartholomew I, together with the Holy Ecumenical Synod, had similar thoughts.

The Pope has included all the three elements in this one speech. He said that the deepening of feelings and bonds of love between the Churches of East and West and between individual believers is really intended to overcome the prejudices and misunderstandings that have accumulated over the centuries of ongoing divisions. At the same time, it is intended to help to stand in truth and to face in fraternal spirit the difficulties that still prevent us from joining the same Eucharistic table. He stressed that these meetings are held in prayer, which is indispensable because only the Lord can show the way to unity. For unity is a gift from God, for which we must pray in harmony and “receive it with humble obedience and awareness of the sacrifices that the path to unity requires.” It is about striving for full, visible unity with respect for both Eastern and Western traditions.

Already at the first meeting with the delegation from Constantinople, the Pope defined the unity we should strive for. And he specified that he did not mean a unity that would be the result of compromises reached in the course of negotiations, far removed from the truth of Christ, not a unity that would absorb or merge everything into one, but one that would have respect for the manifold fullness of the Church. The Church, which according to the will of its founder Jesus Christ, should always be one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. The Pope also reminded us that the Second Vatican Council clearly recognised the treasure which the East possesses and from which the West “drew many things.” After all, the basic dog-

³⁵ Cf. Speech at the meeting with the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 29.06.2006.

³⁶ Address to the Delegation of Constantinople, 29.06.2007, “L’Osservatore Romano” 9 (2007), p. 46.

mas of the Christian faith were defined by the Ecumenical Councils held in the East. He also called us not to forget how much suffering the East has suffered to preserve its faith. Thus East and West, only when taken together, form the shining face of the Pantocrator blessing all of Oikoumene with his right hand or, as John Paul II put it, the two lungs with which Europe and the Church breathe.³⁷ The different theological formulas adopted in the East and in the West should therefore be seen as complementary rather than opposing (UR 17; SlAp15), as Western theology seeks concerning the phrases *Filioque* and *per Filium*.

THE QUESTION OF UNDERSTANDING THE PRIMACY

Reflecting on the direction in which the Catholic-Orthodox ecumenical dialogue will go, Fr Paweł Rabczyński points out – referring to Pope Francis – that the principle of conciliarity “seems to be the most ecumenically fertile ground for striving for Christian unity and the most appropriate context for the theological dialogue.”³⁸ I was wondering if this is how Benedict XVI saw the matter? But I must admit that I have not encountered statements that would confirm this. I would say that Benedict clung more to the statement of John Paul II, who distinguished the primacy as to the essence and as to the form of its realization. In my opinion, this was his starting point. For he always stressed the primacy of the universal Church over local churches.

Undoubtedly, in order to restore full and visible unity, it would be necessary, above all, to clarify the theological differences in ecumenical dialogue, and one of the most important is, of course, the question of a proper understanding of primacy. According to Benedict XVI, this distinction between the essence and the form of its exercise, previously presented by John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut unum sint*,³⁹ can be a guiding light on this path. Therefore, in one of his most important speeches, that is in his homily delivered in Fanar, he called the question of primacy – the question of universal authority of Peter in the Church of Christ. He also recalled the definition of Peter's office as a ministry of mercy, that mercy which Peter first experienced himself (US 91). Based on an awareness of this nature of the ministry of Peter, Benedict's predecessor, in his ecumenical encyclical, invited the Orthodox Church to a fraternal dialogue whose aim “was to find ways of exercising the ministry of Peter, with respect for its essence

³⁷ Cf. Speech at the meeting in Rome with Chrisostom II, Archbishop of Justiniana and all Cyprus, 16.06.2007.

³⁸ P. Rabczyński, “*Fides querens dialogum*”..., p. 182.

³⁹ Cf. Speech in Freiburg, 24.09.2011.

and nature, so as to carry out a ministry of charity recognised by both” (US 95). So Benedict XVI has again encouraged this dialogue.⁴⁰

For the Pope, the progress of the ecumenical dialogue was particularly marked by the fact that in October 2009, in Paphos, a discussion began on the role of the Bishop of Rome in community – the communion of the Church in the first millennium. In this way Catholics and Orthodox reached a crucial point.⁴¹ He even considered it indispensable to study this issue⁴² in order to be able to deepen the understanding and recognition of the primacy of Peter in the current context of the search for full communion. On this occasion, the Pope assured that he prayed that the members of the Commission would continue along this path during the Vienna Plenary Session and that they would examine this sensitive and important issue in detail.⁴³ As can be seen, Benedict XVI believed that the most appropriate starting point for this dialogue would be to reflect on the understanding of primacy in the context of collegiality rather than conciliarity.

It may be worth reminding at this point how the Orthodox perceive the office of the Pope. Let a short illustration of this be the speech of the Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostom II delivered just after the Pope’s welcome in Rome,⁴⁴ who called him a Shepherd of the ancient Church and a famous witness of the Eastern Church. Archbishop Chrysostom answered: “Your Holiness, Pope of Ancient Rome and Bishop of the Historical Cathedral of St. Peter.” And he went on to say what prompted him to come to Rome, namely: “The grace of the Holy Spirit and the duty of Archbishop Primate of the Holy Church of the martyr Saint Apostle Barnabas for unity and peace among our Apostolic Churches brought him to the place of martyrdom of the Corypheuses, the Apostles Peter and Paul, to the Shrine of the Catacombs of the Martyrs of the Holy Faith, to meet the Pope, the one who among the bishops has the honorary primacy of undivided Christianity, to pass on the fraternal kiss of peace and, after centuries of walking along the non-fraternal road, to rebuild anew the bridges of reconciliation, cooperation and love.” These contacts culminated in Benedict XVI’s subsequent apostolic journey to Cyprus, which was also a significant step in ecumenical dialogue.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Cf. Homily in Fanar..., p. 26.

⁴¹ Address to the members of the plenary session of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, 18.11.2010.

⁴² Cf. Address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, 27.06.2009.

⁴³ Cf. Address to the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, 28.06.2010, “L’Osservatore Romano” 8–9 (2010), p. 42.

⁴⁴ Cf. Speech at the meeting in Rome with Chrisostom II, Archbishop of Justiniana and all Cyprus, 16.06.2007.

⁴⁵ Cf. Z. Glazer, *Prymat biskupa Rzymu w perspektywie prawosławnej. Ekumeniczne nadzieje*, “Studia Nauk Teologicznych” 10 (2015), p. 161–185.

BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL PREMISES FOR DIALOGUE

It is obvious that the striving for unity is not just a matter of achieving some human ambition, but is based on Revelation data. In his speeches, homilies, catecheses on the occasion of the week of prayers for Christian unity, or speeches addressed to representatives of the Orthodox Churches, Benedict XVI almost always started from biblical premises in order to encourage work for the unity of Christianity. He quoted evangelical texts, texts of Paul, especially those addressed to representatives of the Orthodox Church of Greece and Cyprus, where there were Christian communities founded by the Apostle of the Nations (Corinth, Thessaloniki). It is impossible to quote all of them, but perhaps, to present some examples, it is worth citing at least some of them.

Benedict XVI, meeting with the patriarch of Jerusalem,⁴⁶ Theophilos III on 15.05.2009, indicated that Christ stretching his arms on the cross fully revealed His desire to attract all people to Himself and to unite them in the People of God (John 12:32). Then, he mentioned further motives for reconciliation: the fact that Christ, through breathing of His Spirit on the apostles, revealed His power to empower disciples to participate in His mission of reconciliation (Jn 19:30; 20:22–23). Redemption has a unifying character. The Church's mission is accomplished by the power of breathing in. Hence Christians who have an ardent desire to bring Christ to others, to acquaint them with His message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19) may feel ashamed of the divisions between them. Therefore, knowing that they have been sent into the world (Jn 20:21) and strengthened by the unifying power of the Holy Spirit (v. 22), they proclaim the reconciliation that leads everyone to believe that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 31). It is for this reason that they must find the strength to strive for perfect unity, to make it complete, to give common witness to the love of the Father who sent the Son so that the world may know his love for us (Jn 17:23). Hence, if we want to glorify the name of the Lord, we should be of “one heart and one spirit” (Acts 4:32).⁴⁷

Patriarch Bartholomew I, who came to the Vatican for the feast of St. Peter and Paul,⁴⁸ and at the opening of the Year of Paul, was greeted by the Pope with the words of Peter, who writes to those who have received the same precious faith from God the Father and Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1–2). Then the Pope showed Saint Paul as the perfect master of Christian unity, because full communion has its foundation “in one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5). Common faith, one baptism for the

⁴⁶ Cf. Speech in Jerusalem, 15.05.2009 r., “L'Osservatore Romano” 7–8 (2009) p. 43–44.

⁴⁷ Cf. Speech at the meeting with the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 28.06.2012.

⁴⁸ Cf. Speech at the meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew I, 29.06.2008.

remission of sins and obedience to the one Lord and Saviour are always expressed in both the communal and ecclesial dimensions. He added that just as Christians are one body and one spirit, so they are animated by being called to one hope (Eph 4:4). This is a constant way to maintain unity and, in the case of division, to rebuild it. The Pope also pointed out that the Council's Decree on Ecumenism contains Paul's indications on how Christians should act, that is to say, in a manner worthy of their vocation, in all humility, gentleness, patience, to endure one another with love, seeking to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph 4:1–3). Nevertheless, Paul was not afraid to address to the Corinthians harsh words and a strong call to be unanimous in saying that the divisions should disappear and that they should try to maintain a perfect unity of thoughts and intentions (1 Cor 1:10).

In turn, the joint declaration⁴⁹ of Benedict XVI and Chrysostom II, Archbishop of Justiniana and Cyprus, draws attention primarily to the long history of Christianity in Cyprus, which began with the preaching of the first disciples who came there from Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen, and then it followed Paul's journey from the coast of Cyprus to Rome described in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 11:19; 27:4). This in turn should encourage us to remain faithful to our Christian vocation and to respond to the needs of the world today, which is to preach the Gospel today.

When Benedict XVI received Christodoulos, the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece in the Vatican⁵⁰ on 14.12.2006, he reminded that Greece and Rome had had intense relationships from the very beginning of Christianity and maintained them for a long time. These relations have contributed greatly to the emergence of various forms of Christian communities and traditions (for example, of St. Cyril and Methodius) in various regions of the world, which today correspond to Eastern Europe and Western Europe. A similar "osmosis" in preserving in particular the disciplinary, liturgical, theological and spiritual matters of the two Roman and Greek traditions has made the Church's evangelizing activity and the inculturation of the Christian faith effective.

AREAS OF COMMON ECUMENICAL ACTIVITY

Despite the lack of doctrinal unity,⁵¹ the Pope pointed out the fields in which Catholics and Orthodox can bear witness to the Gospel together; he especially

⁴⁹ Cf. Common declaration of Pope Benedict XVI and Archbishop Christostom II, 16.06.2007, "L'Osservatore Romano" 7–8 (2007), p. 34.

⁵⁰ Cf. Speech at the meeting in Rome with Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and all Greece, 14.12.2006.

⁵¹ Cf. Address to the Delegation of Constantinople, 28.06.2011.

pointed out what religious leaders – the Pope, patriarchs, bishops – can and should do together. He emphasized that the primary duty of shepherds is to preach the Gospel in today's world, because this necessity results above all from the words of Christ: "Go therefore and teach all nations" (Matt 28:19), not only in missionary countries but also in traditionally Christian ones. He drew attention to the difficult contemporary context, which is the growing wave of secularization, relativism and even nihilism, especially in the Western world. He believed that this situation must not lead to a weakening of evangelizing activity; on the contrary, this activity should be carried out with new power, in a way adapted to the present day. The proclamation of the Gospel is sharing a legacy, it is offering it to others. This is why it calls for a strengthening of cooperation and a clear common witness to all peoples.⁵²

This common duty should also encourage closer ties between the Churches, since "divisions between Christians are a scandal to the world and an obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel" and contradict Christ's prayer to God the Father on the eve of His passion asking for unity so that the world may believe (Jn 17:21). Thus "only the fraternal communion of Christians and their mutual love can make the message of God's love for all people and for every person credible. Anyone who looks at the modern world realistically will see an urgent need for such witness."⁵³

At the meeting with the Cypriot Catholic community,⁵⁴ the Pope encouraged in a special way to live the faith, so that its members could contribute in the modern world to the promotion of the values of the Gospel, which were passed on to them by generations of Cypriot Christians. These values should encourage them to make efforts to strengthen peace, justice, respect for human life and the dignity of their fellow citizens. In this way, faithfulness to the Gospel will benefit the entire Cypriot society. He also pointed to the quest for a fuller union in love with other Christians, as this is the most important part of the life and mission of the Church. The situation in which Cypriots live makes it possible for them to contribute to building greater unity among Christians in their daily lives.

At the same time, Benedict XVI pointed out that, at this stage of ecumenical progress, cooperation in the field of charity is extremely important. In his speech at the *Instrumentum Laboris*⁵⁵ presentation ceremony he strongly stressed that Christians are called to overcome differences, to bring peace and reconciliation

⁵² Declaration of 30.11.2006, "L'Osservatore Romano" 2 (2007), p. 28.

⁵³ Cf. Homily in Fanar 30.11.2006, "L'Osservatore Romano" 2 (2007), p. 25.

⁵⁴ Cf. Speech at the meeting z Cyprus Catholic community, 5.06.2010, "L'Osservatore Romano" 8–9 (2010), p. 18.

⁵⁵ Cf. Speech delivered in Nicosia, 6.06.2010, "L'Osservatore Romano" 8–9 (2010), p. 18.

where there are conflicts and to offer a message of hope to the world. They are called to extend a helping hand to people who are in need, generously sharing earthly goods with those who are less fortunate.

The declaration of Benedict XVI and Bartholomew I also includes a positive assessment of the process of creating the European Union. At the same time, the authors urged the participants of this momentous undertaking to take into account “all matters that concern the human being as a person and his inalienable rights, especially religious freedom, which is a testimony and a guarantee of respect for all other freedoms.”⁵⁶

They also stressed that members of all Churches should make a common contribution to the promotion of peace and interreligious understanding, that in any process the protection of minorities, their traditions and cultures, and religious differences should be ensured. Indeed, Europeans should be open to other religions and value their contribution to culture. However, the need of the moment is to combine the efforts of all the followers of Christ to protect Christian roots, traditions and values, to ensure respect for the past and at the same time to contribute to the culture of the future Europe and to improve relations between people at all levels.⁵⁷ The contribution of the Churches to the culture of Europe must not be forgotten, and in particular in the lands where this meeting took place, i.e. in today’s Turkey.⁵⁸ It is on this land, as the Acts of the Apostles testify, that the message of the Gospel was combined with the old cultural tradition. It is this bond that the common heritage of East and West owes so much and it will bear fruit in the future, as the authors assure us.

And even an initiative undertaken in Warsaw “Wigilijne Dzieło Pomocy Dzieciom” (Christmas Charity for Children) did not escape Benedict XVI’s attention. Charitable organizations of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelical Churches participate in this initiative. The Pope considered it important because many brothers and sisters expect from all Christians the common gift of love, trust, and concrete spiritual and material help. And ecumenical dialogue has created a network of relationships that can be joined by those who wish to participate from different denominations and thus they can work for “respect for the rights and needs of all, especially the poor, humiliated and vulnerable” (DeCa 30 b).

The difficulties that have to be faced by Middle Eastern Christians, on the other hand, were a particular source of deep anxiety and concern for the Pope

⁵⁶ Declaration of 30.11.2006, “L’Osservatore Romano” 2 (2007), p. 28.

⁵⁷ Cf. *ibidem*.

⁵⁸ Cf. *ibidem*.

and Catholics.⁵⁹ For this reason, Benedict reminded everybody that all Christians should work together on mutual recognition and mutual trust and thus serve the cause of peace and justice. He also expressed the wish that the intercession and example of the many martyrs and saints who have given courageous testimonies about Christ in individual Churches should sustain their strength and sustain their communities.

The Pope also expressed particular appreciation for educational work in Jerusalem,⁶⁰ Cyprus⁶¹ and Jordan. He emphasized that by bringing up future, well-educated generations, Christians do great service to the countries they inhabit together. The Declaration also mentions those areas in the world where Christians face problems such as poverty, war, terrorism, as well as various forms of exploitation of the poor, emigrants, women and children. In this regard, Pope Benedict XVI encouraged the common action for the respect of human rights, of every human being, created in the image and likeness of God, and for economic, social and cultural development. He pointed out that first of all the theology and ethics of both Churches is a strong foundation for the defence and operation of the traditions of East and West. These command to oppose the killing of innocent people in the name of God, because it is an offence against God himself as well as against the dignity of man. Finally, both leaders assured that they will strive to mobilize everyone to engage in a renewed service to man and to defend every human life.⁶²

SUMMARY

The analysis of numerous speeches, homilies and declarations made it possible to show how involved Benedict XVI was in the Catholic-Orthodox ecumenical dialogue, how much he promoted it in all dimensions: top-down (hierarchical) and grass-roots (the Church as a whole), supernatural and human, prayerful and dialogical, official and fraternal, biblical and theological – open to other formulations of the truths of faith, historical and contemporary, respecting both his own and sisterly traditions, evangelizing and anti-ideological, personal and social, sacred and everyday, peaceful – diplomatic and defending the unborn, the poor and persecuted, in the areas of worldview and spirituality, charity and education, using the word of truth and love. All these activities, taken together, can – in his opinion –

⁵⁹ Cf. Address to the Mixed Commission, 28.01.2011.

⁶⁰ Cf. Speech in Jerusalem at the meeting with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Teophil III, 15.05.2009.

⁶¹ Cf. Speech delivered in Nicosia, 6.06.2010, "L'Osservatore Romano" 8–9 (2010), p. 18.

⁶² Declaration of 30.11.2006, "L'Osservatore Romano" 2 (2007), p. 28.

contribute to a full, visible union, which is a gift of God, for which one must pray, and which will find its fullest expression in the common participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

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UDZIAŁ BENEDYKTA XVI W DIALOGU EKUMENICZNYM Z KOŚCIOŁEM PRAWOSŁAWNYM

Streszczenie

Autor tego artykułu przedstawia – opierając się na przemówieniach, deklaracjach, homiliach wygłoszonych do przedstawicieli Kościoła prawosławnego Wschodu – udział Benedykta XVI w dialogu ekumenicznym z tym Kościołem jako całością. Niewątpliwie jest on znaczący. Benedykt XVI jako papież zachęcał do tego dialogu swym autorytetem, pełnym przyjaźni i miłości braterskim traktowaniem, spotkaniami, wspólną modlitwą, pouczeniami, przełamywał różne trudności, przyczyniał się do postępu w dialogu. Kładł nacisk na wspólne badania teologiczne, gdyż bez jedności wiary nie ma pełnej i widzialnej jedności. Jak zawsze – i jako teolog, i jako prefekt Kongregacji Wiary – uczył, że wspólne sprawowanie Eucharystii może mieć miejsce dopiero przy pełnej jedności. Kiedy ona nastąpi? Niewątpliwie jest darem Bożym, o który należy się modlić i zarazem pracować: wspólnie ewangelizować, wspólnie przeciwstawiać się wrogim chrześcijaństwu i człowiekowi ideologiom, dbać o pokój i sprawiedliwość pomiędzy chrześcijanami i wyznawcami innych religii, razem działać charytatywnie na rzecz ubogich, chorych i potrzebujących.

Słowa kluczowe: dialog ekumeniczny, droga do pełnej jedności, braterstwo, starożytna tradycja chrześcijańska, Kościół prawosławny, współpraca ekumeniczna