

THE NORTH AMERICAN ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL CONSULTATION

The Vocation and Mission of the People of God: “A Chosen Race, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation”

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. (I Peter 2:9-10)

Our Lord Jesus Christ continues to call individuals to be his disciples, members of the “holy nation” we call his Church. From the day of Pentecost, this saving relationship with Christ has normally been established through the solemn and joyous event of baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. A sacred rite, rich with deep significance - baptism, in water and in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - ultimately proclaims that the newly baptized is united to Christ and his people, participates in his death and resurrection, personally receives the gift of the Spirit, and comes to know the generous love of the Father expressed in the forgiveness of sin. Through these new relationships, the believer now lives as a member of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), God’s faithful people - a life which is manifested especially in the celebration of Holy Eucharist. He or she is now a member of the Church which is “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.”

These words from the Epistle of Peter immediately point to the value and dignity of every member of the Church. Baptism marks the beginning of a new life of holiness and discipleship in Christ. Each member has been fully united to him, is blessed with the gifts of the Spirit, and so is bound through Christ to other believers. Each one now has a public mission: to “declare the wonderful deeds” of God the Father, who “calls us out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

So we reaffirm what we agreed almost twenty years ago, solemnly recognizing the validity of sacramental initiation in each other’s communities: “The Orthodox and Catholic churches both teach the same understanding of baptism. This identical teaching draws on the same sources in Scripture and Tradition, and it has not varied in any significant way from the very earliest witnesses to the faith up to the present day. A central element in this single teaching

is the conviction that baptism comes to us as God's gift in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. It is therefore not 'of us,' but from above."¹

In this present Agreed Statement, the members of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Consultation want first to affirm the vocation and ministry of each member of the Church: a vocation and a ministry rooted in Christ's call, first given through baptism and chrismation, and lived out through the relationships, responsibilities and obligations each of us encounters in daily life, in family, Church and society.

Over the past four years, our earlier, continuing examination of the dimensions of primacy and conciliarity or synodality in the life of the Church has led us also to study the People of God, who are that Church in its fullness.² In the past, we responded to the Lima document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry in 1984, and spoke more at length about the significance of baptism in both of our Churches in our Statement on "Baptism and Sacramental Economy" (1999). We have also briefly spoken of the laity in our early Statement on "The

¹ Agreed Statement on Baptism and Sacramental Economy (1999).

² One often sees references that derive the word "layperson" from the biblical word *laos*, (λαός) meaning "the people of God" in contrast to the pagan nations. According to this view laypeople are simply those persons who belong to the people consecrated to God. If this were true, the word "lay" would be synonymous with "sacred." But such an interpretation rests on a double confusion. First, it presupposes that the word "lay" arose within primitive Christian or contemporary Jewish circles, when in fact it occurs 300 B.C. in Hellenistic papyri. The second presupposition is that the adjective "lay" is always suggestive of the noun *laos*, which Christians understand generally to mean "people of God." However, the noun *laos*, in the Bible as well as in secular texts, has a special meaning: not people in general, but the common people in so far as they are distinguished from their leaders - the equivalent of *plebs*.

While the Greek word *laos* is a biblical term that occurs frequently in Scripture, to designate the people of God in distinction from the pagan nations, the word "layperson" (λαϊκός) is not a biblical word. It occurs neither in the LXX nor in the New Testament, but is an ecclesiastical word that appears for the first time in the first epistle of Clement, about the year 96, to describe those members of the people of Israel who were neither priests nor Levites: "Special ministries have been assigned to the high-priest; a special place has been allotted to the priests; and the Levites have their own duties. Lay people are bound by rules laid down for the laity." Even though I Clement identifies the laity here by distinguishing them from "priests and Levites," he gives them a place within the consecrated people, who are set apart from the non-consecrated "nations". This identification as a consecrated people opens the way for an identification of the laity with the "people of God" and the "royal priesthood," that is, to identify them as being consecrated persons.

Church” (1974) and in our Statement on “Conciliarity and Primacy” (1989). We also referred to the distinctive vocation of the Christian laity in our Statement, “Steps towards a Reunited Church: A Sketch of an Orthodox-Catholic Vision for the Future” (2010). The International Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, too, in 2007, made a number of valuable references to the specific participation of the laity in the life of the Church in its Statement, “Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority” (The “Ravenna Statement,” 2007) and our Consultation responded to that Statement in 2009.

We believe, however, that discussion of the basic constitution of the Church, and of the specific role of the laity, remains somewhat underdeveloped in our previous statements, as well as in the statements of the International Commission. On the one hand, the topic has not been a ‘church-dividing’ issue between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Rather, in both our Churches in recent decades there have been continuing discussions about the proper role of the laity in worship, administration and witness. So the Second Vatican Council, in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, expressed the Catholic Church’s desire “that all believers be brought to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is required by the nature of the liturgy itself and to which the Christian people... have, in virtue of baptism, a right and a duty.” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14)

Second, we recognize that both of our churches have often been affected by a strong emphasis on the vocation and ministry of the clergy, even to the neglect of the ministry of the laity. A lay person has frequently been assumed, as in I Clement, simply to be one *who is not ordained* (see above, n. 2). This perspective appears to neglect the proper, wider vocation of every Christian disciple, as that is rooted in Christ’s call and in baptism.

We have come, therefore, to recognize the need to articulate together a common perspective on the People of God and the vocation and ministry of lay persons and the ordained within it, especially in light of contemporary challenges both in the Church and in society. From the beginning of our Consultation in 1965, lay theologians, both women and men, have been full and active participants. We gratefully affirm their contributions, and believe that our North American Consultation can take a distinctive part in this important discussion. It is in that spirit that we respectfully submit this statement to our churches.

I. The Mystery of Baptism

Baptism, as the central act of Christian initiation, is a rite rich in significance. At its heart are two fundamental affirmations. First, baptism, celebrated with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and completed by chrismation and the reception of the Eucharist, brings about our union with God in Christ and our sharing in Christ's death and resurrection. It is the act that marks the beginning of every distinctively Christian life; so, with the Apostle Paul, we affirm: "As many of you who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ" (Gal.3:27).

Second, baptism thus marks our entry into the Church, which is the People of God. Our mysterious union with Christ our Lord through baptism is, at the same time, a union with all those who are 'in Christ' (Phil.1:1). If Christ is the head, then the Church is his Body (Col. 1:18). The two share one life. For every believer, growth in holiness takes place both through our relationship with Christ and through our sharing this relationship with fellow members of the Church.

As we have previously said: "Baptism is not a human work, but the rebirth from above, effected through 'water and the Spirit,' that introduces us into the life of the Church. It is that gift by which God grounds and establishes the Church as the community of the New Covenant, the 'Israel of God' (Gal 6:16), by engrafting us into the body of the crucified and risen Messiah (Rom 6:3-11; 11:17-24), into the one sacrament (*mysterion*) which is Christ himself (Eph 1:3; 3:3; Col 1:27 and 2:2)."³

A number of the Fathers, both Eastern and Western, have spoken about Christ's saving work in terms of his three "offices": of Priest, Prophet and King. As priest, Christ is the one who offers himself up for the salvation of the world. As prophet, he is the one who proclaims the truth to us about God and the human person. As king, he is the one who leads his faithful people to the Father.

The same Fathers of the Church also remind us that, through baptism, the faithful themselves share in these offices of Christ. So St. John Chrysostom says: "Through baptism, you have become king, and priest and prophet: a king, in that you have dashed to earth all the deeds

³ Agreed Statement on Baptism and Sacramental Economy (1999).

of wickedness and slain your sins; a priest, in that you offer yourself to God; a prophet, knowing what shall be, and being inspired by God and sealed.” (*Homily 3:4-5 on II Cor*)

A prayer from the Roman rite of baptism, accompanying the “sealing” of a newly baptized person with sacred chrism, says: “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.”

Our understanding of the fundamental vocation and ministry of all Christian men and women is rooted in the call of Christ as it is manifested in the sacrament of baptism. By this sacred rite, we are bound to the Lord and his people, and blessed with the gifts of his Spirit.

II. The People of God

The people of God are distinguished both by charisms (1 Cor 12:7; 14:26), or interior gifts, and by public ministries; both of these serve to build up the community. The New Testament mentions distinctive roles of leadership in the community, such as ministers (1 Cor 4.1; 2 Cor 3.6; 6.4), presidents (Rom 12.8; 1 Thes 5.12; Heb 13.7, 17, 24; Acts 12.1; 20.28), pastors (Eph 4.11), elders (Tit 1.5), and teachers (Acts 12.1; 1 Cor 12.28) as gifts of the Spirit, given to some individuals in the community for the sake of all. The charisms of *all* the baptized, above and beyond these special roles, are linked with their participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly role of Christ, enabling all to be witnesses to him through lives of faith. “The manifestation of the Spirit received by each person,” St. Paul reminds us, “is given for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). But all these charisms “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4.11-12) The diverse ministries carried out in the Church are all forms of service, the focus being on our common mission rather than on anyone’s particular identity.

Reflection beginning with the people of God as a whole, then, rather than with the notion of “the laity” as distinct from “the clergy,” replaces the “priesthood-laity” divide with an emphasis on the necessity of all ministries for “the building up of the Body of Christ,” as that Body serves the world. A genuinely dialogical Church, formed from these ministries, is thus characterized by mutual listening, mutual witnessing, and mutual respect, as well as by

distinctions in office and function. Ecclesial structures, such as bishops' synods and regional or ecumenical councils, maintain and foster the unity in faith of the Body of Christ.

The terms "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" apply to all the baptized, before there are further distinctions within the community, and emphasize the unitary nature of the community, founded on a common baptism and common confirmation or chrismation. The people addressed in I Peter 2:9-10 are therefore not the "laity," but the faithful Christian people. According to I Peter, the spiritual rebirth of Christians occurs through the resurrection of Christ, in which Christians share through baptism and chrismation (see Rom 6:3-11). This is the basic identity that defines all groupings within the community, whether those groups be identified as the laity, the clergy, monks, or religious.

Every member of the Church has a dignity and value rooted in baptism. The Spirit also endows each baptized Christian with spiritual gifts, which are meant to contribute to the well-being of the Body and to the salvation of the world. While these spiritual gifts serve to highlight each person's unique identity, they are not meant to harm the bond of unity which each baptized person has with the rest in Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-11). Each gift is given, ultimately, not for the benefit of any one person alone, but for the well-being of all the members of the Body of Christ. As St. Basil the Great says: "We are all members one of another, having different gifts according to the grace of God which has been given to us...All the members together make up the Body of Christ in the unity of the Spirit, and render to one another the necessary service according to their gifts" (*On the Holy Spirit*, 26).

Baptism and Orders.

Among the many particular gifts of the Spirit, some persons are appointed to exercise a special leadership role within the community, as bishops, priests and deacons. Both Orthodox and Catholics affirm that these orders are essential to the life of the Church. Yet, the ordained ministry is itself but one of the many gifts of the Spirit to the Church. The differentiation between clergy and laity itself rests on a gift, which serves as the basis for liturgical ministry. Those who are called to the ordained ministry continue to be fellow members of the Body of Christ and People of God, together with all who are baptized.

At the same time, the gift of ordained ministry itself builds the distinctive relationship between the one ordained and the other members of the Eucharistic community. Each ordained minister is involved in a special ministry of service "for the building up of the Body of Christ"

(Eph. 4:12). So St. John Chrysostom says to the clergy: “If lay people need us, in the same way we as ministers exist for their sake, appointed for their spiritual needs. We need each other: the leaders need the support of the people and those in office equally need the contribution of the flock. To be a leader implies that persons be taken care of and be helped. Nobody exists as self-sufficient, assuming that he himself can do all. ...Therefore, the Church as a conciliar assembly can do much more than one single person. All that one person alone cannot do, rather, he or she can do together with others.” (*Homily 30 on 1 Corinthians, 7*)

So we speak of the clergy as being “set apart,” but not as “above” or separate from the body of believers. Indeed, it could be also said that every baptized believer is “set apart” to serve God in the Church and in wider human society. This means that the clergy are called to serve the other members of the community with the gift of the Spirit in a distinctive manner, which is sanctioned and blessed by the Church itself through the rites of election and ordination. Yet the fact that every ordination takes place within the context of the community’s Eucharist, and with the assent of the community, reminds us that an ordained person is intimately related to the entire Body of the Church. God calls the one who is ordained from the midst of the Church for the service of the Church.

There is always a profound, intimate connection, then, between those who are ordained and those to whom and with whom their ministry is offered. St. Augustine expressed this reciprocal relationship when he boldly declared: “Although I am terrified by what I am for you, I am consoled by what I am with you. For you, I am your bishop; with you I am a Christian. The former is a title of an office which has been undertaken, the latter is a title of grace. The first is a danger, the second salvation...Precisely as we struggle in this office we find rest in the common good.... It consoles me more that I have been redeemed with you than that I have been placed over you...Aid us by your prayers and your obedience, that we may rejoice not so much in overseeing you as in serving you.” (*Sermon 340:1*)

The Eucharistic Community

This intimate relationship of the bishop and priest with the laity is most clearly expressed each time the Church gathers to celebrate the Eucharist. The bishop or priest who presides at the Eucharist represents Christ as the head of the Church, which is his body. As president of the Eucharistic assembly, it is the bishop’s or priest’s responsibility to preside before the altar, to

proclaim the Gospel, to preach and interpret the word of God, to receive and offer the bread and wine, and to intone the great Eucharistic prayer.

At the same time, the Eucharist is not the action of the bishop or priest alone, separated from the community. Rather, the Eucharist is, properly speaking, the priestly act of the entire People of God, gathered at a particular place in obedience to the Lord's command to do this in his memory (1 Cor.11:24). So all the members of the assembly truly celebrate the Eucharist, led by the bishop or priest. The prayers of the Eucharistic liturgy, in both our traditions, are normally addressed to God in the first-person plural, because they are rightfully the community's words; so while the bishop or priest speaks the prayers aloud, all the members of the community give their assent by responding together "Amen." While the bishop or priest offers the bread and wine, as the Byzantine liturgy expresses it, "on behalf of all and for all," it is the faithful who present these gifts to be offered. All respond to his greeting, "The Lord be with you," by replying "And with your Spirit," confirming their conviction that he presides by the grace of the Holy Spirit, given in ordination; all exchange the 'kiss of peace' and profess with the presider their common faith. And while the bishop or priest is the first to receive the Holy Communion, all the members partake of the same bread and the same cup. In these liturgical actions, the synodal or conciliar structure of the Church is expressed in a way which does not deny or diminish the genuine primacy of the bishop or priest.

It is within the Eucharistic context, in fact, that one can clearly see operative the mutual relationship of clergy and laity, as well as the principles of both primacy and conciliarity in the Church as a whole. So St. John Chrysostom says that "during the most awe-inspiring mysteries, the priest prays for the people and the people pray for the priest, for the words 'with your spirit' are nothing else but that. The offering of the Eucharist is in common, for it is not the priest alone who gives thanks, but the whole people. He first speaks in their voice, then they add that it is 'fitting and right' to do this. Then, the Eucharist begins." (*Homily 18 on II Corinthians* 8.24). And in another homily, he declares: "With us, all things are equal. The saving life that sustains our souls is given with equal honor to both you and me. I do not, after all, partake of one Lamb and you of another, but we partake of the same. We all have the same baptism. We have been promised the same Spirit. We are all hastening to the same Kingdom. We are all alike brothers and sisters in Christ, sharing all things in common!" (*Homily 4 on II Thessalonians* 3.2)

The image of an intimate mutual relationship of giving and receiving, modeled on the *circuminsessio* or *perichoresis* of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, may even be apt to describe the relationship of the various charisms, ministries, and states of life among the faithful in the Eucharistic community. Within the diversity whose source is the Spirit of unity, all work together to build up the Body of Christ.

III. The Ministry and Mission of the Laity

While the entire people of God is called to minister in and for the church, as early as the *Apostolic Tradition* one finds a distinction between clerical and lay ministries evidenced through the distinction between the ordination of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, through a laying-on of hands, and the simple installation or institution of lay ministers such as widows and readers. So in both the Orthodox and Catholic churches, liturgical ministry includes not simply the presiders but altar servers, cantors, lectors, and the choir. Beyond these liturgical roles, increasing numbers of lay people today teach the faith, serve in peace and justice networks, in soup kitchens and shelters, in administrative positions, and in various parish programs. In the Catholic Church, for example, lay persons are regularly involved in the liturgy as extraordinary Eucharistic ministers, and in some places are responsible for leading Sunday worship in the absence of a priest. In the Orthodox Church, lay persons are involved in parish, diocesan, and national church assemblies (Clergy-Laity congresses), and function as short-term and long-term missionaries.

Through our union with Christ in baptism, every disciple has an obligation to be a defender of the apostolic faith through the way we live out our relationships and responsibilities in family, Church and society. As the recent Ravenna statement of our international Orthodox-Catholic dialogue says: “The whole community and each person in it bears the ‘conscience of the Church’ (*ekklesiastike syneidesis*), as Greek theology calls it - the *sensus fidelium* in Latin terminology. By virtue of baptism and confirmation (chrismation) each member of the Church exercises a form of authority in the Body of Christ. In this sense, all the faithful (and not just the bishops) are responsible for the faith professed at baptism. It is our common teaching that the people of God, having received ‘the anointing which comes from the Holy One’ (1 John 2, 20 and 27), in communion with their pastors, cannot err in matters of faith (cf. John 16, 13).”⁴

⁴ “Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority” 7 (Ravenna, October 13, 2007.)

The participation of the laity in councils, the consultation of the faithful in matters of discipline and faith, and their longer-term involvement in the reception of doctrinal definitions, so that they become embedded in the life, worship, and teaching of the Church, reflects the role that the whole people of God, as a single Body, ultimately must play. Engagement in society extends to all the baptized, insofar as all the baptized are called to participate actively and responsibly in the church's mission of proclaiming salvation to the whole world. All are called to share their gifts and talents in the family, the workplace, the civic community and the parish or diocese. Not surprisingly, it is often the laity who are best able to provide decisive Christian witness in these settings, and within the professional, political, and cultural life of society.

The Church has a mission to the world. The people of God are sent out as "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13-14). The relationship between the Church and the world is perhaps best described as an interplay, an interpenetration, insofar as the Church, along with the whole of humanity, shares the world's lot even while it serves as a leaven within human society, renewing it in Christ, and collaborating with Christ to transform it in conformity with the Kingdom of God.

The whole Church's mission, then, is ultimately the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God. Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:9-15; Luke 3:21-4:14), identifying the transformation foretold by Isaiah 61:1-2: good news brought to the poor, captives released, the blind given sight, and the oppressed freed. The Kingdom was revealed as present in the person and actions of Jesus (Luke 4:21). The mission of the church participates in the mission of Jesus, manifested at his baptism and assumed by Christians in their own baptisms, in which they put on Christ and participate in his death and resurrection. Precisely as members of the body of Christ, all the faithful share in the anointing of the Spirit, are formed into a holy and royal priesthood, offer "spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ" (I Pet 2:4-5), and have a part to play in the mission of the body as a whole.

The church then, is a sign for the nations, and so has a mission that encompasses both the historical reality of human community now and its ultimate union with God. So it is oriented eschatologically, signifying the ultimate union of all, when recapitulated in Christ at the end time. The Church in its most basic identity, for both the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, is thus

called a sacramental reality, in which God works actively in and through human beings and actions in the midst of a concrete, historical community.⁵

Implications for Synodality

The identity of the whole Church, as participating in the threefold office of Christ and as sharing in the inerrancy of the whole people of God in matters of faith,⁶ bears implications for its conciliarity and synodality. As our own “Agreed Statement on Conciliarity and Primacy in the Church” states, “The ordering of charisms within the community is the basis of the Church’s structure, and the reason why permanent offices of leadership have been divinely established with the Eucharistic body, since apostolic times, as a service of love and a safeguard of unity in faith and life.”⁷ While the term “conciliarity” primarily refers to a gathering of bishops exercising their pastoral office, the Ravenna document affirms the possibility of “taking the term in a more comprehensive sense to refer to all the members of the Church (cf. the Russian term *sobornost*)” and “as signifying that each member of the Body of Christ, by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in eucharistic *koinonia*.”⁸ The Ravenna document identifies the ultimate foundation of conciliarity to be the Trinitarian mystery, wherein the three persons of the Trinity are “‘enumerated’ without the designation as ‘second’ or ‘third’ person implying any diminution or subordination.”⁹ Similarly, an ordering among local churches does not imply any inequality between them. While the Eucharist has rightfully been identified as manifesting this order and *koinonia* within the ecclesial community, we wish to assert here that a baptismal ecclesiology of the people of God, endowed with various charisms, likewise provides a theological foundation for the practice of conciliarity.

⁵ The sacramental nature of the church is affirmed in the Ravenna statement, “Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority,” Ravenna, 13 October 2007.

⁶ *Lumen gentium*, 12; on the instinct of a baptized Christian to discern the truth in Scripture, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.9.4, PG 7.545.

⁷ Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, “An Agreed Statement on Conciliarity and Primacy in the Church,” October, 1989, § 5. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/orthodox/conciliarity-and-primacy.cfm>.

⁸ Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic church and the Orthodox Church, “Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority (Ravenna, 12 October 2007), § 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Conciliarity is manifested in the local church gathered around its bishop, in regional groupings of neighboring local churches, and in the entire or whole Church (*ecclesia universa*).¹⁰ In each case, the Church is constituted by Christian believers and their assemblies; these people, regardless of their office or state in life, gather as *synodoi*, “travel companions”. Synodality and conciliarity are aspects of the life of the entire church, before they are activities of the church’s hierarchy. Consequently, synodality and conciliarity imply in some sense the participation of all the people of God.

The Ravenna statement identifies conciliarity primarily with the local Church, described as “synodal” or “conciliar” in structure (§ 20), but states that the composition of a regional synod is always essentially episcopal: even when it includes other members of the Church, only bishops have a deliberative voice (§ 25). Despite the episcopal character of regional synods, their conciliarity or synodality involves the entire Churches of the assembled bishops in two respects. First, the bishops “are bearers of, and give voice to, the faith” of the Churches (§ 38). Second, the decisions of a council are received through a process “according to which the people of God as a whole—by means of reflection, discernment, discussion and prayer—acknowledge in these decisions the one apostolic faith of the local Churches...of which the bishops are the teachers (*didaskaloi*) and the guardians” (§ 37). The process of reception of the decisions of the bishops into the life of the Churches, especially their liturgical life, is a process which involves the entire Church.

Historical precedent for such a corporate understanding exists in the early Church. The Acts of the Apostles reports that “the apostles and elders met together to consider the matter” of the relation of Christian conversion to taking on the full obligations of Jewish law (Acts 15:6), and mentions the presence of an assembly (15:12). Local synods gathered during Cyprian’s time in the Church of Carthage “with a multitude of faithful present” expressing their opinions.¹¹ At the First Ecumenical Council, laity eagerly defended the party of their choice,¹² although in later councils they were normally just represented by the Byzantine emperors and imperial officials.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, §§ 10, 17.

¹¹ Cyprian, *Epistle*, 13:31; PL 4.267, 3093, 320, cited by John N. Karmiris, *The Status and Ministry of the Laity in the Orthodox Church* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross, 1994), 14.

¹² Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.8; PG 67.64, referenced by Karmiris, *Status and Ministry of the Laity*, 14.

A synodical and conciliar church is characterized by mutual listening, mutual dialogue, mutual witnessing, and mutual respect. Ecclesial events such as synods and councils become focal points for these activities, at the same time as they exhibit the very character of the church. As St. John Chrysostom says, “Church and Synod are synonymous.”¹³ The ideal, as articulated in the Ravenna statement, is that in a truly synodal order there should be “neither passivity nor substitution of functions, neither negligence nor domination of anyone by another.”¹⁴ The instinct of faith (*sensus fidei*), a gift of the Holy Spirit given to all the baptized, unites all the members of the church, each in his or her own proper role, in discerning the presence of the Spirit, the mind of Christ, and the will of the Father.

IV. Challenges for the People of God: Clericalism, Individualism, and Ecumenical Reunion

Expanded participation in the life of both of our Churches by lay people still represents, to some extent, a change in normal practice for the contemporary church. Not surprisingly, alongside the multiple benefits an active laity provides, there continue to be tensions, in some instances even a certain polarity between clergy and laity.

What this tension between trajectories of service has obscured is the fact that the whole church has an unchanged mission to serve the world. When the modern concept of a recognized lay ministry in the church began to be explored and developed, several decades ago, it seemed to lie somewhat outside the time-honored idea of how the church and its offices should function. Even today, the relationship between lay ministers and ordained clergy can be strained, as both navigate their respective roles and identities.

“Clericalism,” surely, is a problem for both our churches. Ordination to clerical status is viewed by some as an “elevation,” rather than as a gift of new responsibilities within the body for the well-being and ordering of the whole. Often, too, ministries in the church are understood by promoters of lay leadership as purely functional, a “job” for which one acquires professional qualifications, rather than as a lasting gift of the Spirit for the sake of the community. However, a dialogical relationship between the ordained and the non-ordained can enhance an appreciation of the underlying equality of the baptized faithful before God across the various charisms, ministries, and roles within the body. As the Lord said: “If anyone would be first, he must be last

¹³ Saint John Chrysostom, *Explicatio in Ps.* 149.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, § 21.

of all and servant of all.” (Mk 9:35) Service to the other, in action and in spirit, is the hallmark of Christian leadership.

So clericalism, when pushed to its extreme, brings about an understanding of the church as constituted in a privileged way by the ordained, and a reduction, an objectification, of the laity to second-class status can follow. This can lead, among today’s young people, either to a world-hostile traditionalism or to the phenomenon of “voting with your feet.” Feeling alienated from the contemporary life of the church, more and more faithful people, especially the young, have come either to seek authentic discipleship by returning to the forms of worship and structure they imagine were shared by their grandparents, or else to seek to privatize their inner lives in a way inspired by contemporary secular individualism, claiming to be “spiritual, but not religious.” For both groups, contemporary ministerial professionals and their institution — the contemporary Church — can seem to be unnecessary, even a hindrance to real faith.

A mutually respectful relationship between clergy and laity needs to be strengthened in both of our Churches, by our finding an expanded, active role for all the faithful in the conciliar and synodical structures of the church — at the parish, diocesan, and universal levels — so that a multiplicity of voices can be effectively heard. The ideal, as articulated in the Ravenna statement, is that there be “neither passivity nor substitution of functions, neither negligence nor domination of anyone by another.” It will require a restored emphasis on the Church as constituting, in the united activity of all of its members, the full Body of Christ, who is its head. It will also require a spiritual renewal in all of us: new humility, a new desire to be of genuine service, a new pursuit of Christlike holiness.

Yet the implications of such a renewal for growth towards ecumenical unity between the Orthodox and Catholic families of Churches seem also to be profound. All of us, after all, begin our Christian lives as lay persons. Through baptism, we are all incorporated into the Body of Christ, and therefore are in a relationship of communion with one another in Christ. However, this communion, though genuine, remains “imperfect;”¹⁵ as a result, the desires of many Orthodox and Catholic Christians for a more intimate relationship of faith and religious practice, especially through Eucharistic sharing, remains largely unfulfilled. And while it is clearly the role of the both leaders and other members of our Churches to act as “stewards of the mysteries

¹⁵ See Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3.

of God” (I Cor 4.1; cf. Tit 1.7), one must also ask whether a deep sense of responsibility for the heritage we guard can also sometimes pose an obstacle to reunion.

V. Conclusion

A baptismally-based ecclesiology grounds the principle and practice of conciliarity. The Ravenna statement describes conciliarity as “signifying that each member of the Body of Christ by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in eucharistic *koinonia* (*communio* in Latin).”¹⁶ As a result of baptism and chrismation, the whole church makes up the royal priesthood, shares in the prophetic mission of Christ in the world, works to realize the justice and peace of his Kingdom in the wider human community, and yearns to express this vocation in the structured unity of Eucharistic celebration. An emphasis on the whole people of God, as the foundation for how we conceive of the Church, suggests that any attempt to divide the body of Christ leads ultimately to expressing the Christian faith, too, in contrasting and negative categories. Our focus in thinking about the Church, and in celebrating its reality, must be on the unity of the people of God that is grounded in our common baptism, and on a corresponding understanding of the diversity of roles and charisms within that radically unified people.

From this renewed point of departure, we hope further insight may emerge regarding renewed conciliar and synodical structures and processes, which might pave the way towards deepening the unity that already exists between our two Christian families through baptism and chrismation. “There is one body and one Spirit,” St. Paul reminds us, “just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” (Eph 4.4-7) Enlivened by those particular gifts of God, may we continue to seek ways towards the unity in Christ of which Paul speaks.

Contoocook, New Hampshire

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¹⁶ Ravenna document 5 (2007)

Catholic Disclaimer

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