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Joseph Ratzinger's Proposal to Decentralise the Ecclesial Structures in the Context of Conciliar Debates on *Lumen Gentium*¹

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to show Ratzinger's proposal, contained in his book *Das neue Volk Gottes*, regarding the decentralisation of ecclesial structures in the context of the conciliar debates on *Lumen gentium*. The aim is to answer the questions: To what extent did Ratzinger's work fit into the thinking of theologians and bishops at Vatican II? To what extent did the German professor's ideas represent his original, or isolated, voice, and to what extent were they compatible with other reformist views in theological reflection at the time? The article consists of three parts: the first part refers to the conciliar discussions on those passages of *Lumen gentium* which deal with the relationship between the college of bishops and the pope; the second presents Ratzinger's proposals for the decentralisation of ecclesiastical structures; the third part is evaluative and shows the later pope not so much as an innovator, but as a proponent of a compromise solution.

Keywords: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, collegiality, papal primacy, patriarchy, Second Vatican Council

In his text *Das neue Volk Gottes*, Joseph Ratzinger reflected on the directions of such a reform of the Church's structures which, on the one hand, would be faithful to Tradition and, on the other, would allow for a more decentralised governance of the ecclesial

¹ Translated from Polish by Maciej Górnicki.

community. Recalling the inspiration for his reflections, the later Pope wrote: “How multilayered is the problem of the relationship between the primacy and the episcopate has been shown once again after a certain phase of stagnation following the discussions at the Second Vatican Council [Wie vielschichtig das Problem des Verhältnisses von Primat und Episkopat ist, hat sich nach einer Phase der Erstarrung seit den Diskussionen des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils von neuen gezeigt].”² A few sentences further on he made an even more explicit reference to the conciliar heritage, writing: “Everything that will be said here is rather to be judged only as speaking in the broad discussion that began after the announcement of the convocation of the last Council [Alles, was hier gesagt wird, will vielmehr lediglich eine Wortmeldung in der umfassenden Diskussion sein, die seit der Ankündigung des letzten Konzils eingesetzt hat].”³

The proposed changes were thus born in the process of the reception of the conciliar voices and documents, and were part of the development of post-conciliar ecclesiology. In the reflections of the Council Fathers, the debates on two points from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*: 22 and 23, are of particular relevance to the issue. During the numerous consultations and disputes over the content of these points in particular, many proposals were made in the Council hall, most of which did not find their way into the scheme finally adopted. Treating them as a context for the German theologian’s analyses is therefore – on the one hand – in line with his intentions and, on the other hand, may help to answer the questions: To what extent did Ratzinger’s work fit into the thinking of theologians and bishops at Vatican II? To what extent did the German professor’s ideas represent his original, or isolated, voice, and to what extent were they compatible with other reformist views in theological reflection at the time?

The purpose of this article is therefore to analyse and evaluate Joseph Ratzinger’s early proposals on the relationship between primacy and episcopacy. The hermeneutical key to this evaluation will be provided by the conciliar debate.

² Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 121.

³ Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 121–122.

The source for the presentation of the German professor's thought will be the paper quoted above, *Das neue Volk Gottes*. The conciliar proposals and debates will be presented based on *Acta et documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II apparando* and *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*.

In accordance with the outlined aim and problem questions, we will undertake the reflection in three research steps. We will first analyse the conciliar discussions around *Lumen gentium*, focusing on the issue of collegiality in order to outline Joseph Ratzinger's reformist proposals against this background. In pursuing these points, we will use the analytical method. The third stage will be an attempt to answer the two questions posed above, extended by an evaluation of the quoted ideas of the German theologian in the perspective of his later decisions and the need for changes in ecclesial structures today. This reflection will require the use of theological synthesis and comparative method.

1. Primacy and Collegiality in the Voices of the Council Fathers

Some of the Council Fathers linked the perspective of collegiality to a return to the patriarchal structure of the Church. This resounded already at the level of the proposals sent to the Council. Henri-René-Adrien Brault not only asked whether, if the schismatic patriarchs returned to the Church, they could count on retaining their powers as patriarchs as they had before the schism (*eodem modo quo ante schisma erat*), but also advocated the creation of new patriarchates (*patriarcharum creatio*).⁴

The original version of the schema *De Ecclesia* presented at the beginning of December 1962 did not develop the question of collegiality. In Chapter IV of this document there was only a reference to the college of bishops as the continuation of the college of apostles.⁵

⁴ Cf. *Acta et documenta. Series I*, II/II, 394–395.

⁵ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, I/IV, 12–91.

The first to explicitly address the question of collegiality was Bernardus Johannes Alfrink. In his view – he expressed it during the first session of the Council – the college of bishops in the proposed schema is presented in a negative way (*modo sat negativo enuntiatum*). He proposed to adopt the optics of Federico Maria Zinelli, speaking at the First Vatican Council, who emphasised the full authority (*plenam potestatem*) of bishops remaining in communion with their head whether gathered at the Council or dispersed.⁶ Emiel-Jozef De Smedt criticised the schema for the elements of triumphalism, clericalism and juridicalism it contained, and for the pyramidal structure it reflected, with the pope at the top, through bishops and priests to the passive role of the laity.⁷ Luigi Maria Carli also postulated a clarification of the relationship between the episcopal college and the pope. He suggested referring to ancient patristic literature in the process.⁸ Julius August Cardinal Döpfner, on the other hand, postulated a definition of the nature and function of the college of bishops. He suggested making collegiality (*collegialitas*) the starting point for all reflection on bishops.⁹ Joseph Gargitter pointed out that the relationship of the bishops with the pope should not be defined only in terms of primacy, but also in terms of respect and love, so that the Church of law is also a Church of love.¹⁰ Mathurin Blanchet was critical of the repeated and so strenuous stress on authority and rights. For true solemnity does not abound in words of authority (“Vera auctoritas non abundat verbis imperii”).¹¹ In the view of Maronite Michael Doumith, the constant emphasis that the authority of the bishop depends on that of the pope resembles the behaviour of a mother who gives her child a toy and fears that it will destroy it (“sicut mater quae filio dat aliquod ludibrium et quae timet ne illud frangat”).¹² He referred to the customs of the ancient Church (*consuetudo antiqua*). He was

⁶ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, I/IV, 135.

⁷ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, I/IV, 142.

⁸ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, I/IV, 160–161.

⁹ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, I/IV, 184–185.

¹⁰ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, I/IV, 193–194.

¹¹ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, I/IV, 235.

¹² Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, I/IV, 255.

also the first to mention collegial authority (*collegialis potestas*). He formulated an important principle: “primacy itself does not remove collegiality, but is postulated by it” (“ipse primatus non fugat collegialitatem sed ab ea appellatur”).¹³ Joseph Emmanuel Descuffi suggested accepting the infallibility of the whole Church, i.e. the body that is the bishops treated collegially, including the Pope (“corpus episcoporum omnium collegialiter sumptum, Romano Pontifice incluso”). In his statement, he advocated that the Pope should be advised by the teaching Church understood collegially (“Ecclesiam collegialiter sumptam docentem”), i.e., the college of bishops.¹⁴

So, the participants in the first session of the Council called for the question of collegiality to be developed and clarified. There were voices to refer to the experience of the ancient Church in this regard. The majority of those speaking on the matter suggested that collegiality should not be feared and should be seen as a value rather than an obstacle to papal authority. The Council Fathers felt there was a deficit of debate on the issue. It is not surprising, therefore, that the issue of collegiality returned at subsequent stages of reflection on the Church.

In the next version of the schema, the question of the hierarchical system of the Church and the question of the episcopate constituted the second chapter of the draft *De Ecclesia* (there was nothing there about patriarchates).¹⁵ During the conciliar discussions and the drafting of the subsequent schema of the later constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (the earlier schemas were entitled *De Ecclesia*), the question of collegiality and its understanding came increasingly to the fore. In the discussions in the autumn of 1963, there were voices calling for closer cooperation between the Pope and the College of Bishops.

In his address, Josef Frings cited the example of Pope Gregory the Great, who wrote a letter to Eulogius, Patriarch of Alexandria. He first stated that in a text devoted to the teaching of the bishops,

¹³ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, I/IV, 257.

¹⁴ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, I/IV, 259.

¹⁵ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, II/I, 231–240. The points 16 and 17 presented issues related to collegiality of bishops.

more is said about the pope and his infallibility than about the bishops, suggesting a certain concern that emphasising the authority of the bishop might somehow diminish the authority of the pope. As an example, he cited a letter from Gregory the Great, who wrote not to call him father of all (*patrem universalem*), as Eulogius did (“*meus honor est honor universalis Ecclesiae. Meus honor est fratrum meorum solidus vigor. Tum ego vere honoratus sum, si singulis quibusque debitus honor non negatur*”).¹⁶ Franz König was critical of the scheme, stressing that it adds nothing in the context of collegiality. He referred to the ancient tradition and the Eastern Catholics, where collegiality had always been practised (“*semper fuit in usu*”) and added that the supreme authority of the council, i.e. the college of bishops, could not derive from geographical motives.¹⁷ Meyer saw the origins of collegiality in the election of Matthias as apostle.¹⁸ Marcel-François Joseph Marie Lefebvre advocated that collegiality should not be opposed to papal primacy. He subscribed to the words of Gregory the Great quoted by Frings.¹⁹ The Melchite patriarch of Antioch, Maximus IV Saigh, warned against such a portrayal of papal primacy that would make ecumenical dialogue impossible. He called for the primacy to be cleansed of exaggeration in doctrine and practice, which would remove an obstacle to Christian unity.²⁰ Emiel-Jozef De Smedt pointed out that collegiality is the active cooperation (*cooperatio activa*) of the bishops with the pope. He warned against reducing this cooperation to a minimum.²¹ Carmelus Zazinović quoted Pope Leo, who addressed Theodoret with the words: “Let the authority of the highest be exercised in such a way that it in no way diminishes the freedom of those who are subject to them.”²²

One of the most important and elaborate voices on collegiality was the presentation of Jesús Enciso Viana, Bishop of Majorca. He proposed a precise definition of the understanding of the college of

¹⁶ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, II/I, 344.

¹⁷ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, II/II, 226.

¹⁸ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, II/II, 231–232.

¹⁹ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, II/II, 233–235.

²⁰ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, II/II, 238–242.

²¹ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, II/II, 263–264.

²² *Acta Synodalia*, II/II, 267.

bishops, the rights and duties of such a college and the relationship of this college to the Pope. He posed a series of questions and suggestions aimed at clarifying the intentions of the Council Fathers. In his view: a) understanding collegiality as the delegation of a number of powers to episcopal conferences would render the doctrine of collegiality useless, since, according to theological sources, episcopal conferences do not constitute a college of bishops; b) the stress on the internationalisation of the Roman Curia has nothing to do with collegiality, since the Curia is simply an instrument through which the Pope governs the Church; c) the concern to create and select from among the bishops of the whole world a consultative body for the Pope does not imply collegiality, since collegiality is not consultative but decision-making; d) the idea that the Pope should have a council composed of various bishops who would exercise some authority in the ordinary governance of the Church on behalf of the college would imply that this consultative body limits the Pope's authority.²³ The subject of collegiality aroused much emotion. Not surprisingly, successive amendments and additions to earlier schemas increasingly highlighted the issue.

In a written submission, Anthony Léon Louis Caillot postulated the establishment of an Apostolic Consistory, which, in addition to the Pope, would include patriarchs and bishops representing all episcopal conferences. For efficiency, their number should not exceed one hundred. This body would participate in the governance of the universal Church.²⁴

The discussion was concluded by Michael David Browne, who presented the dilemmas of the committee preparing the document, related to the understanding of the concept of the college and

²³ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, II/II, 589–592. Viana presented the rest of his reflections in written form. He was critical of the interpretation of the calling of the apostles as the moment of the creation of the college of apostles. He saw the collegial action (*actio collegialis*) of the apostles in their sending of Peter and John to Samaria (Acts 8:14). He was also critical of attempts to portray the college of bishops as the successor of the college of apostles.

²⁴ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, III/III, 543.

collegiality.²⁵ He explained that collegiality does not mean understanding the Pope as the first among equals (*primus inter pares*). Speaking on behalf of the Episcopal Conference of Venezuela, Luis Eduardo Henríquez Jiménez saw in the conciliar idea of collegiality a doctrinal development (*progressus doctrinalis*). In the schema, he noted the overemphasis on papal primacy and the fear to affirm the rights of the bishops.²⁶

Thus, the second year of work on the document on the Church brought significant voices in favour of collegiality understood not so much in an advisory key as in a decision-making one. The Council Fathers were concerned that collegiality should not be a fiction. There were warnings in the Council hall against reducing collegiality, either to the internationalisation of the Roman Curia or to the granting of certain powers to the episcopal conferences of individual countries.

At the next stage, the following year (1964), some important amendments were made.²⁷ Both the originally presented schema and the revised one had no mention of the ancient patriarchal Churches (*antiquae Patriarchales Ecclesiae*) in point 23. The revised text only included information about the Churches founded by the apostles and their successors (their own rite, discipline and their own theological and spiritual heritage).²⁸ There was a proposal to add a new paragraph mentioning the Patriarchate with a reference to the ancient world: “sub forma Patriarchatus, ut iam antiquitus praesertim in Oriente” – the idea was to indicate the historical fact of the special relationship between Churches which have a common origin, from which there

²⁵ The speaker presented the different senses of the Latin word *collegium*, referring to dictionaries. He indicated as the correct meaning: *sensus vocis “collegii” est conventus seu societas hominum legis probata; et in praesenti casu, lex probans – atque hoc saltem videatur sensus commissionis – lex probans esset lex Christi, lex divina, lex evangelica. Acta Synodalia, II/II, 601.*

²⁶ Cf. *Acta Synodalia, II/II, 612.*

²⁷ For details on individual changes in paragraphs 22–23, see: *Acta Synodalia, III/I, 241–249.*

²⁸ Cf. *Acta Synodalia, III/I, 218–219.*

arises a close unity between the bishops of these Churches in the form of a Patriarchate, as has long been the case especially in the East.²⁹

Frane Franić reported on the difficulties surrounding the issue of the collegiality of bishops.³⁰ He first stated that there is no longer any doubt about the supreme and full authority of the Pope in the whole Church. However, he pointed out that a new doctrine of supreme authority (*supremam potestatem*) in the Church, which is held by the college of bishops, was coming into play in the schema.³¹ He drew attention to the novelty of the proposed doctrine of the collegiality of bishops, which until recently had been defended by only a few theologians, while almost everyone opposed it (“*Revera doctrina de collegialitate episcoporum, prout in schemate proponitur, errat ante paucos annos doctrina quam nonnisi paucissimi theologia defendabant, fere omnibus contradicentibus*”).³² The will of some is that this still immature doctrine (*doctrina adeo immatura*) should be accepted by the Council. However, there is also another opinion among the Council Fathers, according to which this doctrine cannot be accepted before it has been examined in every respect. He stated that it is not that the doctrine of collegiality is disputed, but that it lacks the kind of certainty that is required for it to be accepted by the Council.³³

So, two months before the promulgation of *Lumen gentium*, there was considerable disagreement among the Council Fathers on the question of the collegiality of bishops. In the final vote, the document gained 2151 votes in favour and 5 against.³⁴ It was promulgated on 21th November 1964.

²⁹ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, III/I, 249. A reference to the law of the patriarchs appears in the text with a reference to the letters of Gregory the Great.

³⁰ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, III/II, 193.

³¹ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, III/II, 193.

³² Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, III/II, 194.

³³ *Acta Synodalia*, III/II, 197.

³⁴ Cf. *Acta Synodalia*, III/VIII, 782.

2. Ratzinger and the Patriarchal Structure of the Church

An analysis of Joseph Ratzinger's text *Das neue Volk Gottes* reveals that a fundamental reformist demand is the separation of the office of the successor of Peter and the patriarchal office,³⁵ and thus a change in the pope's juridical competence. Such a step would have its causes and consequences, which are worth looking at in more detail.

The basic methodological assumption in Ratzinger's theological thinking was the use of a hermeneutic of continuity.³⁶ In the introduction to the article, we read: "The measure of the Church, after all, is not what is convenient at a given moment, but its genesis, which is also the lasting guarantee of its future [denn das Mass der Kirche ist nicht die Opportunität der jeweiligen Gegenwart, sondern ihre Herkunft, die allein auch die bleibende Gewähr ihrer Zukunft bildet]."³⁷ In this spirit, the author outlined the turning points in the theology of primacy and episcopacy in antiquity, the Middle Ages and during the First Vatican Council. Let us reconstruct his thinking, supplementing some of the relevant themes with the positions of other experts on the subject.

Looking for key moments from the first millennium,³⁸ the theologian drew attention to the provisions of the First Council of Nicaea. It was probably there that the term "primacy" first appeared in relation to the Roman capital, but also in relation to Alexandria and Antioch.³⁹ In Canon VI, for it is there that the words are contained, Alexandria is even mentioned before Rome, but the order does not seem to have any significance here. The council fathers only meant to recall the "ancient custom" of precedence of certain capitals.⁴⁰

This primacy of the three places was linked to the supra-local responsibility of the bishops, and thus constituted an important element of concern for the unity of the whole Church. What seems important is that even when certain ecclesial decisions were taken by the bishops gathered in synods, letters were sent informing

³⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 142–143.

³⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 22 December 2005.

³⁷ Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 121.

³⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 122–134.

³⁹ Cf. Minnerath, "La tradizione dottrinale," 59.

⁴⁰ Cf. The First Council of Nicaea, *Canons*.

the patriarchal capitals, among others. An example of this behaviour was the election of the successor of the Bishop of Antioch, Paul of Samosata. The local synod excommunicated Paul and decided on his successor Domnus, but the latter could only take office after Rome and Alexandria, from where the letters of communion came to Domnus, had been informed. Johannes Hofmann, quoting after Eusebius of Caesarea the heading of the letter of the synod of Antioch to Rome and Alexandria (“To Dionysius and Maximus, and to all our fellow-ministers throughout the world, bishops, presbyters, and deacons, and to the whole Catholic Church under heaven”⁴¹), remarked that although the letter was addressed to all, the distribution was the responsibility of Rome and Alexandria as the “distributing places,”⁴² and Antioch as the sender. The importance of these three patriarchal capitals was linked to the presence of the Apostle Peter (either directly or in the person of Mark), and this approach to some extent favoured the Roman centre. Gradually, Rome itself also increasingly accentuated its superiority over Antioch and Alexandria, demanding special treatment also in the juridical field.

According to Ratzinger, these claims were linked to the conviction, present in the fourth and fifth centuries, that this local Church had preserved itself from heresy and was therefore a place “preserving an intact tradition,” that it was the seat of Peter and Paul and was therefore a “*sedes apostolica* in a special sense” and had a function among Christians analogous to Jerusalem for the Jews. In Christian antiquity, then, we had a two-pronged structure. On the one hand, the institution of patriarchates was crystallising, among which the Roman patriarchate played a special role, and the bishop in charge of it “held a higher office than the other bishops,” which was often justified by the Gospel promise given to Peter at Caesarea Philippi. However, as Roland Minnerath mentioned, in the fourth and fifth centuries the Fathers were generally convinced that it applied equally to all bishops.⁴³ Jean-Marie Tillard added that originally it was not that the Bishop of Rome had a right of jurisdiction over other

⁴¹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* VII, 30.

⁴² Cf. Hofmann, “Znaczenie rzymskich wspólnot,” 290.

⁴³ Cf. Minnerath, “The Petrine Ministry,” 39.

ecclesial communities on this basis, but that he was called to give a particular witness to the faith.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the concern for the unity of the Church was realised through the mutual connections between the patriarchates and by synodal activity. The overemphasis on the first path became one of the main focuses of the dispute between East and West, centralising ecclesial structures around Rome.

Analysing the situation in the Middle Ages,⁴⁵ Ratzinger saw in the Roman milieu an increasingly strong combination of the privileges of inheriting the promise given to Peter by Jesus and the political position of that city in the Latin West. This resulted in a separate interpretation of the history of the primacy of the Roman bishop from the East, and ultimately a schism. The German theologian listed several factors determining the rise of this local Church.

Firstly, it was the loss of Christian Africa, conquered by Islam. This area was characterised by a high degree of independence from Rome, and without it, only the Churches closely associated with it remained in the Western Patriarchate. Secondly, the political weakness of Byzantium was building up the position of the pope, who, having merged with the Carolingian kingdom, was the centre of the “new world,” and ecclesiastical customs and traditions became an instrument of imperial unity. Consequently, the West no longer spoke of many local Churches, but the whole West became one and homogeneous local Church. As a result, Rome depreciated the very position of patriarch, making it an honorary title, and increasingly emphasised the cardinalate, which had grown from a local Roman office to a power of supra-local scope. This tendency led to the conclusion that cardinals were the successors of the apostles. As John R. Quinn has pointed out, the suggestion, originating at the time, that there was more to being a cardinal than being a patriarch is still interpreted today as disrespectful of the Eastern tradition.⁴⁶ Third, the patronage of Anglo-Saxon missionary activity was important in building Rome’s position. Fourthly, important in this process of exposure was the conflict of the Gallican bishops

⁴⁴ Cf. Tillard, *Il vescovo di Roma*, 133.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 135–139.

⁴⁶ Cf. Quinn, *The Reform of the Papacy*, 146.

with their metropolitans, which led to Pseudo-Isidore's set of laws. Fifthly, the emerging mendicant orders in their disputes with local bishops had recourse to the pope, who acted as if he were the bishop in each place of conflict. All these factors did not, in practice, make the episcopate cease to be an autonomous decision-making force, as was evidenced by the debates at the Council of Constance.⁴⁷

In this context, Ratzinger's comment is very interesting: "The Council of Constance [...] did not formulate any conciliarist dogma, but merely reformed and united the Church divided into three papal obediences; the ecclesiastical exceptional law applied in this process, which had existed only as a theory in the medieval canonical considerations, thus took concrete form and, as an exceptional law, remains forever at its disposal [Konstanz hat [...] kein konziliaristisches Dogma formuliert, sondern die in drei päpstliche Observanzen zerspaltene Kirche reformiert und geeint; das dabei angewandte kirchliche Notrecht, das in den Überlegungen der mittelalterlichen Kanonistik nur als Theorie bestanden hatte, hat damit konkretere Form in der Kirche angenommen und gehört als Notrecht bleibend zu ihren Möglichkeiten]."⁴⁸ Interpreting the conciliar provisions in such a key, they can be seen as complementary to the later provisions of Vatican I. It should be noted here, however, that not everyone viewed the provisions of Constance in this way. Richard R. Gaillardetz, for example, saw the event as contrasting the authority of the pope with that of the bishops.⁴⁹

The last of Ratzinger's historical reflections concerned the dogma of papal infallibility, formulated at the First Vatican Council.⁵⁰ Contrary to many interpretative tendencies, the German theologian saw in this solution a "third way" in the disputes between episcopalism and papalism, rather than a victory for the curial-papal tendency. Although pro-papal solutions were favoured in the process

⁴⁷ It was about two decrees of the Council of Constance: *Haec sancta* and *Frequens*.

⁴⁸ Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 139.

⁴⁹ Cf. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, 285.

⁵⁰ Cf. Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 139–141.

of the reception of this provision, the Council itself directed that it should be read in the spirit of the reality of the ancient Church.

It seems that Ratzinger's remark was correct, since precisely this way of interpreting the dogma of papal infallibility is confirmed by a situation that had its origin in a certain event in the German Reich two years after the conclusion of the Council. Chancellor Bismarck sent a communication to diplomatic representatives in which he pointed to a change in the jurisdiction of bishops related to the provisions of the constitution *Pastor aeternus*.⁵¹ He informed them that, since the promulgation of this document, papal competence had taken the place of the previous competence of local bishops. In response to this note, the German Church leaders issued a statement in which it was made clear that the Pope was the Ordinary of Rome and not of the other dioceses, and therefore could not substitute himself for the local superiors.⁵² Reacting to this statement, Pius IX in his apostolic letter *Mirabilis Illa Constantia* of 1875 wrote: "You, venerable brothers, have certainly continued this glory of the Church by undertaking the restoration of the germane sense of the Vatican definitions against the distortions made in the captious comments of the recently published Circular Dispatch."⁵³

Taking into account the situation of the Church in the first millennium and treating those decisions and practices as a point of reference for later ecclesial solutions, Ratzinger thus built up a justification for his own proposal for reform. At this point, it is worth citing some of the implications which for the German theologian were related to the return to a patriarchal structure. Firstly, he saw the need to set aside certain areas in the Church in the West as new patriarchates. Secondly, given the development of the local Churches of Asia and Africa, he proposed to rethink the creation of autonomous patriarchal entities there. Thirdly, he saw the need to discuss how the unity of the local Churches with the Pope would be realised in the new structural realities. One of his ideas was to limit Rome's role in the process of electing new bishops only to a ratification similar

⁵¹ Cf. Vaticanum I, *Pastor aeternus*.

⁵² Cf. Quinn, *The Reform of the Papacy*, 79.

⁵³ Pius IX, *Mirabilis illa constantia*.

to the exchange of communion letters in ancient Christianity. Fourthly, binding doctrinal interpretations should be made through a process of collegial exchange of ideas between the pope and the other bishops and patriarchs. Summarising these proposals, Joseph Ratzinger expressed his conviction that changes in this direction would not only benefit ecumenical efforts, but in their face “the historical sense and divine rights of the papacy” would also become comprehensible to its contenders.⁵⁴

Conclusions

Looking synthetically at the quoted voices of the participants at Vatican II, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the question of collegiality in the perspective of the experience of the ancient Church was increasingly recurring in the conciliar debates. This issue too, therefore, was about a conciliar return *ad fontes* and drawing on the experience of the first centuries.

Secondly, on the basis of the experience of the ancient Church, the Council Fathers, on the issue of the collegiality of the bishops, moved more and more in the direction of granting the college specific competences, not only consultative but also decision-making powers. In this context, they emphasised the need for the bishops to cooperate more actively with the pope, not reducible to merely obeying the commands of the Bishop of Rome.

Thirdly, emerging references to the institution of patriarchates in antiquity were often combined with the suggestion of creating new patriarchates and distributing responsibility for the Church to the patriarchs. Along with these ideas, the need to restore at this level the structure of competences comparable to those that were there in the first centuries of Christianity was emphasised.

To what extent did Ratzinger present the voices of the Council Fathers and to what extent did he present his own vision of the reform? Looking at the manner of argumentation as well as the concrete proposals, it seems that the German theologian merely systematised and summarised what was happening in the Council hall. His

⁵⁴ Cf. Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 141–146.

authorial contribution can be limited to a selection of concrete proposals and an elaboration in a systematic way of what was emerging as ideas in the debates.

It is also worth noting that the reflections in *Das neue Volk Gottes* are not just a presentation, but an affirmation of the reformist voices presented. This is interesting and relevant in view of Ratzinger's subsequent decisions, particularly his removal of the title of Patriarch of the West from the *Annuario Pontificio*. Although some reasons of a formal and historical nature are given in the official justification for this decision,⁵⁵ they are not convincing in the perspective of the papal titles that were not deleted. Indeed, if it had only been about the aforementioned problems related to the patriarchate of the West, and if Ratzinger had still held the views of the post-conciliar time, the decision would probably have been different. One would then have expected for the Pope to create new patriarchates in the West, define their boundaries and thus clarify the meaning of the title in question, rather than remove it. Rather, its abolition shows that he has abandoned his previous views, and finally manifested this in his conduct in 2006.

Assessing the very idea of returning to the patriarchal structure of the Church, it seems that it could bear good fruit in at least two areas. The first is the ecumenical efforts mentioned by Ratzinger. The potential rapprochement with the Orthodox Church after such an institutional change is evidenced by the positive voices on the subject that emerged from the request to rethink the nature of primacy, presented by Pope John Paul II in *Ut unum sint*,⁵⁶ and the critical speeches by Orthodox theologians and dignitaries after Benedict XVI's 2006 decision.⁵⁷ The second area is of an intra-Catholic nature. Since Pope Francis has advocated the need for

⁵⁵ Cf. Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, *Comunicato*; Blaza, "Czy Kościołowi katolickiemu"; Bujak, "Przyczyny i konsekwencje."

⁵⁶ See: John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, no. 95; Quinn, *The Reform of the Papacy*; Quinn, *Ever Ancient, Ever New*; Wąsek, *Nowa wizja*; Wąsek, "Neuaustrichtung des Papsttums"; Wąsek, "Natura i manifestacje."

⁵⁷ Cf. Bujak, "Przyczyny i konsekwencje," 37–40.

“sound decentralization” in ecclesiastical structures,⁵⁸ the creation of patriarchates could be a clear step towards the realisation of this demand.

Joseph Ratzingera propozycja decentralizacji struktur eklezyjalnych w kontekście soborowych debat nad *Lumen gentium*

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest ukazanie propozycji Ratzingera zawartej w jego książce *Das neue Volk Gottes* odnośnie do decentralizacji struktur eklezyjalnych w kontekście soborowych debat nad *Lumen gentium*. Chodzi o odpowiedź na pytania: W jakiej mierze twórczość Ratzingera wpisywała się w sposób myślenia teologów i biskupów na Vaticanum II? Na ile pomysły niemieckiego profesora stanowiły jego oryginalny, bądź odosobniony, głos, a w jakim wymiarze były kompatybilne z innymi poglądami reformatorskimi w ówczesnej refleksji teologicznej? Artykuł składa się z trzech części: pierwsza referuje soborowe dyskusje nad tymi fragmentami *Lumen gentium*, które podejmują problematykę relacji między kolegium biskupów a papieżem, druga prezentuje propozycje Ratzingera odnośnie do decentralizacji struktur kościelnych, trzecia ma charakter oceniający i ukazuje późniejszego papieża nie tyle jako nowatora, co zwolennika rozwiązania kompromisowego.

Słowa kluczowe: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedykt XVI, kolegialność, patriarchat, prymat papieski, Sobór Watykański II

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⁵⁸ Cf. Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 16. [In other languages the expression “salutary decentralisation” is used; the exact sense cannot be therefore determined – translator’s note].

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