

# CHURCH UNITY – THE MYTH OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM

## REMARKS ON PLURALISM AND CHURCH DIVISIONS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

*Dietmar WINKLER*

In the 20th century, the search for the lost church unity has received powerful impetus through the ecumenical movement and the Second Vatican Council. Christians today are involved in exchange and dialogue on nearly all levels, as individuals or as churches as a whole. A large variety of churches, all invoking the Holy Trinity and confessing Jesus Christ as true God and true man, are adding their charisms to the ecumenical choir. And naturally, the larger question of “How?” was always part of the program. What kind of unity do we envisage? And if theological controversies were indeed to be overcome, how would this “visible unity” actually be made visible? We may approach such questions either theologically-systematically, or by concrete models of unity.

### *1. On the difference between theological thought and historic reality*

The theological ecumenical dialogues of the last fifty years have produced innumerable documents reflecting about the nature and constitution of the church, be it through the multilateral dialogues of the World Council of Churches on “Faith & Order” or the many bilateral dialogues between various Protestant and Reformed, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church. Many aspects can also be found in the dogmatic constitution on the Church of the II Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium*. All these documents of classical systematic ecclesiology refer to the „unity“ of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. These *notae ecclesiae* are confessed in the early Christian creeds of the 4th century and practically all the Churches are praying for them. In that theological sense it is evident that there has always been and will always be only one church.

If the question on “church unity” of the present symposium is to be understood in this way, we might as well pack up now, because all questions have already been theologically solved. The Church is already one, there can only be one, and it is just us, i.e. the diverse churches, who are incapable of making this unity visible. The living testimony of the churches does not make this reality of the one church, the mystical body, visible. In this respect, systematic

theologians have an easier task: The whole matter is thus settled and there are only concrete steps to be taken. And this is where the problem starts, because from historical perspective it is highly doubtful that this one church, which we sometimes imagine, has actually ever existed at all. Here, theological thought of the one church of the credo stands in contrast to the historic reality of conflicting and quarreling churches. To avoid any misunderstanding: This is not about unity in diversity, because the one church has always been a pluralistic one in terms of cultures and traditions; it is instead about the one church as expressed in the ideal of the one church of the credo and the concrete separations and splits on the other side.

Referring back to a time where the unity of the church was still intact would be logical and understandable for the ecumenical discourse. Thus, the intention is not to construct this unity, but instead to “restore” is or to “re-discover” it. In this context, the first millennium plays a pivotal role in modern ecumenical thinking. The Orthodox/Catholic dialogue specifically shows that the model of independent patriarchates of the first millennium, the so-called Pentarchy with a *primus inter pares*, is a constant point of reference as a model for church unity in diversity. In some instances, it has been even stated that if only the Roman Pope today would give up his universal jurisdictional primate, we could realize unity already tomorrow.

One suggestion quoted in this context are the words of Joseph Ratzinger 1976 in Graz, where he made reference to the Ecumenical patriarch Athenagoras stating that Rome would not have to ask more of the other churches or of Orthodoxy than what has been formulated and lived in the first millennium. The pre-eminence of individual Patriarchates in a specific order was established by the first four Ecumenical Councils from Nicaea (325) to Chalcedon (451), i.e. at synods of the Roman Empire in the 4th and 5th century. In the 6th century, during the reign of Emperor Justinian (527-565), the idea of a polycentric supra-regional church structure is taking shape in theological literature and canon law and was seen as a fitting concept of church unity even in Rome up to the 9th century. The phrase “undivided Christianity of the first millennium” is thus a popular term. Unfortunately, this statement cannot withstand any verification of historical realities in a number of respects:

First, Joseph Ratzinger’s phrase of “what has been expressed and lived in the first millennium” is rather vague as this can rightfully be interpreted very differently in the East and in the West.

Second, the Pentarchy has in fact never had to work or indeed worked in ways that it would be required to work today. The historic realities of the 5th to the 9th century were very different in the Western Roman and the Eastern Roman

Empire. In a nutshell: Rome as a *primus inter pares* has never existed in this form.

Third and above all, the statement that the first millennium was a period of a non-divided Christendom is a historic myth and construction which cannot withstand the scrutiny of historical research. The Church historian unfortunately has to play the role of a spoilsport of historic deconstruction.

## *2. On plurality in Early Christianity and its negation*

During the first two centuries, Christianity has already spread throughout the whole Middle East, i.e. Syria, Egypt and Asia Minor, as well as Greece, Italy, Spain, Gallia, Great Britain and North Africa. It also crossed the Eastern border of the Roman Empire to Mesopotamia, Persia, Armenia, and India. Christianity has been universal and pluralistic right from the beginning, and it spread eastward and westward. Historically it is not Europe, i.e. Rome or Constantinople, which have to be seen as the heart of Christianity, but the Orient with Jerusalem and Antioch. Not to do so means to exclude rich Christian cultures, traditions and spiritualities, as well as a wide range of theological approaches.

Christian geographical, cultural and liturgical diversity has been astonishing from its very beginnings. A first process of inculturation already takes place during its transition from the Aramaic-Jewish context of the Jesus movement to the Greek area. Linguistically, this means a transfer from a Semitic to an Indo-Germanic language. Theologically, it means a transfer from the oriental setting with a profound narrative theology (as evident in the parables of Jesus) to a rich Greek philosophical environment with the thoughts of Plato become especially significant for Christianity in patristic times.

As a result, Christian theology has been expressed in Greek philosophical terms, like the ones of the Greek apologists of the second century and the Trinitarian and Christological terminology of the Ecumenical Councils. There is no doubt that the dogma of the Early Church was developed and formulated through means of Greek language and philosophy. As it entered the world of Hellenism, Christianity was faced with a whole wealth of philosophical tradition. If the young church of the Roman Empire was to persist in this environment, it had to arrive at a clear terminological definition in its reflection about Jesus Christ that suited this geographical sphere. In certain constellations, these Greek philosophical terms achieved normative validity through the decisions of the Early Christian synods of the Roman Empire.

Does this however mean that Greek terminology is automatically normative in nature? Today, a serious theologian will not make such a statement since

expressing revealed truth requires a legitimate theological pluralism. On the contrary, it is important to unearth the theological and historic treasures which have long been lost as they were dismissed all too quickly in past centuries because they were seen through the narrow prism of later historic developments in Christianity within the Greek-Latin linguistic and cultural sphere.

Outside this focus were all those Christendoms ascribed to the *Oriens Christianus*: the expansion into the Caucasus, the Arab Peninsula and Ethiopia, to Persia, India, and China. Just to remind ourselves: East Syriac Christianity reached the imperial court of China as early as the 7th century during the rule of the Tang Dynasty. During the Middle Ages, it was this church that spread across the largest geographical area.

Church historiography is not entirely uninvolved when it comes to the deficiencies of exploring the history of Christianity. One of the people causing this restricted view can be found in Eusebius of Caesarea (4th c.). He might be called the “father” of church history and the perspective of his *Historia Ecclesiastica* was an example and role model for virtually every subsequent church history up to the 20th century. Eusebius wanted to study the spread of Christianity throughout the whole oikumene, but he actually concentrated on describing the oikumene of the Roman Empire which subsequently led to a strong focus on Europe. This Euro-centrism that affected both Greek Orthodoxy and the Latin Church does not take into consideration that a large part of Christendom took root outside the Roman Empire.

In addition, the systematic theology contributed to this narrow focus, too. Due in large part to the Christological controversies of the 5th century, the Chalcedonian churches considered a large part of Christianity as schismatic at best, but mostly more or less as heretic. Consequently, this branch of Christianity was soon marginalized itself and disappeared from general ecclesiastic consciousness. Stereotypes still live on today (e.g. “Nestorians”, “Monophysites”) and are further perpetuated through iconography.

Today, we still have churches whose orthodoxy has long been established through ecumenical dialogue and dogmatic-historical research which go back to the schisms of the first millennium. It is thus clear that the phrase of the “undivided church of the first millennium” is in fact a model of a unified Imperial church, i.e. the church of the Eastern and Western Roman Empire. However, this constitutes a limited view of the spread of Christianity.

We are still at the beginning of an integrated history of world Christianity. More recent approaches from my field of study show that the integration of ecumenical prerequisites and extra-European perspectives are a desideratum. Overall, enormous achievements have been made already in terms of research

and synthetization; however, these results are still waiting to be integrated into traditional church historiography. This obviously would have theological and ecclesiological impact. Because, if church history respectively is always seen only from a denominational point of view, the own church perspective and ecclesiology is seen as absolute and as such brought into dialogue and theology.

### *3. On the “Ecumenical” Councils*

The first seven Ecumenical Councils are seen as the common heritage of the first millennium and are not only indispensable for the foundations of our faith, they are also considered as instruments to create church unity. However, this last point is not really reasonable. This is not the place to engage in conciliar theology, but I will raise some points, which I have already dealt with in greater detail elsewhere.

The first synods which can be identified in the Roman Empire at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, were characterized by a large degree of independence and freedom when it came to their choice of topics. They each concerned a specific geographical region, such as Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria, Northern Africa, Gallia and Corinth. However, with Emperor Constantine, the structure and dynamic of the church changed. While the synods of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century were initiated by the bishops, now the emperor convoked the synods as he saw himself as the worldly advocate of the church.

The now upcoming imperial synods were convened by the Emperor and led by his commissioners, the decrees were made law by imperial proclamation and those who refused to sign incurred penalties. However, the fact that a synod was convened, led and promulgated by the emperor did not make it “ecumenically” valid, i.e. it was not automatically an „Ecumenical Council“. This only happens through a complex process of reception. Unfortunately, however, nearly every council of the first millennium produced schisms, even if the council itself proclaimed to have reached an “unanimous” decision.

This is most clearly evident in the context of the disputes on Christology, i.e. in the Ecumenical Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). They to find the appropriate expression of faith in Jesus Christ as true God and true Man. But it is not only the theological dispute, which led to excommunications and church separations. In the background, there is also a whole bundle of non-theological factors at play, which we may highlight: e.g. the personalities of the opposing sides (such as Nestorius of Constantinople and Cyril of Alexandria), the social and political situation of the church, the disputes about predominance among Patriarchates, the overall political situation of the Empire, etc.

*Ecumenical Council: Ephesus 431*

The Council of Ephesus (431) ended in a schism between the Church of Antioch that supported Nestorius and that of Alexandria, the party of Cyril. The two parties only entered into closer contact after the council in the course of disputes that ended in the so-called formula of union (433). However, Nestorius himself became the victim of this agreement. He was banished to Egypt; his followers were persecuted and eventually pushed out beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. There they joined the East Syriac Church in Persia where Christianity had gained a foothold as early as the first century.

The fact that this church was subsequently called “Nestorian” or “pre-Ephesian” is misleading and also based on a specific, Empire-focused viewpoint. As a former patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius plays a rather subordinate role in the East Syriac Church (Church of the East, “Persian” Church), although he is considered a saint, albeit an important one. In this sense, the historic allocation as a “Nestorian” church is wrong. Furthermore, the Persian Christians had to distance themselves from the official church of the Roman Empire as Persia and Rome were frequently at war with each other and followers of the enemy’s religion were often accused as disloyal. The Christians in Persia were thus able to maintain their faith without attracting the suspicion of collaborating with the Roman enemies.

Similarly, the term “pre-Ephesian” is problematic, as is the term “pre-Chalcedonian”. These terms presume a certain understanding of the councils and the necessity of an recognition of synods of the Roman Empire by the whole of Christendom (i.e. including the church[es] outside the Roman Empire). However, the churches concerned, those of Persia, India, Ethiopia, Armenia, etc. were not part of the Roman Empire at all or only partly for a certain period of time.

*Ecumenical Council: Chalcedon 451*

Even after the formula of union (433), the Church of the Roman Empire did not settle down peacefully. The ongoing disputes led to an even more significant schism following the 4th Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon (451). The intense struggle in post-Chalcedonian times, the rivalries between the patriarchates and imperial politics led to one of the most significant splits in Christendom. Theologically, it long remained unclear which branch would eventually gain the upper hand after the Council of Chalcedon (451), the supporters of the Chalcedonian terminology or the anti-Chalcedonians invoking Cyril of Alexandria.

The anti-Chalcedonian party produced some fine theologians, not least Severus of Antioch († 538), whom the Chalcedonians had nothing to counter. At the time when Severus was patriarch of Antioch (512-518 i.e. more than 60 years after the council of Chalcedon), the anti-chalcedonian movement had spread far and wide from Egypt via the provinces of Arabia and the whole Middle East to Mesopotamia and Armenia, from Cilicia and Cappadocia to the lower provinces along the Danube. The Chalcedonian patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem were deposed. Only Rome remained faithfully to Chalcedon.

When Emperor Justin I (519-527) ascended to power, a Chalcedonian restoration occurred. Those opposing Chalcedon were pushed into exile, the desert or underground by military force. In 537 under Emperor Justinian (527-565), a brutal elimination of churches and Christians opposed to the Council of Chalcedon took place. The anti-chalcedonian movement was robbed of its heads. Anti-Chalcedonian writings such as those central texts by Severus of Antioch were destroyed. The show of strength by which Emperor Justinian pushed through the Chalcedonian creed, had a very political background. The Western Mediterranean and the Western Roman Empire were already under Germanic rule. Emperor Justinian tried to re-establish the Roman Empire as a whole. It was thus vital for the emperor to ensure an agreement with the Western Church. Rome had always been adhered to the Chalcedonian creed and Justinian now made it the official religion of the Empire.

For a short time, the empire was reunified, the Germanic peoples were defeated. However, in the course of events, the Eastern Roman provinces that had been mainly anti-Chalcedonian were eventually lost to the Persian Sasanian Empire. Later attempts to reunify these were unsuccessful as at that time the Roman Empire was already under siege from all sides.

#### *The split between Rome and Constantinople: Acacian Schism*

One might say that these events simply meant that so-called “heretics” were excommunicated and therefore the Church itself actually remained as one. Consequently, imperial policy of unifications and the politics around the councils would have to be seen as successful. – Alas, this is far from historic reality: First, current ecumenical dialogues have established quite clearly that the accusations of heresy against those who could not follow the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, but were subsequently persecuted, are false and inappropriate. Furthermore, the post-Chalcedonian struggles also lead to a schism between Rome and Constantinople. In this instance, the next council, the 5th Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (553) and with it the imperial politics of unification, lastly failed to achieve their goals. Let me outline these two aspects briefly:

The confrontations after the Chalcedonian Council led to a whole series of complex and extremely turbulent events. As Emperor Zenon ascended to power (476) the preceding anti-Chalcedonian period initially gave way to a pro-Chalcedonian policy of restauration. A colorful figure of this period is the Antiochean Patriarch Peter Mongos, a strict opponent of Chalcedon, who nevertheless managed to apply his political talent and gain the respect of the emperor. However, next the patriarch of Constantinople, Acacius (472-489), enters the stage. From his point of view, he cannot allow for Peter Mongos to be installed as patriarch without any concessions which would render the Council of Chalcedon obsolete and with it specifically its canon 28 which grants specific rights and primacy to the New Rome.

Acacius thus drafts an edict for Emperor Zenon which is presented for signature in 482 to patriarch Peter Mongos. Among the texts documenting the conflicts of the 5th century, this edict became known under the title Henoticon. These events would eventually lead to the first schism between the Eastern and Western Roman Imperial Churches, the so-called Acacian Schism. For Pope Felix III (483-492) the anti-Chalcedonian Peter Mongos became something of a thorn in his side. The energetic pope sees him as a heretic and is outraged that Patriarch Acacius is establishing communion with him; he demands the Emperor to depose him.

For Rome, Chalcedon is non-negotiable, presumably also from a standpoint of ignorance about the enormous conflicts in the East. A Roman Synod (484) excommunicated the Patriarchs of Antioch and Constantinople, Peter Mongos and Acacius. This made the schism between East and West a fact. It was a schism in which religious issues were deliberately cut off from all sides and personal issues played the leading part. The schism remained in force from 484 to 519, i.e. 35 years. Only with Emperor Justin (518-527) and his Chalcedonian restoration does a new chapter begin in the dispute over Chalcedon.

### *Church Fathers and liturgy*

Just a little note on Church Fathers and Liturgy: It is often said that the Fathers of the first millennium can be a common reference point; and that especially in liturgy it was perceived that one believes, prays and celebrates the same thing. Both these views require precision or correction:

Because of their special importance as privileged witnesses of the church, four characteristics developed in Catholic Patristic theology to characterize a "father of the church": *doctrina orthodoxa, sanctitas vitae, approbatio ecclesiae and antiquitas*. However, research has shown that these features are quite problematic. Without going into more detail, I would like to refer here only to the argument of *doctrina orthodoxa* and *approbatio ecclesiae*:

One of the most painful facts in the conversation between today's separated churches is that an early church theologian may be a "father" and "saint" in one church and a "heretic" in the other. In consequence, there are heretical saints or holy heretics. But in today's ecumenical research, we come to more differentiated viewpoints. The official dialogue between the Byzantine Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches (Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Malankara Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic) therefore states that today the fact has been recognized that "councils and fathers who have been previously condemned are orthodox in their teaching" (Geneva Communiqué, 1993). That is, an ancient church theologian can be both orthodox in his teaching and yet condemned. For example, Theodore of Mopsuestia, who was highly respected as a bishop and died in peace with the church, was condemned 125 years after his death by the Council of Constantinople (553) because his teachings were measured using at later standards. If we are thus to speak about the "Fathers of the Church", we have to specify which fathers of which church we are referring to.

The liturgy was often used as a battleground in the post-Chalcedonian conflict. This is only too logical considering the old principle of *lex orandi – lex credendi*. The churches have always included their confessions in the liturgy, which could only be prayed by the respective side and not together. Just an example:

Toward the end of 518, during the negotiations for the termination of the Acacian schism, so-called Scythian monks came to Constantinople and caused trouble with the sentence "One of the Holy Trinity had suffered in the flesh." These Goths from the Dobruja, with their Christological approach, wanted to free the Chalcedonian terminology from any Nestorian interpretation. Their formula, however, sounded dangerous because of the expansion of the Trishagion, which was introduced by Patriarch Peter the Fuller around 471 officially in the Antiochene liturgy: "Holy Strong, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, who has been crucified for us." This addition became the battle cry of the Chalcedonian rivals. When Severus of Antioch and his monks appear in the capital Constantinople, the dispute flared up. The great patristic scholar Eduard Schwarz wrote early in the twentieth century that the Palestinian and Antiochene monks, who stayed in Constantinople, sang the Trishagion at the liturgy with the addition, the locals, according to their custom, without it, and as is common with the monks, it came to beatings; each party accusing the other of having started was just part of rule.

The dispute over the Trishagion is rooted in its different ways of interpretation, which cannot be discussed here. We wanted to show only one of many examples, where the liturgy becomes a battleground, a kind of praying against each other rather than praying together.

*Ecumenical Council in Constantinople 553*

In the context of our question, the 5th Ecumenical Council has also to be considered. It is a somewhat inglorious chapter in the history of the Church: Emperor Justinian tried to forcibly bring back the anti-Chaeledonians from the first quarter of the sixth century onwards. He wanted to re-unify the entire Roman Empire, but he also needed religious unity. However, Justinian, with his efforts to reconcile Chalcedonians and anti-Chaeledonians, which alternated between forcible repatriation and theological concessions, had fundamentally misjudged the situation. This is especially evident in the so-called *Three-Chapter-Controversy*.

One of the main allegations against the Council of Chalcedon was the rehabilitation of those who had been condemned at another imperial synod. However, this other imperial synod – the Second Council of Ephesus 449, which Pope Leo called a “robber synod” (*Latrocinium*) – was ultimately not received as an Ecumenical Council. Yet, for the opponents of Chalcedon, this council is important while at the Council of Chalcedon the chair of Ephesus 449, Patriarch Dioscoros of Alexandria, was deposed. In particular, the Three-Chapters-Controversy concerned Theodoret of Cyrus (a strong critic of Cyril of Alexandria), Theodore of Mopsuestia (the teacher of Nestorius) and Ibas of Edessa (a so-called “Nestorian” bishop). These three theologians are at the center of the clashes between 544 and 553.

As early as 544, Justinian deals with the matter in an edict. In three key sentences (*capitula*) Justinian demands the condemnation of the aforementioned three. The conflicts following the edict, however, hardly served to regain anti-Chalcedonian terrain, but rather burdened the relationship between Rome and Constantinople: With this condemnation, Rome identified an attack against the infallibility of the Council of Chalcedon. Constantinople, on the other hand, believed that precisely the anathema on the three chapters could free the Council from the accusation of being “Nestorian”, thus preserving its authority and bringing about reconciliation with the anti-Chalcedonians.

The succeeding struggle that began in the years leading up to the Second Council of Constantinople (553) is highly inglorious, the pope’s role more confusing than straightforward. Here are some keywords:

- The North African bishops regard the Justinian’s imperial edict as heretical;
- Pope Vigilius (537-555), deported by Justinian in 547 to Constantinople, imposes a penance upon the Patriarch of Constantinople, Menas, who has signed the edict;

- 
- Patriarch Menas imposes a repentance on the pope as well;
  - Pope Vigilius is entangled between rejection and approval of the condemnation of the *Three Chapters*, and finally surrenders to the pressure of the Emperor (548) and agrees;
  - The Pope is himself subsequently excommunicated by the North African bishops (550);
  - In the meantime, Pope Vigilius has completely refused communion to Patriarch Menas, and Patriarch Menas, on the other hand, no longer mentions the pope in the diptychs of the liturgy;
  - In a second edict (551), Justinian solemnly condemns the Three Chapters with thirteen anathemas, whereupon the Pope in turn speaks out against the anathemata (552);
  - The Pope does not take part in the council convened on May 5, 553, as he is forbidden to travel back to Rome to consult his Western bishops;
  - Of the 168 participating bishops of the Council only nine are from the West;
  - The Council accepts the condemnation of the *Three Chapters* in accordance with Justinian's decree.

Even though one may not have been able to follow all the steps mentioned above, there is nothing to change in the assessment of the Council of Father Karl Baus SJ, who clearly stated that the consequences of the three-chapter controversy were frightening in terms of church policy, because the desired goal, the unity of the church, was turned into its opposite. The antagonisms between followers and enemies of Chalcedon deepened further; in the West there were long-lasting differences of individual districts with Rome, especially in northern Italy, North Africa and Illyria. Furthermore the prestige of the papacy dropped enormously. The Roman bishop finally accepted all the decisions of the Council, even if this led to lengthy disputes in the West.

The fact that the powerful Emperor had Vigilius brought to Constantinople, and that the Pope conceded, to the horror of the Western Church, and accepted the condemnation of the Three Chapters, damaged the authority of the Roman Patriarchate for centuries. Because of his behavior in this situation, Vigilius 1300 years later - in the 19th century - again gained great importance: In the dispute over papal infallibility, he was quoted by the opponents of this dogma as a leading negative example. The second negative example of the opponents

of infallibility at the First Vatican Council (1870) was Pope Honorius I - which would bring us to the 6th Ecumenical Council (680/81), but there is no room for that now and here.

### *Conclusions*

The examples given may suffice to show that the word of a “undivided Church of the first millennium” is misleading. One could go even further, to the ninth century, when it comes to the dispute and division between Patriarch Photius of Constantinople and Pope Nicholas – two outstanding personalities of the Middle Ages and also the first millennium.

It is not about stigmatizing the past, but about clarifying the historical view and not constructing a past that never existed. Only when this is made clear, misunderstandings might be avoided in today’s ecumenical conversation. Otherwise each side may continue to point to different points of reference.

Just as the first millennium was not a perfect world of undivided Christianity, so the second millennium is not only marking the millennium of church separation. For here, too, there has been church fellowship and manifold connections between the churches. However, both the theological and historical stereotypes persist and continue to make dialogue more difficult. It would be more appropriate to adopt a clear view on mutual responsibility and guilt, on subsequent repentance and forgiveness.

All in all, it should be noted that the unity of the Church cannot be achieved by recourse to the past alone, but must also correspond to today’s realities. Or to say it with the Second Vatican Council, which states in *Lumen Gentium* that the treasury of Revelation brings forth new things and old (LG 25). And similarly, the document *Dignitatis Humanae* affirms that the sacred tradition and doctrine of the Church “continually brings forth new things that are in harmony with the things that are old” (DH 1).