

TOWARDS A SYNODAL CHURCH: PATHWAYS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

RELATIONS BETWEEN ROMAN AND EASTERN CATHOLICS



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“As guarantor of unity in diversity, the Bishop of Rome ensures that the identity of the Eastern Catholic Churches is safeguarded and that their centuries-old theological, canonical, liturgical, spiritual, and pastoral traditions are respected. These Churches are equipped with their own deliberative synodal structures. Relationships among the Latin Church and Eastern Catholic Churches must be characterised by the exchange of gifts, collaboration, and mutual enrichment” (FD 132).

Pope John Paul II’s *Oriente Lumen* (Apostolic letter on the Light of the East) is a cornerstone document urging Catholics to embrace Eastern traditions as complementary to Western ones, fostering mutual respect and learning to restore the Church’s full witness. It highlights how East and West together illuminate divine truth.

“Since, in fact, we believe that the venerable and ancient tradition of the Eastern Churches is an integral part of the heritage of Christ’s Church, the first need for Catholics is to be familiar with that tradition, so as to be nourished by it and to encourage the process of unity in the best way possible for each (*Oriente Lumen*, para. 1).”

“In the study of revealed truth East and West have used different methods and approaches in understanding and confessing divine things. It is hardly surprising, then, if sometimes one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has expressed them better. In such cases, these various theological formulations are often to be considered complementary rather than conflicting” (*Oriente Lumen*, para. 5, quoting Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, para. 17).

Read Acts 15:1-29, the account of the Council of Jerusalem. In this biblical passage, the early Christian gathers to discuss and resolve disputes related to the integration of Jewish and Gentile converts without imposing uniformity. As an early example of synodality, note the prayerful listening, dialogue, and communal decision-making under apostolic authority.

Conversation in the Spirit, questions for reflection:

1. How does the Church’s vision of unity in diversity, as described in paragraph 132, challenge us to appreciate the Eastern Catholic churches’ autonomy and communion in our local communities?
2. What misunderstandings persist between Roman and Eastern Catholics today, and how can prayerful dialogue, rooted in para. 133’s healing imperative, bridge them?
3. What personal or communal steps can we take to live out para. 132’s call for “fraternal exchange of gifts,” making our parish or diocese a microcosm of synodal communion?