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Toward the Possible Development of Fr. Nikolay Afanasiev's Antithesis between "Primate" and "Priority"

This article takes as its starting point Fr. Nikolay Afanasiev's significant study entitled "The Church Which Presides in Love", in which in addition to treating the long-discussed relationship between local and universal ecclesiology, Afanasiev proposes an innovative interpretation of the church primate (hierarchy), which presupposes the practical refusal of any manifestation of primacy in favour of the conceptual imagery of priority, previously unexplored in academic discourse. According to Afanasiev, priority is an exclusively spiritual quality of the church community which exceeds others in the charisma of Christian witness because of its foundation in the love of Christ. This article examines the possibility of extending this understanding of primacy based on a priority of love, as proposed by Fr. Nikolay Afanasiev in the context of interrelations between local church communities, to the internal life of any given local Christian community. The author supposes that it is possible to extrapolate from the priority of love as the foundation of authority of a particular local fellowship in relationship to others, in order to conclude that within each community it is this charisma of love that becomes the foundational, if not unique criterion of the community's spiritual maturity and the extent to which it is living its calling. Turning the priority of love into a fundamental and pervasive life principle for the local church community makes it necessary, in the author's opinion, to integrate imagery depicting the "flashing" or "shimmering" manner in which the Church of God appears within history into our conceptual understanding of orthodox ecclesiology. This "shimmering" indicates the lack of self-sufficiency of any given empirical form of church, without respect to its scale in numbers and degree of institutional effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: Eucharistic ecclesiology, universal/local church, primacy, priority, church authority.

One of Fr. Nikolay Afanasiev's late works, entitled "The Church which Presides in Love", is fairly well known, though as a rule not considered one of his foundational works, and is generally quoted in relation to the issue of primacy in the early church, amongst ancient episcopal sees or patriarchs. Closer acquaintance with the work makes it clear that it is

directly related to the group of works in which Afanasiev presents his ideas on Eucharistic ecclesiology, though it is rarely remembered as an attempt to further develop these ideas. To my mind, this appears as an inexplicable oversight. In fact, “The Church Which Presides in Love” contains an entirely new idea, developed within the context of Afanasiev’s Eucharistic theology, which we do not find anywhere else. Moreover, a careful reading of the text creates the impression that the author has said much more than what is contained in the article: his far-from-trivial ideas about the relationships between the figure of the “primate”, “authority” and the principle of “leadership in love”, itself, arise somewhat unexpectedly and force us to conclude that here Fr. Nikolay is almost purposefully infringing that “impermeability” and self-sufficiency of the Eucharistic fellowship of which he is typically accused.

The article can be conditionally divided into two sections. The first section concentrates on unity among churches and the question of primacy in their interrelations. The author’s task is to figure out how to understand primacy and how it should look, given the basic tenets of Eucharistic ecclesiology. In the second section, finding, as it seems to him, an authentic means of rethinking proverbial primacy, Fr. Nikolay turns to relationships within the local fellowship, thereby unexpectedly extending his proposed bases for primacy to the life of the church as a whole and effectively proposing the use of this principle in a pervasive fashion. I will argue that it is precisely in this that he opens the door to possible significant development of Eucharistic ecclesiology outside of its “classical borders”.

At the beginning of the article, Afanasiev predictably speaks of the fullness of the Church of God within every local Eucharistic community within the context of his discussion of primacy between local churches, and therefore has no need for any additional measure of the fullness of church in the form of a universal ecclesial organization — all the less one built on the principle of power — “because any power over it (the local church), would turn out to be power over Christ and his Body” [Afanasiev 2015, 561]. Further, he develops a thought which is natural to such a position, which is that multiple local churches will naturally gravitate toward each other, seeking unity. He means not organizational unity but unity in a spiritual sense, “founded in love and agreement”. These two foundations, love and agreement, are found in the well known principle of reception, which Fr. Nikolay adopts from R. Zoma, and which signifies a mystical, rather than formal acceptance of another local church community of Christians as brothers in the faith, who in the same way actualize the presence of the Church of God in their local

Eucharistic gathering. In this picture, we can observe a fully alive and effective, though informal union of local church gatherings. We'll return later to "love and agreement", but for the moment we want to focus on another aspect of such an informal union of communities — an aspect which will become our main topic of discussion here. This aspect or trait is the difference in significance between communities. This difference in significance must firstly be understood in a sense non-contradictory to the principle of equality we have just spoken of, and secondly demands explanation as a naturally occurring phenomenon arising from the essence of the relationships which bind the communities together.

In a union of local church communities of equal right, there is, of course, no room for primacy, according to Afanasiev, because primacy would presuppose that one would rule over the other, requiring relationships of lordship/submission which, according to Fr. Nikolay, are entirely alien to Christianity. Even the familiar "primacy of honour", borrowed from antiquity, is tied to the power principle [Afanasiev 2015, 566]. Here it remains only to marvel at the degree to which our impressions of church history are sometimes distorted, when many of our contemporaries understand "primacy of honour" or the well known principle of "*primus inter pares*" as expressions of a non-hierarchical sort. Remember that Octavianus Augustus called himself first among equals in relation to the Roman Senate, and it is clear that he was the primate in the sense of having superior power.

Thus it turns out that the aforementioned inequality of church communities, in the sense of their having different significance, can only refer to the a degree of difference in the depth and degree of saturation of their own spiritual and Christian life. In this vein, Fr. Nikolay speaks of a difference in the authority of their witness; the higher this authority is, the greater the degree to which the Kingdom of God is manifest in the local church. Thus it becomes possible to speak of a sort of vertical hierarchy created by an inequality of authority¹. That this authority has an exclusively spiritual content is obvious from a series of unambiguous statements that Afanasiev makes:

...If the authority of a church among a set of churches is higher, than higher also is that church's love. <...> Neither power nor honour lies at the foundation of

1. "Churches which are equal according to their nature as churches are nevertheless not equal as regards their authority, and this difference in authority creates a hierarchy between them" [Afanasiev 2015, 566].

priority, but authority alone, which flows out of love and made manifest in love [Afanasiev 2015, 567].

Let us turn our attention for a moment to the interesting terminological pairing of priority and authority. These two terms are not pitted against each other, insofar as for Afanasiev, “the church which has priority possesses the highest authority” [Afanasiev 2015, 568]. It follows that priority and authority are both categories of a single order insofar as they are both enmeshed with the thoroughly spiritual quality of love. Priority is simply the highest degree of authority that a given local church can have in relation to others which are similar to it. “It is specifically possible to affirm,” writes Fr. Nikolay, “that priority is a gift of God and, it follows, chosenness by God, which we cannot fully comprehend, but which is received in freedom and love by the entire set of local churches following that church which possesses priority” [Afanasiev 2015, 568].

If we compare understandings of “priority” on the one hand, and “primacy” or “primate” on the other, we come up with a juxtaposition which touches on the very essence of the interpretation of church, insofar as the first characterizes the life of the church from the perspective of her calling, and the second speaks of the institutional relationship between local churches from the perspective of their ranking according to external factors, whether these be number of members, geographical location, relative antiquity, etc. Father Nikolay believes that:

the idea of primacy accords with the unity of the universal Church and the idea of priority with every local church. ...In accepting the idea of primacy, we renounce Eucharistic ecclesiology, and in accepting the idea of priority, we make it practically impossible to accept a universal ecclesiology [Afanasiev 2015, 569].

As far as I know, the antithesis of Eucharistic (local) and universal ecclesiologies isn’t considered elsewhere in such strict and unequivocal relationship to the ideas of priority and primacy².

Further, Afanasiev gives historical evidence in favour of the true ecclesial nature of priority and the fully juridical nature of primacy, which should therefore properly remove our understanding of primate to a space outside the borders of the church. Furthermore, we note that the conceptual imagery of priority, proposed by the creator

2. Compare, for example: [Tillard; Legrand].

of Eucharistic theology as the only foundation for leadership amongst churches, presupposes that priority is dynamic and movable. This means that given the exclusively charismatic nature of priority, it cannot be assumed and taken by one local church or another for all time. It therefore follows, that over the course of church history priority may be recognized as belonging to different local churches at different times. And in his excursions on church history, Fr. Nikolay points to such precedents of passage of priority of the role of "the Church Which Presides in love". So, for instance, from the church of Jerusalem, which had unquestioned priority in the early apostolic period, priority passed to Rome, and then for some time to Antioch, etc. Moreover, there could be no question of the formal fixation of whom priority belonged to or of its passage [Afanasiev 2015, 578–579].

It seems to me that it is important to consider the possibility of applying Fr. Nikolay's proposed priority/primacy antithesis to the internal life of the local church community, as such an approach could perhaps enable the development of our entire understanding Eucharistic ecclesiology.

Starting with the primary significance of the life of grace as expressed in the church's effective manifestation of Christ's love, her ability in terms of bearing sacrificial witness to her Lord and Saviour, and also bearing in mind the exclusively charismatic character of the New Testament Church that Afanasiev proclaims, we would need to return to the question of the correlation between the charismatic and institutional principles within the church. If the ecclesial principle for forging unions between communities of equal right is characterized by the ability to adequately give priority to that community which most manifests the gift of Christ's love, then it is probable that inside each local church community relationships between the members of the community have their foundation in an analogous ability. What, indeed, could be more important for Christians gathered together by the grace of the Holy Spirit in a single community, than striving to more fully manifest the fruit of the gift they have been given? Taking this as main goal, it is natural that a major focus of our attention vis-à-vis such a union would be the manifestation of authorities who maximize the degree to which all members of the local church are able to bear spiritual fruit. In other words, if the basis of priority of one or another local church is simply love as a gift of God, then this must also mean that priority is given by this same charisma within any dimension of the church's existence, including within a specific local community. So we could simply say that the leadership of such a community is doing

nothing other than “presiding in love”, only now on the level of the local church community. But at this point we run into a familiar difficulty expressed in the particular ecclesiological setting.

The fact is that the service of “presiding”, which is the episcopate service, is typically interpreted as the unity of the charismatic and institutional principles of the church. On the one hand, “episcopate” (ἐπισκοπή) is unquestionably a gift of the Holy Spirit, while on the other hand, the position of the bishop within the church stems from his particular duties and authority. Given that without a bishop, the church gathering is uncanonical, his presence is a necessary condition for each Eucharistic service and, it follows, for the life of the local community in general to have integrity as “church”. At this point, a particular methodological difficulty generally arises, insofar as the episcopal charisma is integrated not with the charismatic, but with the canonical character of the bishop’s service. As such, Fr. Nikolay Afanasiev was a primary adherent to the concept of the “priesthood of all believers”, assuredly affirming that: “the Church continues, until our present day, to confess a single priesthood in its liturgical life — a priesthood which belongs to the entire people of God...” and here he continues, “...the highest degree of which is manifest in the particular priesthood of members of the church hierarchy” [Afanasiev 2005, 364].

This phrase can, as desired, be understood in one of two different ways: some people see in it a witness to the principle unity of the charisma of the entire Church, a particular occasion of which is the specific service of the bishop. Others, paying attention to the words “highest degree of which is manifest in the particular priesthood of members of the church hierarchy”, insist upon the particular significance of that priesthood, which in this respect exceeds any other charisma. Knowing the basic thrust of Fr. Nikolay’s ideas, we can say with assurance that he himself inclined toward the first of these two interpretations, though we must admit that a convincing methodological basis for this understanding remains undeveloped in Fr. Nikolay’s own thought.

Having recognized “leadership which presides in love” as a pervasive ecclesial principle, upon which all interrelationships between members of the church fall into line, it seems worth attempting a reconciliation of “charisma and institution” on the basis of “presiding in love”, in service of developing the idea of the “priesthood of all believers” in the context of Afanasiev’s thoughts on the spiritual priority which characterizes relationships between churches.

In other words, affirming that the church is alive and unceasingly elicits bearers of the gift of love, to whom the members of the church

give priority by orienting themselves to their example and striving not to lag behind these "perfect ones", we are simultaneously forced to conclude, that the rule of the spirit of love calls forth a particular order of life. As always, it may seem that there is nothing new in this statement; the assertion of the priority of love within the Church of Christ seems in some way paradigmatic. In fact, it isn't even really possible to refuse to acknowledge that the order of the life of the Church is dictated by Christ's love without sinning against the nature of Church. Otherwise, how could we confirm the presence of Christ in every local church gathering which arises in thanksgiving to the Father for the Son, Saviour and Redeemer? Our only problem is that for the moment we aren't able to strictly describe this from an ecclesiological perspective.

It seems that the priority of love which creates the Church should be recognized as the principle which produces order in the life of the Church. The Holy Spirit not only communicates the gift of new life, but simultaneously creates the new structure of that life. From a formal perspective there is nothing new here: anyone will easily admit that governance is a gift which is numbered amongst the gifts of the Spirit. However, often behind this affirmation lurks an understanding of the bishop as empowered from above almost in the creation of the life of the church itself, i. e. as a commander-in-chief. But in making peace with such an understanding of the episcopal charisma, we refuse, in practice, the idea that such command actually comes from above. Moreover, understanding things in this way creates the illusion that the bishop isn't so much infused with the spirit from within, as he is the receiver of some special insignia of master of ceremonies, which in and of themselves put him in a particular position within the community. It seems to me that it is possible to escape such an interpretation only by recognizing that love has sufficient power and might to order our lives without a need for any kind of power management in the sense of the typical, this-worldly definition of power. In general terms, this idea is also found in Afanasiev, who speaks of the lack within the Church of any sort of power other than the power of love³, as well as of the incompatibility of rights and grace⁴.

3. "If within empirical life which has lost the principle of love, power founded in love is insufficient, then in the Church, in which love is the first and last principle of life, love is fully sufficient" [*Afanasiev 2005, 453*].

4. "A synthesis of rights and grace would be possible only if the principle of right (in the sense of right to something. — *Translator's note*), like grace, were integral to the being of the Church. If the principle of right doesn't exist in the 'invisible church', than neither can it in the 'visible church' " [*Afanasiev 2005, 432*].

If love is recognized as the foremost and only essential principle of the Church's life — the unique rule and measure of Christian existence — then we must also recognize that it is love that is the source, channel and strength, capable of producing order in the daily life of the church within history. This affirmation does not at all mean that the historical church can exist only in this fashion: it is all too obvious that we are speaking of a benchmark, here, rather than of some automatic realization of our own wishful thinking. This recognition implies only the orderly disassociation of anything within the Christian life which can be understood as normative Christianity, i. e. that which belongs to the Church, from all that which bears the mark of this world and from which, for this reason, Christians are bound to distance themselves, with all their might.

From the perspective of this world it seems ridiculous that the “structure of everyday things” would be produced by a principle as ephemeral as love, but the greatness of Christ's victory over the things of this world consists precisely in that what is impossible for man becomes the very image of man's existence as possible for God through the action of the Holy Spirit. Within this context, the gift of governance could be interpreted as the ability to carry the particular burden of responsibility for the effective presence of the Spirit in the everyday life of the Christian gathering, for the provision of leadership which “presides in love”, spiritual respect for those who bear authentic authority, and for making sure that priority is given to these people, in particular. Remembering that there can be no guarantees in matters of the spirit, we are forced to admit that the fulfilment of the bishop's charisma is fraught with failures and deviations from the evangelical norm; but order built upon love is, in fact, exactly like this, because it is continuously recreated through the effort of overcoming a multitude of probable mistakes and failures.

On the one hand, we can't contradict Afanasiev's idea that the only possible power within the church is simply a witness to the most effective force, capable of creating something unconditionally “good”, quite apart from any apparent suppositions or bases, as if “out of nothing”. On the other hand, the power of love is fragile, vulnerable and easy to lose — even helpless and crucified. Love itself, just as with the action we can expect from it — *ordo amoris* (the order of love) — resembles an oxymoron even from a linguistic perspective. The power of love as a foundation for structuring life, seems an unreal scenario. But isn't it exactly for this reason that the church isn't revealed to us once and for all as an empirical reality, but as a subject of faith which is per-

fect, as we might suppose, through our efforts at Christ-like love? In a word, those thinkers and activists who have seriously considered how Christ's love can be an effective, practical structural principle for community life have often come to similar oxymorons. It's enough to remember, for instance, N. N. Neplyuev's "discipline of love"⁵, or Patrick de Laubier's "civilization of love" [*Laubier*].

Let's try to consider this principle of love from the perspective of the opposing alternative, for the sake of exploration. The alternative is well known and isn't difficult to imagine either logically or historically — I mean, of course, an institutionally established church order. In other words, we are speaking about some sort of institution, where there is a network of relationships and a system of governance laid out by that network, with a dependable foundation in law. This can be done very well or less well, and much here is dependent upon the consistency of the legal mechanisms, approved at the will of the hierarchy. We might say that the decisive element here will be the degree to which these mechanisms are agreed, and history shows that often things are far from ideal. We might think separately about why it is that the expression of will strives for primacy even in terms of legal regulation. Nonetheless, historical practice shows that the governance of big communities which are formally church communities, yet internally estranged from such "unreliable" methods such as evangelical love, require special management structures, more often than not vertically integrated, with a solid system of ranks and subordination. True, for some reason church organizations in particular, and especially those not supported by secular power, demonstrate significantly less persistence in the face of unpredictability and entropy.

We can see clearly in historical retrospect, that the cultivation of security, stability and governability for their own sake within the church often lead also to a situation where the order becomes self-sufficient, implying indifference to the contents of the Christian faith. The order itself stops being concerned about the Church of Christ ceasing to be evident within the empirical church, or losing its significance and influence in the world as a whole. Nor does it concern itself with

5. "The discipline of love is faithfulness in brotherly love, which accords with love of God and of his eternal work of uniting all of creation, through love, into one spiritual flock, into one love. For me, a measurement of how well someone is succeeding in the discipline of love is the degree to which he feels the urgency of uniting himself personally in brotherly love and conscience submission of his own will not to another

person or another human will, but to the requirements of the work of love itself and the manifestation of real brotherhood in life..." [*Neplyuev 2010b, 316*].

"The absence of a well formed organization of life based in love is an inexpressible loss reflected in the spiritual condition of the great majority of Christians in the world" [*Neplyuev 2010a, 109*].

whether the spirit is being extinguished, etc. This type of order has no room for eschatological expectation, which in terms of its contents, obviously contradicts the idea of smoothly functioning order; thus any allusion to the coming order of the Kingdom within the existing order seems entirely out of place. Furthermore, a good support for this sort of rigid structure has appeared in history. I have in mind an ideology which makes it possible to “privatize” both the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the action of the Holy Spirit, which can be viewed as unavoidable, given that it is fully tied to canonically accepted actions and procedures.

In accepting the evangelical basis of life we can, of course, affirm that the spirit of Christ’s love is able to maintain an eschatological perspective for the Church’s historical pilgrimage, because it presses us forward to meta-history; we might say that only in this and by this we can look to Christ’s coming in glory. After all, “love never ends” and will abide even when prophecy is fulfilled ^{*1}; in love and only in love is the taste for eternal life born. Although even as we affirm all these things, we must simultaneously acknowledge that the priority of love can’t fail to mean the acceptance of colossal risks within the historical existence of the Church of God. I mean that there is a possibility that much which is desirable and in accordance with the Gospel may not come to fruition, perhaps for a long time, and that there is a danger that we may forget the precious experience of specific charismatic communities; I mean that continuity, which is also impossible to guarantee, might be violated as generations move on. And failures of spiritual memory also require that we apply effort to restore that which has been lost, in practice discovering what is already known all over again. The actual continuity of Holy Tradition means that it must be constantly renewed, allowing Tradition to exist for a living and always relevant and growing experience of knowing God, though neither is there any guarantee of the constancy of such an effort. The only thing that we can certainly count on and be sure that we won’t lose is God’s promise to abide with us until “the end of the age” ^{*2}, and that the Spirit of God, of course, “blows wherever it desires” ^{*3}, which is to say that it isn’t tied to one or another historical phenomenon, and though it will never abandon the Church forever, it is also true that the Lord’s path is inscrutable. And we can never know what might give church history a new impulse of the renewed spirit of love or how this might happen.

As such, the priority of love isn’t simply a normative equivalent to the primate’s power and the spirit of command, but an absolutely

*1 1 Cor 13:8

*2 Mt 28:20

*3 Jn 3:8

different regime of existence in which only effort and real experience of adoption by the Father in Christ, which can in no way be formalized or guaranteed, are primary. This mode of existence requires us to strengthen our spiritual muscles and take a sort of ascetic approach to reception: one which on the one hand should make it possible for us to accept various, often unexpected and sometimes heretofore unknown forms of life in Christ, and on the other hand recognize and reject false and dead-end forms. This should mean that as we develop our ability to receive from the tradition we will gradually broaden the spectrum of forms and practices that qualify as church life, and also the variation of means for systematizing that experience of knowing God which endure within the tradition. But in its turn, the growing variation can hardly help but mean a multiplication of the risks which have already been mentioned.

Fairly often and justly, over the recent past, the dangers of various forms of church triumphalism have been stressed (this is one of the most common and accessible types of "privatization of the Spirit"), but it seems to me that we don't speak nearly enough about how we should use our clearly significant experience based on mistakes already made and those which are unavoidable in the future. Any Orthodox Christian knows, for instance, that any claim of infallibility is extremely dangerous for the church, and particularly for its unity. It wouldn't be out of place, therefore, to propose that the inability to adequately understand fallibility might be considered one of the most significant blocks to the creative exploration so necessary, as we have already noted, to support a functioning environment based on the priority of love and in its associated *ordo amoris*.

At last, in our time, when the word "love" has been so watered down and its meaning so significantly blunted — when such a plethora of experiences has been signified by and made the subject of the word "love" — the Church will have to renew its experience of Christ's love in a much more attentive and directed way, in a way much stricter than previously necessary, so as to distance itself from false lookalikes, so as to guard against its identification with people's natural sentiments, sympathetic attractions and empathic reactions. In saying this, I have no wish to denigrate the positive contents of any of the things just listed; but perhaps today it is harder than in previous times to differentiate relative and ephemeral values from those which really have the foretaste of eternity.

For the Church, the priority of love means the art of the impossible, and faith in the fact that Christ has a very specific kind of power which

is also present in every person who follows Him, to produce in the fullness of His growth, in such a way that “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”^{*1}. And this lifestyle presupposes the effort to give one’s brother an analogous experience of being absolutely needed in a personal sense and of worth which has not been forfeited, even despite our weakness and sinfulness.

*1 Gal 2:20

In the end, we need to maintain that Fr. Nikolay Afanasiev’s antithesis between “the priority of love” and “primacy of honour”, which in my opinion express the essence of the conflict between the local and the universal ecclesiological models, isn’t resolved by simply accepting the priority of love as a principle specific to the church hierarchy, as do the adherents to Eucharistic ecclesiology. Accepting it in this way necessarily implies the extension of the same principle to the entire expanse of the Church as we understand it: to its nature, significance, foundational traits — and not only in a meta-historical sense, but to the Church’s existence within history, as well. If we don’t expand the principle’s reach in this way, we necessarily end up with an internal conflict within Eucharistic ecclesiology, which it is unclear how to resolve. But our proposed expansion of the principle of the priority of love, turning it into a pervasive mode of historical existence for the entire church, presupposes a complete refusal of triumphalist interpretations of church history in favour of principles such as constant risk of temporary loss of the originally acquired gifts of the Spirit, a regime of constant effort aimed at their constant and successive renewal, eschatological tension capable of overcoming any tendency toward self-satisfaction and complacency with the state of affairs as it is, etc.

As a result of considering what might happen if we live in an order brought about through love and fraught with an increase in the risk of losing that order, we could say that the paradoxical nature of Afanasiev’s proposed “priority of love” means that the church in history moves between two poles. On the one hand, the church is constantly pursued by the permanent danger of not standing up to the danger of the “leaven of the Pharisees”, which at its extreme can lead to the situation where the Son of Man comes and finds no faith on the earth^{*2}. On the other hand, the church has an externally ephemeral but spiritual solid support: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”^{*3}.

*2 Cf. Lk 18:8

*3 Lk 12:32

The only means of not giving into the temptation of the Pharisees is found in that the priority of love remains the highest principle for structuring the life of the church. This, as we might expect, means that the leadership of the community should give the greatest authority

to those who bear the gift of love. But the paradox of this charisma seems to be that he who truly has this gift should, in all his actions, search for means by which this love itself will be manifest most effectively, rather than implementing his understanding of it. In other words, at the level of the local Christian community we clearly see another paradox coming into view: "presiding in love" isn't so much the action of an individual subject as it is the effort to give love itself the chairmanship of the community. To paraphrase, we might say that the person in the leadership position, "the leading subject", should venerate that same love within the church as the highest gift of the Holy Spirit. The active recognition of such a Presiding One further poses the question of how to execute Her (Love's) "authority", which becomes a task for all the members of the community — the task of priestly love. And oversight of the effectiveness and sufficiency of combined efforts as they allocate the leading role to authoritative bearers of the gift of love, becomes the thoroughly charismatic responsibility of a managing figure. Because this image, which is difficult for us to imagine in our earthly lives, is constantly under challenge from more externally stable leadership models of one type or another, the "chairmanship of love" more often than not reveals itself as a desired "impossibility" and, therefore, is typically forfeited as a principle for life. But refusal to try to reintroduce the "leadership of love" means a capitulation to the logic of this world and the triumph of the principle of power in the form of external restraint.

The priority of love, in this case, becomes a foundational and pervasive principle, forming the new paradox of Eucharistic ecclesiology; a well-known and significant potential insufficiency of Eucharistic ecclesiology is that the Eucharistic gathering may be thought of as a self-sufficient unit. And we all know the observation which hints that an integral local community cannot be imagined apart from the spiritual, or baptismal history which formed it, which eliminates the risk of such self-sufficiency [*Erickson*]. With the considerations in this paper, I hope to further add to this picture by recognizing that the integral, i. e. non-self-sufficient Eucharistic gathering exists not as an always easily and straightforwardly identifiable empirical community — even given its baptismal history — but as a spiritual union, from which at times "flashes and shimmers" on and off the figure of the Church of God, in which the single and unique ruling principle is the love of her Founder.

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