

L'intervista al New York Times e allo Herald Tribune sui rapporti fra Chiesa cattolica ed Ortodossi in occasione della consegna della Chiesa di santa Caterina a questi ultimi.

By Bruno Forte, Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto - Italy

It is certainly a positive moment because the Catholic – Orthodox international Commission, after an interim period in which it had not met because of problems between the Orthodox Churches and the Oriental Churches in communion with Rome, started working again, in 2006 in Beograd and in 2007 in Ravenna. And we have produced an important document that recognizes that in all churches there is a "protos" (a first one, a head) who has the primary authority. In the local church it is the bishop, on a regional level it is the patriarch and there is the recognition that for the Universal church it is the Bishop of Rome.

The Ravenna Document includes the recognition of the "protos" at the universal level of the one Church. It goes back to the fifth century, to Apostolic Canon 34 (a text that is very important for the Eastern idea of the Church), which speaks of the "protos" in the ecclesial communion. This recognition opens the road to a profound communion based on mutual respect.

Certainly with Patriarch Kirill the situation is doubly privileged. He has been involved for years in ecumenical discourse and he knows and respects Pope Benedict XVI. Then, the Russian Church is just emerging from a period of rebirth following the events of the fall of the Soviet Union. His predecessor had to work to refound the Church, to set up structures, organize the clergy. Kirill has been handed a reborn church and so he has the strength to forge a new path. This gives us hope that the ecumenical path will make headway. The biggest obstacle is a diffuse mentality amongst people with a decidedly anti-Catholic spirit. In the West, the Second Vatican Council liberated an ecumenical tendency. This process has been slower among some Orthodox churches. That is why the consignment of the Church of St. Catherine to the Orthodox Patriarchate is an important signal of détente. We aim for full ecumenism that respects differences but underlines unity. The best way to achieve ecumenism is through familiarity, meetings, reciprocal discourse.

It is important to create a climate of trust that overcomes the hesitations of the more reluctant.

Often we are suspicious of things we don't know. I see it in the Commission, we have come to know and respect each other, and have built relationships. Some of the Orthodox members have wanted to know more about ecclesiastical questions from our point of view, and reciprocally. This is the path of friendship.