

# Papal push could advance Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, bishop says

WASHINGTON - Although the 1995 encyclical "Ut Unum Sint" by Pope John Paul II helped with Catholic-Orthodox relations, more progress could be made with a nudge from the man currently occupying the chair of Peter, according to an Orthodox bishop who has been part of Catholic-Orthodox dialogues for more than a decade.

"Ut Unum Sint" "was certainly helpful," said Metropolitan Kallistos. "As an Orthodox, I was surprised and moved at Pope John Paul II when he openly asked for the help of others to understand his role and his primacy as bishop of Rome to the universal church."

The retired British-born Greek Orthodox metropolitan, raised an Anglican, spent much of his ministry teaching at Oxford University.

In the encyclical, titled in English "That All May Be One," the pope acknowledged that while Catholics view the bishop of Rome as "visible sign and guarantor of unity," the notion of that papal role for the universal church "constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians." He asked theologians and leaders of other churches to help him "find a way of exercising the primacy" that could make it a ministry of unity to all Christians.

But the document was silent on what Metropolitan Kallistos called "regional primacy" - a significant issue to Orthodox, who are generally organized along national or ethnic lines, such as the Greek, Russian, Romanian and Serbian Orthodox.

"In the 1960s, Professor (Joseph) Ratzinger - that's what he was then - talked about the need to build up 'patriarchal spaces,'" Metropolitan Kallistos told CNS in a Feb. 15 interview. That priest-professor is now Pope Benedict XVI.

"I would like to see the pope repeating today what he said 40 years ago, if he's of the same opinion," Metropolitan Kallistos said.

In the Orthodox Church, a metropolitan is similar to an archbishop in the Catholic Church. Metropolitan Kallistos, now 75, was ordained to the Greek Orthodox episcopate in 1982, but retired from active ministry in 2001. However, when his diocese was elevated to the rank of a “metropolis,” or archdiocese, in 2007, he was given the title of metropolitan retroactively.

Metropolitan Kallistos was born Timothy Ware, an Anglican, in Bath, England. By his teens, he told CNS, he had become a “high-church Anglican” but embraced the Orthodox faith at age 24, saying it was the church that best expressed his Christian beliefs.

He represents the Orthodox in both Catholic-Orthodox and Anglican-Orthodox dialogues. He said that there needs to be “better coordination” among the dialogue partners, since there are times when “we say things a little differently” in different dialogue settings, adding that there are instances when all three faiths could dialogue jointly.

Metropolitan Kallistos said setting a common date for Easter for Christians and Orthodox would be helpful, although it has not been a dialogue topic. Easter will fall on the same date this year and next for both faiths, but “then it will be a very long time” before it happens again, he said. He added Orthodox prefer their formulation for setting the date of Easter, which is usually later than the observance by the rest of Christianity.

Greater sacramental sharing between the faith groups has yet to be enacted, although “since Vatican II the Catholics have been more flexible” about their members receiving the sacraments in Orthodox churches, he said. But the Orthodox have concluded that except in cases of “pastoral necessity,” it would be better if doctrinal agreement were reached on the issues that divide Catholics and the Orthodox before greater sharing is allowed, he said.

They recognize the validity of each other’s sacraments, but Catholics and Orthodox cannot regularly share each other’s Eucharist.

While the mutual excommunications levied by each church against the other’s members were lifted in 1965, the situation that led to the “anathemas” did not erupt

suddenly, Metropolitan Kallistos said. The issues, he noted, that led to the separation of East and West had been brewing by the early ninth century – about 250 years before the Great Schism of 1054. Among the issues were papal primacy and other theological matters and liturgical differences.

One subject the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue is exploring is how papal authority was exercised in the early church, “when we both were together,” Metropolitan Kallistos said, indicating that it may be in such a review that today’s Catholics and Orthodox can come to agreement on critical areas of church life and governance.

“In order to go forward,” he said, “we have to look back.”