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## The Unity We Seek

Radu Bordeianu

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### Abstract and Keywords

Orthodox theologians such as Bulgakov, Florovsky, Afanasiev, Staniloae, and Zizioulas consider eucharistic communion to be the sign of ecclesial unity, but their understandings of the boundaries of the church and unity in love, teaching, episcopacy, and Eucharist (including intercommunion) are varied. This chapter analyses Orthodox understandings of the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the *Una Sancta* of the creed, considers the ecclesial status of other Christians, and assesses various models of unity, such as ‘all in each place’ (New Delhi, 1961). Unity is conditioned theologically: Christians need to confess the same faith, though uniformity is not the goal. Churches should enjoy unity in love, common service at the altar of the poor (in ‘the liturgy after the liturgy’), synodal decision-making, and communion among local churches represented by their bishops. These forms of unity do not represent successive stages, but they mutually condition each other.

Keywords: Orthodox Church, Eucharist, bishop, synodality, communion, Staniloae, Florovsky, Afanasiev, Zizioulas

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## Introduction

In 1920, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople issued an invitation ‘Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere’ to form a fellowship (*koinonia*) of churches. It affirmed that ‘antiquated prejudices, practices or pretensions’ can be overcome through ‘good will and intention’. The call for love based on ‘sincerity and confidence between the churches’ was made explicit when the authors affirmed that Christians are not strangers, but all part of the household of Christ. Moreover, some degree of rapprochement need not await the resolution of dogmatic differences, and they recommended various ways to foster

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unity, thus strengthening churches as they face together the common challenges of war and unhealthy changes in society (Limouris 1994, 9–11).

This invitation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate became programmatic for the ecumenical movement, of which the World Council of Churches (WCC) is the largest institution, and for Orthodox ecumenical involvement. The letter served to indicate five theological issues. It addressed other Christians as *churches*, thus raising the question of the boundaries of the church, and emphasized unity in love, teaching, episcopacy, and Eucharist as necessary elements in a discussion on the nature of the unity we seek. The present chapter elaborates these same topics from an Orthodox point of view.

# The Boundaries of the Church

Orthodox participants in ecumenical dialogues consistently affirm that the church is already one, as the image of the Body of Christ suggests. There is only one head, Jesus Christ, and one Body, the church that is professed in the Creed to be one (*una*), holy (*sancta*), catholic, and apostolic. Consequently, ecumenism is concerned with re-establishing not the unity of the church, which can never be lost, but rather that of Christians, who are visibly disunited. And yet, Orthodox representatives have also consistently referred to the *churches* (plural) that make up the Christian family. As early as 1902, the Ecumenical Patriarchate consulted all major Orthodox sees on the initiation of dialogue with the West, especially with Old Catholics and Anglicans, whose teachings were regarded as very close to Orthodox doctrine. In the 1904 letter of Patriarch Joachim III of Constantinople, which included the responses of the other Orthodox sees, he referred to Western churches as 'holy local Churches of God' (Limouris 1994, 3–8). Most notably, other Christian communities were called *churches* in the unprecedented 1920 initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to form a fellowship, as already mentioned. This designation remained consistent throughout the process of preparation for the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held in Crete in 2016. While all fourteen unanimously recognized autocephalous churches participated in pre-conciliar conferences, only ten were present in Crete. The Council adopted a document entitled 'Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World'. Notwithstanding pressure from anti-ecumenical circles, after affirming that the unity of the church cannot be perturbed the document rather timidly states that 'the Orthodox Church accepts the historical name of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her' and describes the WCC as being made up of 'non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions', thereby continuing to recognize non-Orthodox *churches* as such. It urged 'the most speedy and objective clarification possible of the whole ecclesiological question' (Holy and Great Council 2016, nn. 6, 16).

Thus, the first theological question related to ecumenism has to be an ecclesiological one: how do Orthodox understand the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the church described in the Creed as the *Una Sancta*, and what does that understanding mean for the ecclesial status of other Christian churches? In other words, is the Body of Christ limited to Christians belonging to just one denomination—in this case, Orthodoxy—or can various denominations be considered as distinct members of the same Body of Christ? Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodoxy does not have an authoritative position on this question. In fact, Orthodox theologians and church representatives have espoused two main views of Christian unity, based on two different understandings of the boundaries of the church, broad and strict, respectively.

First and foremost, the official position of all autocephalous Orthodox churches and the view of most contemporary theologians is that Orthodoxy needs to engage in dialogue with other churches, in whom God's grace and work of salvation are present. Accordingly,

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all those baptized with water in the name of the Trinity are validly baptized members of the *Una Sancta*. Were such persons to convert to Orthodoxy, they would not need to be baptized. If in Baptism we unite ourselves with Christ and become members of his Body, then all baptized Christians are united in their mutual identity with Christ. Consequently, Orthodox theologians agree with the two external marks of participation in the church, which were identified at the Third Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi (1961): baptism in Jesus Christ and confession of him as Lord and Saviour (Kinnamon 2003, 153).

The theological presupposition of recognizing the validity of non-Orthodox baptisms is that the grace of God is at work fully in the Orthodox Church, which represents the fullness of the *Una Sancta*, but also in other churches, which share in that fullness to different degrees. As will be shown later, this presupposition is worded differently by various Orthodox theologians, with various (and even conflicting) emphases. But the basic principle stays the same: Orthodoxy represents the fullness of the church.

This statement sounds very arrogant to Protestant ears, but the Orthodox do not mean it in the sense that they live a sinless life or that their church, in its historical manifestations, has been perfect at all times. On the contrary, sin and human weakness are undeniable realities in the life of the church. But, with deep humility and seeing it as a calling, the Orthodox believe that the fullness of truth and church life has been preserved since the beginning of Christianity, without interruption, in Orthodoxy. It is a calling both in the sense of witness to other Christians and in the sense that the church is still in need of perfection: the fullness of the church in Orthodoxy is already here, but not yet; it is both indicative and imperative.

Catholic theologians will recognize in the Orthodox claim to be the fullness of the church a statement similar to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) that the church of Christ ‘subsists in’ the Catholic Church (Second Vatican Council 1964a, n. 8). However, the Orthodox generally do not distinguish between ‘churches’ and ‘ecclesial communities’, as Catholics do when speaking differently of Orthodox and Protestant communions (see Second Vatican Council 1964b, nn. 15, 22). The terms ‘communion’ and ‘confession’ exceptionally appear in Orthodox statements as an attempt to appease ultraconservatives (see e.g. Holy and Great Council 2016, n. 6), but such a distinction has no grounding in the Eastern tradition.

The claim that Orthodoxy represents the fullness of the church represents the basis for official Orthodox reactions to various models of Christian unity proposed in the context of the contemporary ecumenical movement. Most notably, the ‘all in each place’ model was enunciated at the WCC’s New Delhi Assembly, in one of the most frequently quoted ecumenical phrases:

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the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.

(Kinnamon 2003, 153)

The Orthodox representatives at New Delhi affirmed that the statement under discussion presupposed the model of interdenominational agreement or reconciliation, which is understandable within a Protestant mindset, adding:

But for the Orthodox it is uncongenial. For the Orthodox the basic ecumenical problem is that of schism. The Orthodox cannot accept the idea of a 'parity of denomination' and cannot visualize Christian Reunion just as an interdenominational adjustment. The unity has been broken and must be recovered. The Orthodox Church is not a confession, one of many, one among the many. For the Orthodox, the Orthodox Church is just the Church. The Orthodox Church is aware and conscious of the identity of her inner structure and of her teaching with the Apostolic message (kerygma) and the tradition of the undivided Church. She finds herself in an unbroken and continuous succession of sacramental ministry, sacramental life, and faith.

(Limouris 1994, 30)

On the basis of this text and of other similar Orthodox statements, Peter Bouteneff of the Orthodox Church in America concludes that from an Orthodox perspective 'we seek the visible union of *Christians*, not of *the Church*'. That is not to say that others are not the church, since there is a real *koinonia* among all Christians, but that bond is not visibly manifested. Although the church is already one and holy (in no need of repentance or reformation), Christians must strive for their *visible* unity. And yet, Orthodox representatives in the ecumenical movement agree to sign documents that speak of *churches*—understood as denominations not as local Orthodox communities, e.g. the Church of Serbia, the Church of Greece, the Church of Romania<sup>1</sup>—by doing what Bouteneff calls 'mental gymnastics', knowing full well that the WCC will not change its wording but will continue to reflect a specific ecclesiology in its documents (Bouteneff 2009, 353, 357). One can detect in Bouteneff's words the Orthodox uneasiness with the ecclesiological presuppositions behind some WCC statements, despite the WCC's promise articulated in the 1950 Toronto statement on 'The Church, the Churches and the World

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Council of Churches' that it would not impose a specific view of unity on its member churches (Kinnamon and Cope 1997, 463–468).

Another Orthodox criticism of the 'all in each place' model is its weak emphasis on the need for unity of teaching not only among contemporary churches, but also between them and the apostolic tradition itself. Orthodox participants at New Delhi insisted on the need for 'ecumenism in time' in addition to the WCC's 'ecumenism in space'. It is in the former that all Christians converge, so unity in truth really means unity in the faith of the early Church, 'a reintegration of Christian mind, a recovery of apostolic tradition, a fullness of Christian vision and belief, in agreement with all ages' (Limouris 1994, 30–31). A reference to this tradition was added at the Fourth Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala in 1968 that referred to 'the one unchanging apostolic heritage' and 'the one people of God in every age', with an additional emphasis on universal conciliarity (Kinnamon and Cope 1997, 93–97), which is distinct from New Delhi's emphasis on locality. In fairness, however, the New Delhi statement mentions that Christians 'are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places *and all ages*' (emphasis mine), but Orthodox representatives wanted a stronger focus on tradition.

A final Orthodox addition to the 'all in each place' model transpired at the Fifth Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi in 1975, which added a synodal dimension to its understanding of unity as 'a conciliar fellowship of local churches' (Kinnamon and Cope 1997, 110). This new perspective was another significant Orthodox contribution to the WCC's understanding of unity, given the Eastern respect for synodality.

Another model of unity is that of reconciled diversity (Kinnamon 2003, 32–33). Proposed in the 1970s, this model contains several elements with which the Orthodox should agree, including unity in faith (although the Orthodox would propose a maximalist, not a minimalist view of such unity) and the need for mutual recognition of baptism, Eucharist, and ministry. As stated already, most Orthodox recognize the validity of non-Orthodox baptisms, but they distinguish between the recognition of a sacrament as valid and sharing in it. While recognizing the validity of the Catholic Eucharist, for example, the Orthodox do not partake in it.

Orthodox disagree with this model's weak emphasis on structural union, which does not invite Christians to repent for their disunity but preserves current structural divisions and is content with a peaceful coexistence of various churches. While coexistence is a significant step towards unity, the church needs to be fully united in order to fulfil its mission as a sign of the Kingdom. It is true that unity should not mean uniformity, but should preserve and benefit from the gifts that each community brings into union. However, denominationalism is not a gift; presupposing the legitimacy of pluriform denominational existence is an impoverishment of unity. In this sense, the Crete Council states that the Orthodox Church does not accept 'the notion of the "equality of Confessions"', and in no way is she able to accept the unity of the Church as an inter-confessional compromise. In this spirit, the unity that is sought within the WCC cannot

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simply be the product of theological agreements, but must also be founded on the unity of faith, preserved in the sacraments and lived out in the Orthodox Church' (Holy and Great Council 2016, n. 18).

This consideration of the boundaries of the church and consequent evaluation of various models of Christian unity points to a certain tension within Orthodoxy. On the one hand, Orthodoxy is believed to be the church, the Body of Christ. On the other hand, non-Orthodox are understood to have a valid baptism and to be members of the church; Orthodox theologians who hold this position do not deny the ecclesial status of non-Orthodox churches, but they cannot say positively what that ecclesial status is. Here is where the language of *fullness* of belonging to the church is helpful: the Orthodox Church is the fullness of the church, but others partake of this fullness in various degrees.

A second understanding of the boundaries of the church is found in some anti-ecumenical Orthodox circles which consider that only Orthodox baptisms are valid, so those converting to Orthodoxy need to be baptized validly. The ecumenical Orthodox, just described, condemn this practice as rebaptism. At stake is a different understanding of the boundaries of the church: if the ecumenical group recognizes the reality of the church in other Christians, the anti-ecumenical group denies it. For the latter, there is no church outside of Orthodoxy; non-Orthodox are in schism from the church and thus there is little or no difference between them and non-Christians. Accordingly, unity can only take the form of the canonical integration of other denominations into Orthodoxy. This group is quite vocal, but numerically speaking a tiny minority which opposes the official position of all canonical Orthodox churches, sometimes in a publicly scandalous manner.

Given the 1920 initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, it is understandable why a number of Orthodox churches were represented at the inaugural assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948, thus becoming foundational for the WCC: the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Churches of Cyprus and Greece, as well as the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of the USA. Between 1961 and 1965, all remaining autonomous and autocephalous Orthodox churches became members of the WCC. At that time, the Orthodox Church of Albania was unable to exist officially within its territory, so it joined the WCC only in 1994. All canonical Orthodox churches have therefore been involved in ecumenism at some stage.

If Orthodox ecumenical commitment has been unwavering, participation in the WCC is another matter. The delegates of all canonical Orthodox churches met in 1998 in Thessaloniki, Greece, to discuss the then-recent withdrawal of the Georgian Orthodox Church from the WCC and to address the concerns of the Russian and Serbian churches regarding Orthodox involvement in the WCC. In their statement, the delegates 'unanimously denounced those groups of schismatics, as well as certain extremist groups within the local Orthodox Churches themselves, that are using the theme of ecumenism in order to criticize the Church leadership and undermine its authority, thus attempting to create divisions and schisms in the Church' (FitzGerald and Bouteneff 1998, 136).

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The statement thus distinguishes between the consensus existing among local Orthodox churches, all of which are involved in ecumenism, and the 'schismatic', 'extremist' groups that are accusing ecumenism and its supporters of heresy. Its harsh terminology suggests the seriousness of the rift between the official position of all Orthodox churches and that of anti-ecumenical groups. At the same time, the delegates distinguish between Orthodox participation in ecumenism in general and participation in the WCC in particular. While the 1997 withdrawal of the Church of Georgia means that the WCC is not unanimously embraced (shortly thereafter, in 1998, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church withdrew from the WCC as well), a broad commitment to ecumenism is part of both older and more recent Orthodox traditions:

Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement has always been based on Orthodox Tradition, on the decisions of the Holy Synods of the local Orthodox Churches, and on Pan-Orthodox meetings, such as the Third Pre-Conciliar Conference of 1986 and the meeting of the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches in 1992. The participants are unanimous in their understanding of the necessity for continuing their participation in various forms of Inter-Christian activity.

(FitzGerald and Bouteneff 1998, 137)

Along the same lines, the Holy and Great Council reaffirmed the pan-Orthodox commitment to the ecumenical movement, even while some autocephalous churches do not send representatives to bilateral dialogues (Holy and Great Council 2016, nn. 4, 5, 9).

When the discussion shifts from ecumenical and anti-ecumenical attitudes within Orthodoxy in general to the views of individual theologians, one notes that most theologians agree that the boundaries of the *Una Sancta* extend beyond the Orthodox Church. And yet there is great diversity among them. The Russian Orthodox theologian, Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) distinguished between the canonical and charismatic boundaries of the church. He identified the former boundary with the unified early church and its continuation today—the Orthodox Church—and the latter one with the entirety of Christianity. Florovsky pointed out that some heretics were received into the early church without the administration of baptism and their orders were recognized as valid. These sacraments are validly performed 'by virtue of the Holy Spirit'. Moreover, according to Florovsky, 'the unity of the Church is based on a twofold bond—the "unity of the Spirit" and the "union of peace" (cf. Eph 4:3). In sects and divisions the "union of peace" is broken and torn apart, but in the sacraments the "unity of the Spirit" is not terminated. This is the unique paradox of sectarian existence'. Thus, Florovsky considered that the canonical and charismatic boundaries of the church do not coincide because of the extended presence of the Holy Spirit outside the canonical Orthodox Church (Florovsky 1989, 37–42).



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Much of his theology developed as a reaction to what he perceived as faulty understandings of Christian unity and ecumenism, such as denominationalism or the branch theory, according to which the universal church consists of the sum total of the denominations existing today. He also reacted strongly against charitable forms of union, according to which doctrinal agreement was minimized or even considered unnecessary, while sharing in a common mission towards the world and growing in love was regarded as all that was necessary. In response, Florovsky wrote about the Orthodox Church being the church, though not yet perfected:

The Orthodox Church claims to be *the Church*. There is no pride and no arrogance in this claim. Indeed, it implies a heavy responsibility. Nor does it mean 'perfection'. The Church is still in pilgrimage, in travail, *in via*. ... In a sense, the Orthodox Church is a continuation, a 'survival' of Ancient Christianity as it has been shaped in the age of the Ecumenical Councils and of the Holy Fathers ... And for that reason the Orthodox Church recognizes herself, in the distorted Christendom of ours, as being the only guardian of the ancient Faith and Order; that is, as being *the Church*. For the same reason the Orthodox Church cannot regard herself as just a 'denomination' among the multitude of others or just a 'branch' of some wider Church.

(Florovsky 1989, 139-140; emphases in original)

Florovsky's concern was to say that the church confessed in the Creed still exists today, and not to exclude other Christians from the church. He wrote the above words in 1950, the same year that the newly formed WCC declared at Toronto (under Florovsky's direct influence) that membership of the *Una Sancta* is more inclusive than the membership of individual churches, and that members of the WCC recognize in other churches 'elements of the true Church' (Kinnamon and Cope 1997, 467), as in Florovsky's distinction between the canonical and charismatic limits of the church. His theological insights have become the basis for most of the documents signed by Orthodox delegates at ecumenical gatherings.

Another great ecumenical theologian, Nicolas Afanasiev (1893-1966), also Russian Orthodox, was very much in favour of Christian unity but disagreed with the idea that non-Orthodox churches have only 'vestiges' of the church, or share in the fullness of the church to different degrees. He believed that if they have a valid Eucharist they are fully the church, and he therefore considered the Roman Catholic Church to be a local church of the *Una Sancta* as was the Orthodox Church. For Afanasiev, the division between the Orthodox and Catholic churches has affected only the surface of their ecclesiastical lives and has merely a canonical character (Afanasiev 2003, 25).

The Romanian Orthodox, Dumitru Staniloae (1903-1993), disagreed with Afanasiev, and stated that doctrinal disunity creates an essential separation between churches, which can be healed only in the context of a common confession of faith. Presently, Christians do not share in the fullness of the faith, even though they agree on the fundamental truths of Revelation. Staniloae regarded the Orthodox Church as the fullness of the

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church, while other denominations belong to the *Una Sancta* in different degrees of closeness to that fullness (Staniloae 2012, vol. 4, 66–68). On this issue, the Russian Orthodox Paul Evdokimov (1901–1970) agreed with Staniloae and added the memorable words: ‘We know where the Church is, but we cannot judge where the Church is not’ (Bordeianu 2011, 199–205).

One can conclude that there is a main-line Orthodox position regarding the boundaries of the church, according to which Orthodoxy is the fullness of the church, while non-Orthodox churches belong to the *Una Sancta* in different degrees. This position is challenged on both sides, by the anti-ecumenists who simply identify Orthodoxy with the church and by Afanasiev who recognizes a fullness of church existence outside of Orthodoxy, too. These three positions imply three different ecumenical strategies and models of unity: dialogue towards a common faith expressed in eucharistic communion, canonical integration into Orthodoxy, and intercommunion based on a still-existing unity, respectively. Orthodox delegates at ecumenical gatherings largely accepted the first of these models based on the already existing unity of the church in the common baptism of Christians. Baptismal unity represents both a call to manifest visibly the unity that already exists in Christ and the foundation on which other forms of unity rest. The unity we seek encompasses love, common teaching, and episcopal and eucharistic communion, which will now be considered in turn.

## Unity in Love

The 1920 initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate called for unity in love. Before solving dogmatic differences, all churches would adopt an irenic tone, a peaceful approach to past historical divisions, seek a healing of memories, exchange professors and students, and teach theology in an ecumenical spirit (Limouris 1994, 9–11). Love is more conducive to theological dialogue. In fact, love overcomes denominational barriers even when doctrinal unity is lacking, or rather as long as doctrinal unity is not given more weight than it deserves. Such was the case with Orthodox, Latin Catholics, Eastern Catholics, and Protestants who suffered side by side under militant atheist regimes which persecuted them irrespective of denominational identity. They ‘gave a Christian ecumenical witness by their common suffering. This kind of witness has been called, significantly, “ecumenism behind bars” or “ecumenism under the cross”’ (FitzGerald and Bouteneff 1998, 133). As Communist persecutions have ended, new challenges have arisen: social polarization, secularization, poverty, and violence, so churches need to engage in an ecumenism of solidarity with those who suffer from marginalization and discrimination. This is a traditionally Orthodox attitude, because the Orthodox value not only their liturgy and theological witness (*leitourgia* and *martyria*), but also their *diakonia*, ‘the liturgy after the liturgy’, when they serve at the altar of the poor (Bria 1996). However, they now have an opportunity to collaborate with other Christians. As

the Lund principle (1952) states, churches should 'act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately' (Kinnamon and Cope 1997, 463).

## Unity in Teaching

The ecumenical *grundaxiom* that unity does not mean uniformity holds true for Orthodoxy both internally and in its approach to ecumenism. There is a significant degree of diversity in the East, from the ways in which different national churches celebrate the Liturgy, to the calendar that they use, to various practices concerning divorce, the election of bishops, or the means by which converts are received into Orthodoxy. Despite their practical differences, all national Orthodox churches have maintained unity in faith and dogma. This unity is enriched by the diversity that exists at the level of *theologoumena* and theological opinions, as the Spirit has been manifested differently in various contexts. In its diverse unity, the Orthodox Church may be said to be an image of the Trinity—three persons but one essence.

These principles apply to Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement as well. Diversity, understood as constitutive of unity, is a blessing. But seen as an end in itself, diversity becomes division, schism, or 'illegitimate diversity' that damages unity. Ecumenism is thus concerned with establishing the limits of acceptable diversity. One notices over the years a reassessment of past controversies and of what constitute church-dividing issues. Such is the case with regard to Christology in relations between Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox (pre-Chalcedonian or non-Chalcedonian) churches. Their dialogue started on an informal basis in 1964, but since 1985 it has continued at the level of a Joint Theological Commission. The Commission's most important statements of Anba Bishoi (1989) and Chambésy (1990) show that, despite centuries of alienation and terminological confusion, the two churches share the same Orthodox faith (Kinnamon and Cope 1997, 147–149; FitzGerald and Bouteneff 1998, 145). This is one of the most important accomplishments of bilateral dialogue involving the Orthodox Church and it is already bearing fruit in pastoral life in some jurisdictions in Western Europe and North America, where members of the two churches share in the Eucharist.

Orthodox theologians have retraced other lines between church-dividing and non-church-dividing issues. Noteworthy is the recommendation of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation that the Filioque 'need no longer divide us' (O-C 2003, 183), but that the different ways of understanding the procession of the Holy Spirit in the East and in the West should be placed in their proper theological, historical, and terminological context. Churches should continue to discern what pertains to the essence of their faith and what are cultural embodiments of that faith in specific contexts. As Pope John XXIII stated when he opened the Second Vatican Council in 1962: 'The substance of

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the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another' (Pope John XXIII 1962, 715). Churches will grow together as they look back into their respective traditions and find various ways to confess the same faith.

Several Orthodox theologians have made similar remarks that justify seeking a growth in faith while being faithful to tradition. Florovsky, for instance, called for a 'neo-patristic synthesis'. In a creative interaction with the West, Orthodox theologians should write in a patristic spirit, or in 'the mind of the Fathers', and rediscover the 'catholic mind' which is the language of the Scriptures, the worshipping church, and the fathers of the church (Florovsky 1975, 11-30). This is a call to go beyond the fathers but in their spirit, while engaging with contemporary scholarship and especially with Western theology.

Another significant contribution to ecumenical dialogue is Staniloae's concept of 'open sobornicity', understood as the acceptance of every valid theological insight in other theological traditions without running the risk of doctrinal relativism. Building on the diversity of Scripture, Staniloae affirmed that the Bible canonizes the diversity of Christianity and reflects the diversity of God's actions in different historical situations, as well as the diversity of human responses to God's actions. He recommended that all churches should learn from each other and search for manifestations of God's revelation outside their own confines. In so doing, they would come to a symphonic unity, without uniformity, and not regard their own limited experience of God as ultimate and exclusive (Bordeianu 2011, 27-29). Another path to unity advocated by Staniloae is the spiritual interpretation of dogmas. Churches differ greatly in their dogmatic formulations, but by looking at the spiritual core of these formulations one might see a similar spiritual concern. That is why, in the present context when Christians do not share in eucharistic communion, they should engage in what Staniloae calls 'spiritual intercommunion', by means of common study, prayer, and action. As the Holy Spirit multiplies the connections between Christians, they will come to live the same life in Christ and arrive at unity in faith (Bordeianu 2011, 30).

All the Orthodox authors and official positions mentioned thus far converge in their commitment to dialogue in order to achieve unity of faith, a unity that will be enriched by the diverse gifts that churches bring as they grow together in Christ: 'speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love' (Eph. 4:15-16).

## Episcopal Communion

From an Orthodox perspective, episcopal communion represents an essential aspect of unity, given the bishop's role in the local eucharistic assembly and in ensuring communion with other local churches through synods. According to Afanasiev, the

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charism of the bishop is to stand in the same place that Jesus occupied at the Last Supper and the apostles occupied in early eucharistic assemblies. This charism results in a topological understanding of apostolic succession that emphasizes not so much private episcopal qualifications, as the liturgical space and community. The latter is significant for Afanasiev, who rediscovered the role of the laity in Orthodoxy. He affirmed that the early church regarded the rite of initiation as ordination into the royal priesthood, such that sacerdotal acts are celebrated by the entire church, clergy and 'laics' alike (Afanasiev 2007, 24–30, 248). Thus, the episcopal unity that the Orthodox seek places the bishop within the local eucharistic assembly of all the faithful, in communion with other churches today and going back to apostolic times (see also Zizioulas 2001). In light of this understanding of apostolicity and the priestly calling of all the faithful, one hopes that Orthodox laity will play a more central role in future ecumenical dialogues, compensating for an overemphasis on episcopal communion in current ecumenical discussions. Ecumenism in general and Orthodox ecumenism in particular suffers from an unhealthy clericalization and professionalization, even though the ecumenical movement had a pronounced lay character at its inception.

Another important Orthodox emphasis with regard to episcopal communion is on synodality. At synods, the bishop represents the faith of his community, then takes the decisions of the council back to his faithful and submits them to his diocese for reception. Unity is achieved by consensus not only among participant bishops, but also throughout the entire church. One should not idealize the system of synodality or misunderstand consensus as unanimity. All through history, and especially today when there are numerous overlapping jurisdictions within Orthodoxy, human weakness dominates over the principle of synodality. But history also shows that it is possible for local churches, represented by their bishops, to arrive at a common mind, the mind of the church, the mind of Christ.

Another aspect of synodality is prominent in the case of Orthodox–Catholic relations, namely its relationship with primacy. Recent national and international bilateral dialogues have addressed the most important question dividing the two churches: the role of the bishop of Rome in a united church. This is not simply a canonical issue. Papal primacy impacts on the understanding of the local church as embodying the fullness of the church (in communion with other local churches, of course). Orthodox and Catholics need to grow together in their understanding of various levels of primacy: local, regional, and universal. Does the local church still represent the fullness of the church when the universal ministry of the Pope is recognized? Are regional structures of authority necessary or do they contribute to the fragmentation of the church? How can papal authority strengthen the unity among local churches?

Episcopal communion might also be considered as simply a canonical issue. However, given the Orthodox understanding of the relationship between the bishop, the church, and the Eucharist described earlier, it needs to be recognized as truly theological: leaders of all local communities must deliberate communally, representing the faith of their local communities and, after a process of reception, facilitate the formulation of a unified faith.

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The Orthodox Liturgy invites participants to 'love one another that with one mind we may confess' the Creed, as a condition for receiving the Eucharist (Chrysostom 1985), illustrating the link between unity in love, faith, episcopacy, and the Eucharist. The need, however, for nuance in considering the relationship between these elements is discussed in the following section.

# Eucharistic Communion

Orthodox participants in the ecumenical movement consistently condemn the practice of intercommunion or eucharistic hospitality. As early as 1937, the Orthodox delegates at the Second World Conference of Faith and Order in Edinburgh affirmed that intercommunion 'must be considered the crowning act of real and true Reunion which has already been fully achieved by fundamental agreement in the realm of Faith and Order and is not to be regarded as an instrument for Reunion' (Limouris 1994, 16). According to this line of thinking, the Eucharist is a sign of unity, and only within a united church can it become a means to strengthen that unity. In today's divided Christianity, the inability of the Orthodox Church to share in the Eucharist with other churches is *the* sign of our disunity, for reasons which may be described as follows.

First, the Eucharist is a sign of unity in love. Christians are supposed to leave their gift before the altar, reconcile with one another, and then offer their gifts (Matt. 5:24). As churches are trying to reconcile with each other, it may be said that the gift is at the altar, waiting to be brought by Christians together. And yet, by the same logic, one wonders if churches should bring the gifts at all while they remain separated, since they all participate in the present disunity. Christians also need to reflect on the meaning of the Eucharist from a social perspective: even when members of the same church have full communion with one another, should the Eucharist not challenge the social injustice that sometimes clouds their relationships? How can they partake of the same Eucharist when there is oppression and discrimination? Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) offers encouragement to overcome divisions and to increase the love that comes from the Trinitarian communion: 'God does not receive the sacrifice of a person living in discord. He orders us to leave the altar and first to reconcile ourselves with our brother or sister, and in this way God may receive our prayers offered up in peace. The greatest sacrifice that we can offer God is our peace, our goodwill toward one another, a people gathered together in the unity that exists between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (*On the Lord's Prayer-De Dominica oratione* 23; FitzGerald and Bouteneff 1998, 135).

Second, eucharistic communion is a sign of unity in teaching. Given the liturgical connection between a common confession of faith and the Eucharist, as well as the practice of the early church to interrupt Eucharistic communion when serious dogmatic differences arose, Orthodox representatives have emphasized the need for doctrinal unity. There is, of course, a great deal of discussion about the degree of diversity that such unity entails, as well as regarding the issues that need resolution before eucharistic communion can take place. As previously stated, the list of church-dividing issues is evolving, and one of the greatest recent accomplishments of ecumenical dialogue has been the recognition of the common Christological faith of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, which unofficially and not uniformly sometimes share in the same Eucharist. This occurrence of intercommunion will remain confined to the grass-roots level until the

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bishops of the two churches normalize their relationships (Kinnamon and Cope 1997, 148).

Thus, the Eucharist is also a sign of episcopal communion. Theologically, the Eucharist cannot be separated from the bishop, who is the centre of the local eucharistic assembly, in communion with other local eucharistic assemblies. Unfortunately, in practice, canonical (or simply sinful human) divisions sometimes cloud the unity of the church. Even when there is no doctrinal division, local churches—or sometimes only their bishops—interrupt their eucharistic communion for non-theological reasons. Another issue that urgently needs a solution concerns the calendar. For example, Greece and Romania have adopted the Gregorian calendar, while Russia and Serbia still follow the old Julian calendar for fear that the new calendar is a Western influence, even though scientifically it is more accurate. There is eucharistic communion among these national churches, and for them the calendar is not a church-dividing issue, but within Greece and Romania there are schismatic groups that refuse to adopt the new calendar. They have established new synods and this break in episcopal communion has resulted in the break of eucharistic communion, leading to a paradoxical situation in which the calendar is a church-dividing issue *within* certain national churches but not *among* various national churches.

To understand fully the Orthodox attitude towards intercommunion, one has to look beyond official positions. According to John Jillions of the Orthodox Church in America, individual Orthodox theologians display one of two main attitudes: mainstream or prophetic. The foremost proponent of the mainstream view was Florovsky, and his vision has been adopted in all Orthodox ecumenical statements in a surprisingly consistent manner: the purpose of ecumenical discussions is to bring other Christians into the fullness of Orthodox faith and life. In the meantime, there can be no intercommunion (Jillions 2008, 159–163). A closer look at recent Orthodox theologians, however, shows that their understanding is not as monolithic as ecumenical statements might suggest.

In line with the prophetic view, Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944) called in 1934 for partial intercommunion among members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius (mainly Anglicans and Orthodox), based on their sharing in the same faith, as a result of their intense theological dialogue. Bulgakov noted that the members of the Fellowship shared the same faith more deeply than members of the congregations of either church, so he was not advancing a minimalist proposal. Bulgakov went even further, adding a structural aspect to his proposition: based on the model of autocephalous Orthodox churches, he advocated a union between Orthodoxy and other churches who would preserve their historical character (see Jillions 2008, 155–156). Other Christians preserved ‘a grain’ of Orthodoxy and their status as churches, since Christianity lives in the antinomy of simultaneous unity and division: schisms happened within the church, so non-Orthodox Christians are of the church (Bulgakov 2003, 56–57). Intercommunion is a logical consequence. It does not need to wait for the solution of dogmatic differences, and it



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offers a favourable climate for solving theological divisions and for common growth into Orthodox doctrine and life (Bulgakov 2003, 63–65).

Afanasiev's eucharistic ecclesiology holds a prominent place in the prophetic category. As already seen, he claimed that the early church had a eucharistic ecclesiology in which the eucharistic assembly of the local church was understood as containing the fullness of the church, and thus that the church exists wherever the Eucharist is celebrated. Although Catholics and Orthodox are separated, they celebrate the same Eucharist, the same ecclesial reality is present in both of them, and therefore they have never been essentially disunited. Afanasiev recommended that the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church work towards manifesting their still-existing unity by renewing their communion, sharing in the Eucharist, and postponing the solution of dogmatic divergences (including with regard to papal primacy) to a time when they would be able to address them in the spirit of love (Afanasiev 2003, 12–25; Bordeianu 2011, 189–196).

As Jillions shows, other theologians from the School of Paris advocated intercommunion before the solution of all dogmatic divergences for various reasons. Nicholas Zernov (1898–1980) proposed that Christians submit their ecumenical impasses to divine arbitration and allow God to bring them into unity, as opposed to trying to build that unity by human efforts (Jillions 2008, 171–174). Lev Zander (1893–1964) considered that other churches did not have the fullness of the faith, so prohibiting Orthodox participating in Western sacraments was understandable to him. However, he proposed that the Orthodox should invite others to share in the Orthodox fullness of the faith and in Orthodox sacraments, trusting the mystical power of the Spirit to act in the hearts of all Christians (Jillions 2008, 170–171). Anton Kartashev (1875–1960) considered that if intercommunion started out in just one place as an instance of ecumenical heroism, then it would spread to the entire church (Jillions 2008, 169–170).

One more theologian needs to be added to Jillions' list. John Zizioulas (1931–) has criticized the term 'intercommunion' as 'inept', since sharing in the Eucharist can only take place within a united church, not between churches that are not in full union. Appealing to the authority of Irenaeus, who affirmed that '*our doctrine* [i.e. the orthodox faith] *is agreed on the Eucharist, and the Eucharist confirms our doctrine*' (*Against Heresies* IV, 18, 5), Zizioulas contends that 'orthodoxy is unthinkable without the Eucharist' and that 'the Eucharist without orthodoxy is an impossibility'. In the present state of Christian disunity, there can be no eucharistic sharing, even though this situation is tragic and unnatural (Zizioulas 2001, 133, 257–258). If here his emphasis falls on the rejection of intercommunion, elsewhere Zizioulas emphasizes the tragic nature of our divided Christianity by questioning the very idea of denominationalism and denouncing the existence of separate denominational cultures in the same locality, where the Eucharist is supposed to strengthen the unity between people regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender (Zizioulas 1985, 259–260).

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The prophetic attitude towards ecumenism represents a healthy reminder that the mainstream view might place too much emphasis on academic, theological dialogue, and overlook the action of the Spirit in the church today, the common life in Christ that Christians already share, and the possibility of new forms of Christian unity. The merit of the mainstream position is that it compels Christians to continue their dialogue towards the goal of unity in faith, episcopacy, and full eucharistic communion.

## Conclusion

What then is the nature of the unity we seek? These diverse Orthodox perspectives converge towards the conclusion that the ultimate sign of unity is eucharistic communion. But the understandings of full unity and of the ways to reach it are varied. In their quest for full union, Christians should be encouraged by the progress made in recognizing the unity they already share thanks to their common baptism, confession of Jesus as Lord, and faith in the Trinity. Stemming from their common belonging to the *Una Sancta*, churches need to collaborate in love in order to be a sign of the Kingdom on earth and instruments of the full coming of the Kingdom. Christians also need to confess the same faith and to reach doctrinal unity, though uniformity is not the goal. To be fully united and to fulfil their missionary nature, churches need to enjoy common decision-making and unity among various local churches manifested by communion among their bishops. These forms of unity do not represent successive stages, clearly separated chronologically; rather, they mutually condition and enrich each other.

Regarding love, common teaching, and episcopal and eucharistic communion exclusively as signs of unity risks giving the impression that unity is an end in itself. Unity is, indeed, the goal of the ecumenical movement, but not the goal of the church's existence. In fact, Christian unity is a means, a necessary condition for fulfilling the missionary calling of the church: to live as a foretaste of the Kingdom by sharing life in Christ, as his Body, in the bond of the Spirit, as children of the Father.

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## Notes:

(<sup>1</sup>) Orthodox primarily understand the term 'local church' in this sense, though in the context of eucharistic ecclesiology 'local church' designates a diocese.

### Radu Bordeianu

Radu Bordeianu is an Associate Professor at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, USA, and a past president of the Orthodox Theological Society in America (2011-2013)

