

THE CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL OF ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

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1. "Ecumenical Baptism"

"Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid because of your Orthodoxy; do not be afraid because of being isolated and always in a small minority. Do not make compromises but do not attack others; do not be either defensive or aggressive; simply be yourself."¹

This could have been the advice given to me by my spiritual father as I began taking Master's level classes at Fuller, an Evangelical Seminary, as one of only two Orthodox students (the other a recent convert,) but it was not. It could have been the advice given me prior to preparing my response paper for the Society for Pentecostal Studies, but it was not. This was the wise counsel given to Bishop Kallistos Ware over thirty years ago by Father Amphilochios of Patmos (who had never himself been in the West) upon the approaching inevitability of Bishop Ware's departure from Orthodox monastic life to begin university teaching at Oxford. As a highly esteemed Orthodox teacher and ecumenist, Bishop Ware has obviously followed this advice. From my own extremely limited experience in theology, the Divine reassurance "Do not afraid!" of the Biblical call narratives is appropriate of the "call" to ecumenical dialogue as well.

The late Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann (1921-83) formerly Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, goes much further than most in calling the ecumenical encounter between Orthodoxy and the West a "failure" which cannot be concealed by the massive presence of Orthodox officials at ecumenical gatherings. A story he relates from what he refers to as his "ecumenical baptism" at the first assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948 helps to illustrate his point. He describes going through the typical registration process, during which he encountered a high ecumenical dignitary, who in a very friendly fashion informed him that all the Orthodox delegates would be seated to the extreme right of the hall, together with

¹ Bishop Kallistos Ware, "The Witness of the Orthodox Church", *Ecumenical Review* 52.01 (2000) p. 51.

all the representatives of the "high churches" like Swedish Lutherans, Old Catholics and Polish Nationals. Father Schmemmann explained that while he certainly had nothing against those excellent people, he wondered who had made that decision. The answer was that it simply reflected the "ecclesiological makeup" of the conference, in the dichotomy of the "horizontal" and "vertical" ideas of the Church, and that Orthodoxy was certainly more "horizontal" wasn't it? Father Schmemmann remarked that in all his studies he had never heard of such a distinction between horizontal and vertical, and that had the choice been up to him, he might have selected a seat at the extreme "left" with those whose emphasis on the Holy Spirit the Orthodox share (such as the Quakers). His point for sharing this reminiscence in his chapter "The Ecumenical Agony" was to illustrate that Orthodoxy joined a movement whose basic terms of reference were already defined. Before they realized it, the Orthodox theologians were caught in Western dichotomies: Catholic vs. Protestant, horizontal vs. vertical, authority vs. freedom, hierarchical vs. congregational, all deeply alien to Orthodox tradition, but all requiring response. Father Schmemmann believes the differences between East and West are not fundamentally differences over a limited number of doctrinal disagreements, but a deep difference in the fundamental Christian vision itself.²

The purpose of this paper is to examine the background and the underlying issues in what is now being called, either implicitly or explicitly, "the Orthodox problem" in ecumenical relationships, especially in the context of ecclesiology. In this article I will briefly trace the impetus and first sprouts of contact by the Eastern Orthodox in dialogue with western Christians in the early twentieth century. Secondly, I will examine some of the common challenges faced by Eastern Orthodox theologians in the ecumenical arena, after which I will discuss what the Orthodox mean by the terms "ecumenical" and "unity." Then I will present an overview of the

² Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979). pp. 193-201.

role which ecclesiology has played in ecumenical dialogue, with an emphasis on Eucharistic ecclesiology, and a subsequent related discussion of varying views among the Orthodox of communion and inter-communion. Finally, the Eastern notion of catholicity is shown to provide the necessity for dialogue and cooperation with western Christian traditions. I will conclude with some reflections and advice.

The Beginnings of Orthodox Ecumenism

The beginning of Orthodox ecumenical outreach dates back to the early twentieth century with two encyclicals from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The first, in 1902 urged the Orthodox churches to dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox churches as well as the "Western Church and the Churches of the protestants."³ The second, in 1920, was a call to all the churches to form a league of churches in fellowship for common action and witness, in order to see one another not 'as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives, as being part of the household of Christ, members of the same body and partakers of the promise of God in Christ.' (Eph 3.6)".⁴ Father Emmanuel Clapsis, Dean of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, believes this 1920 encyclical continues to be relevant for understanding the Orthodox because it wisely recognizes that unity demands not simply overcoming doctrinal differences, but "demands interchurch *diakonia* and common witness of God's love for the life of the world."⁵ This is a lovely thought and a worthy goal, but however much Christians work side by side in *diakonia*, (and they do!) it is ultimately the doctrinal differences which separate them.

One of the greatest concerns of Orthodox ecumenical involvement, especially in the World Council of Churches, is the issue of ecclesiology. Those Orthodox who believe that there should be no Orthodox participation in the WCC cite concerns that this "fellowship of churches" is becoming a super-

³available online at the website of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople:
http://www.patriarchate.org/encyclicals/patriarchal_encyclicals/Encyclical_1902.

⁴online: http://www.patriarchate.org/encyclicals/patriarchal_encyclicals/Encyclical_1920.

⁵ Emmanuel Clapsis, *Orthodoxy in Conversation* (Brookline, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Geneva, WCC Publications) pp. 1-3.

church or world church, compromising the ecclesiological claims of Orthodoxy. But many cite the Toronto Statement of 1950 as providing an acceptable framework to allow the Orthodox churches to participate fully in the WCC. The Toronto Statement asserted that "... membership [in the WCC] does not imply that each church must regard the other member churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word."⁶ Metropolitan John Zizioulas states unequivocally that the WCC has never been, and will never be a church with the marks of the *una sancta*, but that it still has ecclesiological significance for the building up of the Church, as a privileged instrument of God's reconciling grace.⁷

“Saul’s Armor”

One might view similarities between Orthodox ecumenical relationships and the story of David and Goliath from the Old Testament. As did young David, the Eastern churches have stepped up to the ecumenical challenge of presenting the Orthodox Christian faith to a sizeable, entirely Protestant council. Also expected was for the Orthodox to "put on" the western "armor" – which they were distressed to realize included fundamental differences in methodology, terminology, and structure. This unfamiliar "armor", like Saul's poorly fitting armor on David, has proven to be a burden rather than a benefit. It simply does not "fit" the way the Orthodox have lived out the reality of the Church, and must be thrown off in favor of the "whole armor of God," as did David. For the Orthodox Churches, this "whole armor of God" can only be the Apostolic and Patristic understanding of Church. Although it has not been systematized, it can be presented within its own theological milieu, apart from the poorly fitting, primarily Augustinian concepts, and the theological method of Scholasticism, which have had virtually no impact on Eastern theologies. Almost without exception one finds references to frustrations in Orthodox ecumenical dialogue expressed from both Orthodox and non-Orthodox. While the Orthodox who participate in ecumenical dialogues have encountered many significant and diverse challenges, for our purposes, we may observe at least four categories identified here:

⁶ Clapsis, *Conversation* pp. 3-4.

⁷ Clapsis, *Conversation* p. 5.

(1) Formulated in Western terms: Orthodoxy's current ecumenical relationships can be traced back to the first dialogues in the 1920's (Stockholm, 1925, and Lausanne, 1927) where the Orthodox were first asked to not only state their ecclesiological beliefs, but explain them in consistent theological terms. At this point there appeared a major difficulty which has continued to be the most significant difficulty in Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement. Dialogue always presupposes a common language and a shared understanding of the terms being used. In these first ecumenical dialogues, the Orthodox were faced with a situation in which they were being asked to provide the West, which had been theologically autonomous for centuries, with answers to questions formulated in Western terms, and often conditioned by experiences and situations which were only pertinent to the west. In addition to dogmatic differences, which are genuine and significant, the "agony" of Orthodox participation in ecumenism, according to Father Alexander Schmemmann, is the real obstacle of dialogue that is "reduced to categories familiar to the West, but hardly adequate to Orthodoxy."⁸ This situation has improved over the years, but is still a significant stumbling block to mutual understanding.

(2) Lack of magisterium and the question of identity: Compounding the problem is the perception of inconsistency in the way Orthodoxy "speaks." There is no magisterium, as in the Roman Catholic Church, by which or through which statements made by the Orthodox are considered to be definitive and final. This is predominantly because of the Orthodox theological paradigm that recognizes the limits of language, and led to the apophatic approach of the Christian East. Apophatic expression is as inseparable from the ontology of the Church as it is of the mystical experience of the transcendent God, and further complicates the field of engagement with the West, which looks for concrete, affirmative, propositional statements. At the very least, what the west has realized from ecumenical encounters with the Christian East is that there is no one Orthodox approach. A Lutheran introduction to

⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, "The Missionary Imperative in the Orthodox Tradition" in Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995) p. 197.

Orthodox theology considers that "Orthodox theology is neither as monolithic as it itself sometimes wants to be nor as monolithic as its critics claim it to be."⁹

In Orthodox theology, truth can be expressed by an individual, or a group, or a local church, but such an individual expression does not create dogma.¹⁰ Dogma always reflects an ecclesial consensus along the lines of the seven (out of the many) Church councils that were given the label "Ecumenical" (after the fact.) As these Ecumenical Councils illustrate, doctrinal definitions by the Orthodox Church have had a primarily negative role – that of preventing the spread of error. The dogmatic statements of the Councils are in themselves expressions of the apophatic approach of the East. Their aim was not to "exhaust the truth or freeze the teachings of the church into verbal formulae or systems, but only to indicate the "boundaries" of truth."¹¹ Father John Meyendorff (1926-1992), who was an active participant in ecumenical dialogue, indicates that this lack of an automatic, formal, or authoritarian way of articulating the Faith has caused embarrassment for the Orthodox theologians engaged in ecumenical dialogue, who look like subjectivists or liberals, but who on the other hand, out of their basic concern for truth and their unwillingness to surrender to doctrinal relativism, become associated with extreme conservatives.¹²

(3) A fundamentally different Christian vision: As the story from Father Schmemmann in the beginning of the article reminded us, differences between East and West are not fundamentally differences over a limited number of doctrinal disagreements, but a deep difference in the fundamental Christian vision itself.¹³ Ecumenism was done by Western theologians on their own terms and when the Orthodox joined this movement, the basic terms were already defined. And while the theological

⁹ F. von Lilienfeld, *Orthodoxe Kirchen* (Theologische Realenzyklopädie. (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995) p. 455, in Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness: Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959-1994* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997) p. 217.

¹⁰ John Meyendorff, "Doing Theology in an Eastern Orthodox Perspective" in Daniel Clendenin, ed. *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*. pp. 88-89.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² John Meyendorff, "Doing Theology in an Eastern Orthodox Perspective", pp 79-96.

¹³ Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979). pp. 193-201.

language is understood by the Orthodox, and while there may be agreement at one level, the *ethos* and experiences of Orthodoxy at another level make frustrating the discrepancy between formal agreements and the "totality of the Orthodox vision."¹⁴ Father Schmemmann sees as the ultimate problem in ecumenical discourse resulting from the breakdown in the West of any understanding and experience of *transcendence* – or rather, the Christian affirmation of both God's absolute *transcendence* and His *real presence*.¹⁵ Just as God's transcendence can never be defined by human language, the apophatic totality of the Orthodox Christian vision can never begin to be addressed in cataphatic doctrinal statements.

(4) A superficial view of Eastern contribution to ecumenism: In the early days of these encounters, the Orthodox wanted to discuss the West's deviation from the once-common faith and tradition, believing such discussion to be the "self-evident and essential condition for any further step."¹⁶ But the presupposition of the West was completely different. The West had long since forgotten any idea of being one-half of the Christian world. It remembered not its separation from the East, but its own separation into Catholic and Protestant camps, and used language of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. But Father Schmemmann points out that this does not mean Orthodox Christians were not greeted with genuine Christian love. Their presence as an "ancient" or "venerable" church with a rich liturgical tradition, became for the West a useful periodic infusion of the spiritual vitamins of liturgy, spirituality and mysticism.¹⁷ Orthodox Christianity continues to have a novelty quality – as, for example a Thai food restaurant in a suburban American city that will never really "fit into" the indigenous culture, but will always be regarded as an interesting, but essentially foreign experience.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 199.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 203.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 201.

¹⁷ Ibid.

An Orthodox Understanding of Ecumenism and Unity

What does "ecumenism" really mean? In its best sense, it hopes to express the universal message of the Gospel and the capacity of the Christian Faith to be accepted by the whole world, regardless of race or language. In this sense, it is very close to Eastern Orthodoxy, and is the primary reason the Byzantine Empire and the Patriarch of Constantinople were referred to as "Ecumenical." However, there is another form of "ecumenism" today which wants to gloss over all differences in faith and practice, to into what could be only be characterized as "pretending" to be unified. This is an unacceptable model for Orthodox participation. There must be an understanding that there can only be one Truth, one incarnate Logos revealed to the world, not many, conflicting, equally valid ideas about Truth. In a recent speech on the topic of Ecumenism, Petros VII, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria and Africa states:

The Orthodox Church of Christ seeks and desires dialogue with all other heterodox Churches, based on equal conditions and provided it be conducted in the fear of God and the witness of the One Divine Truth ... The Church does not hold a part of the Truth, but the whole Truth; because Christ, who is the Head of the Church, is the Truth."¹⁸

Because the word "ecumenical" can be ambiguous, Father Schmemmann prefers instead to use the admittedly "slightly outmoded" term "mission." It is the "mission" of the Church, he says, to "make Orthodoxy known, understood and, with God's help, accepted in the West." This missionary task must be guided by two equally important and interdependent imperatives: "to emphasize Truth as the only genuine ground of all 'ecumenical' concern, and a real openness to Western Christian values."¹⁹

The late Father Georges Florovsky (1893-1979), a pioneer in bringing the Orthodox Church into the ecumenical movement had in mind that the Orthodox Church would be the standard of Christianity reaching out beyond its own perimeters to touch the heterodox religious world. The ultimate desire of the Orthodox is the reconciliation of all Christians to Orthodoxy, but not as subject to jurisdiction or

¹⁸ Presented by His Beatitude, Petros VII, Patriarch of Alexandria and Africa, September 1, 1998 at the 12th International Convention "People and Religions", Bucharest, Romania. Available online: <http://www.roea.org/9810/ho00004.html>

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 123.

center of power²⁰ she merely "wishes to make each one understand."²¹ Diversity is necessary for there to be true catholicity, and although Orthodoxy may encompass different cultural patterns, many different ways of worship, and even varying outward polity, it cannot permit diversity in "matters of faith." In the words of Bishop Kallistos Ware, and consistent with the majority (if not all) contemporary Orthodox theologians involved in ecumenical dialogue, "before there can be reunion among Christians, there must first be full agreement in faith: this is a basic principle for Orthodox in all their ecumenical relations."²²

The Church as the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit can only be one. Quoting Bishop Ware again, "The Orthodox Church in all humility believes itself to be the 'one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church', of which the Creed speaks. There are divisions among Christians, but the Church itself is not divided nor can it ever be."²³ Throughout the history of the Church every division has been viewed as a separation from Christ's Body. There have always been schisms in the life of the Church, but the Church always emphasized unity and advanced canons safeguarding such. In the third century, those who separated themselves from the communion of the *una sancta*, were, according to Cyprian, entirely excluded from grace.²⁴ Cyprian's teaching: *outside the Church there is no salvation* meant that God's saving power is mediated to humans in his Body, the Church. For Bishop Ware, this is a tautology, because salvation is the Church.

Although the Church never refuted Cyprian's teaching on this issue, the practice of the Church has spoken otherwise. Father Georges Florovsky points out that there are occasions when "by her very actions, the Church gives one to understand that the sacraments of sectarians – and even heretics – are valid, that the sacraments can be celebrated outside the strict canonical limits of the Church."²⁵ By this he means that in her practice, the Church has received adherents from sects by chrismation (without re-baptism) by which an ecclesiological judgment is made about the validity of the sacramental life of those

²⁰ Ware. *The Orthodox Church*, p. 309.

²¹ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 214.

²² Ware. *The Orthodox Church*, p. 309-310.

²³ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 246.

²⁴ Clapsis, *Conversation* p. 6- 7.

²⁵ Florovsky, "The Limits of the Church" in *Sourozh* no. 26, 1986, p. 14. in Clapsis, *conversation* p. 7.

other churches. Father Florovsky speaks of the "mystical territory" of the Church extending beyond "her canonical borders." He describes certain bonds, such as "right belief, sincere devotion, the word of God, and above all the grace of God" which are still unbroken, even though there is schism. For Father Florovsky, there is something of God connecting every schismatic and heretical community with the life of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. What is valid in the sects, he says, is that which is in them from the Church.²⁶

In this understanding, Bishop Ware agrees. He notes that by God's grace, the Orthodox Church possesses the fullness of truth but many people may be members of the Church who are not visibly so. Despite outward separation, there may be invisible bonds.²⁷ Russian Orthodox theologian, Alexei Khomiakov (1804-1860), in his influential ecclesiological essay, *The Church is One* also refers to individuals connected to the Church by the "ties which God has not willed to reveal to her" and insists that the Orthodox Church should not stand in judgment of others – she acts and knows only within her own limits – and "only looks upon those as excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves."²⁸

Most contemporary Orthodox theologians teach unequivocally that the Orthodox Church is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, but few are so quick to call other Christian churches void of God's salvific presence and action. Stated another way by Father Clapsis, "the communal consciousness of the Church never accepted the equation of its canonical limits with its charismatic boundaries."²⁹ Irenaeus, the second century bishop of Lyons, said that where the Spirit is, there is the Church. Since the Holy Spirit blows where it wants, Bishop Ware insists that we can know where the Church is, but we

²⁶ Clapsis, *Conversation* p. 6.

²⁷ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997) pp 246-247.

²⁸ Alexey Stephanovich Khomiakov, *The Church is One*, (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1968).

²⁹ Clapsis, *Conversation* p. 116–117.

cannot be sure where it is not. One who is not visibly within the Orthodox Church is not necessarily damned, as not everyone who is visibly within the Church is necessarily saved.³⁰

What are the limits of the Church? Metropolitan John Zizioulas writes that Orthodox theology does not yet have a solution to the problem of the limits of the Church. Even in his painstakingly complete treatment of eucharistic ecclesiology, he suggests that it is baptism which creates the limits, and that "within this baptismal limit it is conceivable that there may be division, but any division within these limits is not the same as the division between the Church and those outside the baptismal limit."

Eucharistic Communion

Eucharistic ecclesiology, such as that of Afanassieff, Congar, and Zizioulas, considers the eucharistic fellowship, at which the bishop presides is constitutive for the Church's being, and has found a prominent ecumenical expression in the Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogues. It has been especially helpful in the Orthodox-Roman Catholic joint statement of 1982. But ecclesiology in general has not played such a significant role in the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue, as Risto Saarinen astutely observes. He calls "eucharistic ecclesiology" the "ecclesiological point of departure" of most Orthodox writers, as opposed to the proponents of "Orthodox School Theology" (such as that represented by the Russian Orthodox) in which the episcopacy (bishops as successors of the apostles and thus are the canonical heads) is constitutive of the church. Saarinen laments that the Orthodox-Lutheran dialogue could have been more fruitful with the Eucharistic ecclesiological model, if not for the Russian participation. In fact, he observes that the strongest theologian (in the 1980's) of the Russian delegation, Archbishop Mihail, "refused to affirm any specific ecclesiological doctrine"³¹ because there is "no common, generally accepted and completely adopted definition" of the reality of the church.³² Saarinen even asks whether there is an endemic "ecclesiological deficit" in Orthodoxy, despite the stagnation caused by the

³⁰ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997) pp 246-247.

³¹ Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness*, p. 258.

³² Archbishop Michail, in Leningrad 1983, 2, (in which he apparently directly criticizes Afanisiev's eucharistic ecclesiology, according to Saarinen.) in Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness* p 258.

proponents of "school theology". He even cites what he has perceived as a "*lack of interest* towards developing concrete ecclesiology."³³ Of course, what Saarinen describes as problematic in these encounters is indicative of the same "agony" of Orthodox ecumenical dialogue as described by Father Schmemmann previously: the Orthodox feeling forced to use western models to circumscribe what is ultimately indefinable. The Church is far more than any definition and even when a model is found to be helpful (such as "eucharistic ecclesiology") it is not the totality of Truth (Christ) as expressed in the Church.

Along these lines is a statement made by Bishop Mihail of the Russian Orthodox Church in Lutheran-Orthodox dialog during the period 1967-1971 (Arnoldshain III) which was affirmed as "exceptional in its ecumenical and irenic outlook".³⁴ He stated that the Russian Orthodox Church does consider the individual Christians belonging to the Evangelical Church (EKD) as members of the Body of Christ, but that through some subjective, or more often, objective reasons, they "do not receive that grace which the fullness of grace which is given by the Orthodox Church to its members."³⁵ This statement (and the corresponding Lutheran statement) was considered very useful theologically, because it clearly stated the ecumenical problem.³⁶

Generally speaking, Eucharistic communion in Eastern Orthodoxy is the sign of the fullness of doctrinal unity, not the means to unity. Bishop Maximos Aghiorgoussis (now Metropolitan of Pittsburgh), in an article related to his bilateral Orthodox-Catholic dialogue on the topic of the Eucharist, notes that the acceptance or rejection of the sacraments of a given church depends on the acceptance or the rejection of its "ecclesiality." With regard specifically to the Roman Catholic West, he states that it has not been the practice of the Christian East to condemn Roman Catholic ecclesiality nor to condemn

³³ Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness* p. 263. (emphasis his).

³⁴ Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness*. pp. 98-99.

³⁵ Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness*. p. 99.

³⁶ There were many other issues in the Orthodox-Lutheran dialogue as presented by R. Saarinen, which were of substantial significance: the issue of "*synergeia*" ("participation", "co-workers") with God; the nature of "sacrifice" in the Eucharist, ("bloodless", "spiritual"), the nature of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, apostolicity, and salvation vs. justification.

their communion as invalid, but that dogmatic differences prevent inter-communion. Citing (and paraphrasing) Demetrios Chomatenos, Archbishop of Bulgaria, writing to Konstantinos Kabasilas, Archbishop of Dyrrachion in the 13th century: "We can forgive the cultural differences of the Latins. What we cannot forgive is the falsification of the dogma of the Fathers with the addition of the *Filioque* clause to the creed. 'Whoever forgives this, is unforgivable.' Concerning the Latin Eucharist, we cannot consider it common bread, in spite of the unleavened bread they use. However, the fact that their communion is true (valid), does not mean that we can receive their communion. 'But as they consider our gifts as holy gifts, we also consider their gifts to be holy.'"³⁷

What is most helpful in Metropolitan Aghiorgoussis' study is his summary of the three prevailing tendencies within Orthodoxy concerning the subject of inter-communion, and additionally his own expressed opinion, which is most noteworthy in regard to his continued work in ecumenical dialogue. Although this particular article pre-dates many of the Orthodox-Roman Catholic bilateral dialogues³⁸, his categorization of the positions is still quite *apropos*. First, what Metropolitan Aghiorgoussis calls the "liberal view" is represented by the late Hamilcar Alivizatos, Professor of Canon Law at the University of Athens, which believes that the sacraments of other churches are valid because they are the work of the Holy Spirit, present in other churches. Intercommunion may therefore be practiced especially in earnest need (*oikonomia*) and where there is a valid priesthood and the same doctrine concerning the Eucharist as the Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Aghiorgoussis disagrees, indicating that in his love for those for whom Christ shed His blood, "Professor Alivizatos failed to consider communion in its aspect as manifestation of ecclesial fullness and commitment to the Lord as the Truth of God." It would be an

³⁷ Demetrios Chomatenos in G. Rallis and M. Potlis, *Syntagma tōn theiōn kai ierōn kanonōn*, vol 5 (Athens, 1855) pp 430-434 in Maximos Aghiorgoussis, "The Holy Eucharist in Ecumenical Dialogue: An Orthodox View" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 13.2 Spring 1976.

³⁸ For example, the Munich document of the Joint Commission for theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches (1982), entitled "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity" is a significant step towards mutual understanding.

"act of disobedience to the Lord (the Truth) to participate in the Eucharist of another church if the total truth of Christ is not represented."³⁹

The "ultra-conservative view" is relayed by Metropolitan Aghiorgoussis in the work of Ieronymos Kotsonis, former Professor of Canon Law at the University of Thessalonike, and former Archbishop of Athens. He applies the ancient canons regarding schismatics and heretics to contemporary Christians. Simply put, those who are not in communion with Orthodoxy do not have the Holy Spirit, who works exclusively within the canonical boundaries of the Orthodox Church. This applies with regard to both leniency in times of need (*economia*) and strictness (*akribeia*) (except in a "return" to Orthodoxy).⁴⁰ Metropolitan Aghiorgoussis believes that this position is not only difficult to sustain, but it is almost a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit to not acknowledge its workings among other Christians.

Finally, what Metropolitan Aghiorgoussis considers the "realistic" position with regard to the Eucharist of other Christians is presented in the work of the late Father Nicholas Afanassieff, another Professor of Canon Law, who taught at the Saint Sergius Russian Orthodox Institute in Paris. He believes the same Eucharist is celebrated on the Orthodox and Roman Catholic altar – the one Eucharist of the Church, the unbroken link which unites invisibly despite visible separation between the two churches. However, he does not suggest "intercommunion" due to the doctrinal and canonical problems which must first be resolved in order to become a visible and manifest reality. Metropolitan Aghiorgoussis agrees with this position, but adds that this view should be extended to include all Christians who share in the one Eucharist of Christ along with the Eastern Orthodox Church. Since this particular article is in regard to a specific bilateral dialogue, he cites the lifting of anathemas of 1054 between Rome and Constantinople in 1965. This prophetic act did not abolish the schism, but "put an

³⁹ Ibid. p. 207

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 208.

end to whatever is the cause of that schism: mutual hatred and misunderstandings."⁴¹ In other words, there was a mutual recognition of each other's ecclesiality, and even further: Vatican II resulted in the official offering of the Roman Catholic communion to the Orthodox,⁴² but there has been no such official stance from the Orthodox in regards to offering communion to Roman Catholics.⁴³

Metropolitan Aghiorgoussis concludes with his hope that the primacy of Rome will move toward "universal service" (*diakonia*) not "universal jurisdiction" in order to pave the way for full communion. Again, my own observation is that however real is our shared Christian *diakonia*, the barriers to intercommunion remain primarily doctrinal. And as such, Metropolitan Aghiorgoussis hopes that Rome will "undertake an in-depth study of the procession of the Holy Spirit and that eventually it will return to a pre-Augustinian theology and doctrine on the Holy Trinity."

Bishop Ware also discusses and rejects the concept of "intercommunion" between separated Christian bodies for the same reason, citing that most Orthodox believe that "communion at the Lord's Table ...cannot be used as a means to secure unity in the faith, but must come as the consequence and crown of a unity already attained."⁴⁴ He further qualifies the basic Orthodox standpoint by adding that there is no form of sacramental fellowship short of full communion. Either churches are fully in communion with one another, or they are not. This basic attitude is expressed in a variety of ways in actual practice. There are some who believe the Orthodox view of sacraments is too rigid and should move toward a more open policy. Most would disagree with this liberal approach and would allow exceptions based on pastoral judgment which might permit 'intercommunion' where a non-Orthodox

⁴¹ Citing Karmiris, *Ta Dogmatika* vol. 2 (Athens, 1968), pp. 1026-1030. in Aghiorgoussis, *The Holy Eucharist* p. 209.

⁴² See Walter Abbot, S.J., *The Documents of Vatican II*, trans. by Msgr. Joseph Gallagher (New York, 1966), pp. 357-361. in Aghiorgoussis, *The Holy Eucharist* p. 209.

⁴³ A short-lived exception to this occurred in 1969 when Patriarch Alexei II and the Sacred Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, proclaimed their desire to allow Byzantine Catholics to receive Holy Communion in Russian Orthodox Churches.

⁴⁴ Ware. *The Orthodox Church*, p. 310.

might be allowed to receive the Eucharist from an Orthodox priest with special permission from the Orthodox bishop.⁴⁵

An Eastern Notion of Catholicity

Father Thomas Hopko, the recently retired Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, refers to the Orthodox Church as a "Theandric mystery" which "exists in space and time" as a sacramental reality, "a divine reality with a human form made divine by grace." The human form is deified by the Holy Spirit of Christ, therefore becoming "adequate to God" through Christ and the Holy Spirit."⁴⁶ In confessing itself to be the one catholic Church of God, it identifies itself with the one catholic Church in history and claims there is an absolute identity and continuity of this Church from the time of the apostles to the present day.⁴⁷ Because of this identity, the Church "affirms the legitimacy and necessity of its separation from all other Christian confessions on the basis of its inability to identify itself, and so the catholic Church of all ages, with these communions."⁴⁸ As referenced earlier, he agrees it is due to distortions and deviations in "essential doctrines and practices which block man's way to perfect communion with God when they are accepted and practiced." This perfect fullness, or divine catholicity, is exactly what the Orthodox Church claims about itself, and is concerned that members of other confessions will be frustrated in their search for perfect communion with God. In other words, says Hopko, there are "human forms" in other confessions which are "not adequate or proper to God."⁴⁹

But it is exactly this catholicity of the Orthodox Church which forces it into sacramental separation because there is not an essential identity of Christian faith and life, which is the same factor compelling her to "affirm in other Christian bodies – and indeed when possible, in all religions and philosophies and in all human thoughts and actions – what is positively true and good in them." The

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Hopko, *All the Fullness of God*, (Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), p. 93.

⁴⁷ Thomas Hopko, *Fullness*, p. 99.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 99.

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp 99-100.

Orthodox Church is composed of sinful and unworthy persons who become participants in the fullness of God (Eph. 3.19, Col 1.19) and the Orthodox Church **must** affirm the elements of the catholic fullness of God remaining in other Christian communities, whose members hunger and thirst for this same fullness. It is the same catholicity which necessitates sacramental separation which at the same time propels the Orthodox Church to "recognize these bodies as originally of the catholic Church, possessing, practicing and preaching many things in common with it."⁵⁰ Therefore, the Orthodox **must** enter into ecumenical relations with other traditions, even though it is difficult and painful. It is God's will to "restore them to the catholic fullness of the Church of the Most Blessed Trinity."⁵¹

Conclusion - "Three Sisters" and "Three Brothers"

The term "sister churches" was common in the earliest Christian centuries, and even alluded to in Holy Scripture, "Greetings to you from the children of your sister (ἀδελφή) the chosen one." (2 John 13). As the parent of three now-grown daughters, it has been interesting to observe the interactions of these sisters, based on mutual love, a desire to share their gifts, and a common familial bond. From childhood and even now, their relationships are a microcosm of "ecumenical" (to use the term very loosely!) unity in diversity – especially the sometimes long and emotional discussions which uncover and resolve misunderstandings, and those discussions which have set the ground rules for "play" – in order to be a unified and loving family.

Similarly, Khomiakov used the example of three brothers to make a point about the relationship of Orthodoxy to other Christian communities. The master departed and left the teaching to his three disciples. The eldest preserved the teaching without addition or subtraction. The second added to the teaching, and the third removed from the original teaching. When the master returned, he was not angry, but instructed the two younger brothers to thank the eldest, for without him, the truth would not have

⁵⁰ Ibid. pp 100-101.

⁵¹ Ibid.

been preserved. He told the oldest to thank the younger two, for without them, he would not have understood the truth. The Orthodox, in all humility, see themselves as the eldest brother, entrusted with protecting the truth. The Orthodox have not been part of the debates of scholasticism; Reformation and Counter-Reformation have not been part of their language. There are many in western Christian circles who are recognizing the value of what Eastern Orthodoxy brings to the western Christian world, in her questioning of Latin forms of Christianity, and especially in what Orthodoxy believes is the preservation of the apostolic Faith in a visible, living Tradition. But this is only one side of the coin. There has been much that the Orthodox churches have learned from their western brothers and sisters in the way the Faith is to be lived in the world. Orthodoxy has better understood the Truth that she has faithfully preserved through the witness of western Christian churches.

What remains as a sensitive issue in ecumenical circles is the desire for shared Eucharist. In Orthodoxy, the vast majority believes this is not possible until doctrinal unity is achieved. While shared Communion is not possible now, it is inconsistent with Orthodoxy to deny all ecumenical contact, or to deny that the grace of the Holy Spirit works outside of her canonical boundaries. Following Bishop Ware, Metropolitan Zizioulas and Metropolitan Aghiorgoussis, I would agree that Orthodoxy needs a better defined baptismal ecclesiology (reclaiming the Paschal and Pentecostal dimensions) perhaps only to balance the overemphasis on the eschatological dimension of the Church, as found in Eucharistic ecclesiology. As Metropolitan John Zizioulas' work greatly aided both the bilateral Orthodox-Lutheran and the Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogues and statements, a better-articulated perspective on sacramental Baptism as the "limits" of the Church would be very beneficial in future dialogues with all Christian traditions.

It is undeniable that great progress has been made in ecumenical relations since the first formal Orthodox involvement in the early 20th century. Brotherly and sisterly understanding has increased on all sides. A sure sign of this is a significant move by the World Council of Churches in 1999 to assemble a "Special Commission" to undertake an in-depth examination of the crisis in Orthodox participation when it

finally became apparent that the "Orthodox Problem" neither originates nor lies with the Orthodox, but is a fundamental problem in WCC structures. As WCC general secretary Konrad Raiser said at the Commission's inaugural meeting, "never before in its fifty years of history has the WCC taken its Orthodox member churches as seriously".⁵² Another reason to be optimistic that the Orthodox are being heard and responded to as serious participants on the ecumenical scene is the 2001 installation of an Orthodox layperson, Mrs. Elenie Huszagh, as President of the National Council of Churches.⁵³

Issues that do not serve God too often divide differing ecclesial traditions unnecessarily. Often the root of these divisions are cultural, political, or nationalistic interests which create a type of fundamentalist "us versus them" exclusion. Any process of "ecumenical learning" must first begin with a critical look inward, and then must continue in brotherly and sisterly love. As Saint Paul reminded the Church at Corinth, "Look at what is before your eyes. If you are confident that you belong to Christ, remind yourself of this, that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we." (2 Cor 10.7) And so it is fitting to conclude where I began, with Bishop Kallistos Ware. The last sentence in his chapter entitled: "The Reunion of Christians" in *The Orthodox Church* is a most fitting admonition for brothers and sisters of all Christian traditions, and is simply: "We have everything to gain by continuing to talk to each other."⁵⁴

⁵² See: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/special-01-e.html>

⁵³ It is also noteworthy that Mrs. Huszagh is not the first Orthodox to hold this position, (Very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky of the Orthodox Church in America served from 1990-1991) but she is the first Orthodox woman and only one of five laypersons to serve as president in the Council's history.

⁵⁴ Ware. *The Orthodox Church*, p. 327.