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“CALLED TO BE THE ONE CHURCH”

by

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Without any doubt ecclesiology, in our times, still remains the crucial issue for Christian theology in ecumenical perspective.¹ In the growing number of interchurch theological dialogues, a consequence of the ecumenical movement, this special topic of theology becomes more and more the focus of interest in modern theological research. At the same time, it becomes evident that the vast spectrum of ecclesiology in theological study assumes a concrete shape and a specific expression. As a response to the challenge to intensify interchurch relations or to make theology more explicitly relevant and concrete for the modern world, ecclesiology today becomes the meeting point for church-centered ecumenism and church centered theology.

Thus it is not astonishing that such rich theological production has been manifest in this area of ecumenical theology during the past decades. One cannot fail to appreciate the intense ecclesiological research work based on sound biblical premises and historical-patristic studies. Ecclesiology has therefore contributed not only to a better understanding between divided Christian Churches and confessional denominations, but also towards a more complete self-understanding on the part of each confession; and indeed, it has given a new impetus for the renewal of Christian theology itself.²

The new question is how to evaluate this extremely rich ecumenical heritage of the past and use it in an appropriate comprehensive and synthetic way, not so much for producing further statements of confessional ecclesiological positions-this only risks repeating positions which are already well-known - but rather to reflect on an ecclesiological renewal both in ecumenism and in theological work. It seems to me that our task at this moment is to use this enormous ecclesiological literature and attempt to find a new type of ecclesiological approach, with the intention of promoting an ecclesiology *of more convergence, giving more ecclesiological space* for discussion, study and mutual enrichment between our one-sided ecclesiological positions. It is precisely this kind of ecclesiological approach, which is behind or rather at the basis of such pre-consensus documents as the Porto Alegre Assembly Statement on Ecclesiology *“Called to be the One Church.”* The Statement indicates precisely where we are today on the ecumenical scene in the quest for the unity of the Church: *“..the relationship among churches is dynamically interactive. Each church is called to mutual giving and receiving gifts and to mutual accountability. Each church must become aware of all that is provisional in its life and have the courage to acknowledge this to other churches.*

¹ Cf. Ioannis Karmiris, *Orthodox Ecclesiology*, V and VI, Athens 1973, 7 (in Greek). See also O. Dibelius, *Das Jahrhundert der Kirche*, Berlin, 1927; J.R. Nelson and K.D. Schmidt, in : T. Rendtorff, *Kirche und Theologie*, Gütersloh, 1966, p.11; W.A. Visser't Hooft, *Teachers and the Teaching Authorities*, WCC Publications, Geneva, pp. 35-40.

² Cf. Nikos A. Nissiotis, *The Church as a sacramental vision and the challenge of Christian witness*, in Gennadios Limouris, (ed.), *Church, Kingdom, World: The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign*, Geneva: WCC, 1986.

*Even today, when Eucharistic sharing is not always possible, divided churches express mutual accountability and aspects of catholicity when they pray for one another, share resources, assist one another in times of need, make decisions together, work together for justice, reconciliation, and peace, hold one another accountable to the discipleship inherent in baptism, and maintain dialogue in the face of differences, refusing to say "I have no need of you" (1 Cor12:21). Apart from one another we are impoverished."*³

The Christian world's quest for unity is one with its quest for the Church. All who have been challenged by the important topic of ecclesiology, emerging also from the bilateral and multilateral theological dialogues of the Christian Church, which work for this reality must therefore ask themselves what kind of unity this is to be or, in other words, what nature the Church has so that it might correspond to God's will and plans for our salvation. Of course, there are conflicting assessments concerning the nature of the Church's unity, the role of the Church and its ecclesiastical and ecclesiological inner structure and tradition.

However, there are some common features that are particular to the theology emanating from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church – a common historic framework, sometimes a continuity in tradition, an overall influence of Greek-Roman philosophy – particularly in Europe – sometimes a similarity in worship and a common consciousness in preserving, nurturing and developing the theological tradition of the Church.

Therefore, debates on unity become the focus of ecclesiological discussions in the ecumenical arena today. But diversity on the ecclesiological foundations of unity today remains the main obstacle for doctrinal agreement between the various Churches.

1. The Church is One!

Orthodox affirm that the Church is *One*, even though it is manifested in many places. Orthodox ecclesiology operates with a plurality in unity and a unity in plurality. There is no either/or between the one and the many.⁴ No attempt is made, or should be made, to subordinate the many to the one nor the one to the many. It is both canonically and theologically correct to speak of the Church and the Churches, and vice versa. It is impossible for the Roman Catholic ecclesiology because of the double papal claim for universal jurisdiction and infallibility.⁵ The same must be said of the Protestant ecclesiologies, which connect the notion of the Church with denominationalism and distinguish between the one and the many in terms of the invisible and the visible Church.⁶ Also for the Orthodox, the Church is both catholic and local, invisible and visible, the *one and many*. To explain what lies behind this ecclesiological unity in multiplicity, one needs to deal with the Orthodox understanding of the very nature of the Church.

One of the greatest "*ecumenical*" difficulties facing the Orthodox Church is that its thought forms and "*terms of reference*" are different from those of the West. And since the ecumenical movement was primarily shaped by Western theological presuppositions and antecedents, Orthodox participants were, from the very beginning, forced to express their positions and points of view within a theological framework alien to, or at least different from, the Orthodox Tradition.⁷ The Orthodox East has neither been challenged by the politico-ecclesiological

³ Para 7#.

⁴ Cf. George Dion. Dragas, *Orthodox Ecclesiology in Outline*, in : *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 26-3, 1981.

⁵ Cf. To the Protestant model.

⁶ Cf. To the Roman Catholic understanding and model.

⁷ The Church always remained and remains free from the "*polemical*" and "*definitional*" ecclesiology which underlies the Western *De Ecclesia*, whether in its Roman Catholic or Protestant forms, and which conditions to a great

controversies typical of the Western Middle Ages nor by the Reformation or the second Reformation.

The Church, in other terms, is not an "essence" or "being", distinct as such from God, man (*anthropos*), and the world, but is the very reality of *Christ in us* and *us in Christ*, a new mode of God's presence and action in His creation, of creation's life in God. The Church is God's gift and humankind's (*anthropos*) response and appropriation of this gift. It is union and unity, knowledge, communion (*koinonia*) and transfiguration. And apart from the "content", the "form" has no meaning. Orthodox ecclesiology, rather than precise definitions or forms, conditions and modalities, is an attempt to present an *eikon* of the Church as *life in Christ* – an *eikon* which in order to be adequate and true must draw on all aspects of the Church and not only on the institutional one. The Church is not only a human *institution or organism*, but it is also a divine *mystery*, and it is this mystery that gives meaning and life to the institution and therefore is the object of ecclesiology.

2. The Church as new creation: the cosmic and the eschatological

Orthodox ecclesiology traditionally sees the beginning of the Church in paradise and its life as the manifestation of the Kingdom of God; Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow in his works writes: "*the history of the Church begins with the history of the world. The very creation of the world can be seen as preparation for the creation of the Church because the end for which the kingdom of nature was established is in the Kingdom of Grace*". Such an attempt must probably begin with the Church to be considered or referred as *new* creation. Thus, the basic dimensions of Orthodox ecclesiology according to Fr Alexander Schmemmann are *cosmic* and *eschatological*.⁸

On the one hand, in Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, the new Adam, creation not only finds redemption and reconciliation with God, but also fulfilment in the Kingdom. Christ is the Word, the Logos, the Life of all life, and this life, which was lost because of sin, is restored and communicated in Christ, in His incarnation, death, resurrection, and glorification, to man (*anthropos*) and through him to the whole creation.⁹ The event of Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, is not a mere establishment of an institution endowed with specific powers and authority. It is the inauguration of the new age, the beginning of eternal life, the revelation of the Kingdom which is *joy and peace in the Holy Spirit*.

Thus, the Church is the continuing presence of Pentecost as the power of sanctification and transfiguration of all life, as *grace* which is knowledge of God, communion with Him and, in Him, with all that exists. The Church is the new creation as renewed by Christ and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. It is a *life in communion/koinonia*¹⁰ in its full reality and richness of the expression, a participation in Trinitarian communion which constitutes that unity of the Body of the

degree the ecumenical debate on the Church. In our own "sources" – the Church Fathers, the Ecumenical Councils and Local Synods, the Liturgy – we do not find any formal definition of the Church, or at least there are many different ecclesiastical teachings and views. This is not because of any lack of ecclesiological interest and consciousness, but because the Church cannot be defined or described apart from the very content of its life.

⁸ Cf. Alexander Schmemmann read a paper "Ecclesiological Notes" at the Institute for Contemporary Theology in Montreal, July 1965; it was published in: *St Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1967, pp. 35-39.

⁹ N. Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ* III, in: P.G. 150, 350; See also Gennadios Limouris, *Nicolas Cabasilas, Theology and Spirituality*, Strasbourg France 1983, p. 460; St Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60, in: P.G. 90, 621AB; V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, James Clarke, Cambridge & London 1973, pp. 135-136; St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5,14,1, in: A. Roberts, J. Donaldson and A.C. Coxe, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF)*, 10 vols., New York 1885-1897,1:54; D.O.Rousseau, *Incarnation et Anthropologie en Orient et en Occident*, in: *Irénikon* 26 (1953), p. 366.

¹⁰ Cf. Boris Bobrinskoy, *Le Mystère de la Trinité*, Editions du Cerf, Paris 1986, pp.12-23.

incarnate Logos by the empowering force and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. ¹¹In the sense it could be said that the "Trinity is our social programme." ¹²

But, on the other hand, the kingdom which Christ inaugurates and the Holy Spirit fulfils is *not of this world*. "This world", by rejecting and condemning Christ, has condemned itself; no one therefore can enter to the Kingdom without in a real sense dying to the world, i.e. rejecting it in its self-sufficiency, without putting all faith, hope, and love in the "age to come", in the "day without evening" dawning at the end of time. "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). This means that although the Church abides in the world, its real life is a constant expectation and anticipation of the world to come, a preparation for it, a passage into reality which in this world can be experienced only as future, as promise and token of things yet to come. The fruits of the Spirit (e.g. joy, peace, holiness, vision, knowledge) are real, but their reality is that of the joy which a traveller experiences when, at the end of a long journey, he finally sees the beautiful city where he is going – which, however, he has yet to enter. The Church now reveals, and truly bestows, the Kingdom which is to come, and creation becomes new when it dies to itself as "this world" and becomes thirst and hunger for the consummation for all things in God.

Therefore, it is true that the mystery of the Church as new creation in its two dimensions – the *cosmic* and *eschatological* – reveals to us the meaning and structure of the Church as human and divine *institution*. The nature of the institution can be called *sacramental*. This means not only a given or static inter-dependence between the visible and the invisible, nature and grace, the material and the spiritual, but also, and primarily, the dynamic essence of the Church as passage from the *old* into the *new*, from this world into the world to come, from the kingdom of nature into the Kingdom of Grace.

Thus, the Church, as visible human-divine society and organism, belongs to this world; it is truly a part of it. The Church must belong to it because it is "instituted" to represent and to stand for the world, to assume the whole creation. It belongs thus to the very "institution" of the Church to be a people, a community, a family, an organisation, a nation, a hierarchy; to assume, in other words, all the natural forms of human existence in the world, in time and space. However, it is an organic continuity with the whole of human life, with the totality of human history. It is the *pars pro toto* of the whole creation. Yet it is all this in order to reveal and manifest the true meaning of creation as fulfilment in Christ, to announce to the world its end and the inauguration of the Kingdom.

This *institution* is thus - as Patriarch Athenagoras used to say the - *sacrament of the Kingdom*¹³, the means by which the Church always becomes what it is, always fulfils it as the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, as the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, as the new life of the new creation.

The basic act of this fulfilment, and therefore the true *form* of the Church, is the Divine Eucharist: the sacrament in which the Church performs the passage, the *passover*, from this world into the Kingdom, where it offers in Christ the whole creation to God, seeing it as

¹¹ See Jérôme Hamer, *The Church Is a Communion*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1964, p. 174.

¹² Cf. B. Bobrinskoy, *Ibid.*,

¹³ Cf. Olivier Clément, *Dialogues avec le Patriarche Athenagoras*, Fayard, Paris 1969, p.136. See also A.M. Allchin, *The Kingdom of love and Knowledge. The Encounter between Orthodoxy and the West*, Darton, Longmann & Todd, London 1979, pp. 7-8. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom*, in: Richard J. Neuhaus, Philadelphia PA, Westminster Press, 1979, pp. 55ff.

"heaven and earth full of His glory", and partakes of Christ's immortal life at His table in His Kingdom.

3. The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church: its Trinitarian and Sacramental Nature

This sacramental nature of the Church reveals the real meaning of the universally accepted *notae* by which the Church confesses to be *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*. Each of these attributes applies to both the institution and its fulfilment, the form and the content, the promise and its realisation. The Church is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, and it must constantly fulfil itself as oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. Its visible oneness is to be realised as the very content of the new life and as the unity of all in and with God. The objective holiness of its life is to be fulfilled and realised in the personal holiness of its members. The catholicity is to grow into the *wholeness* of the faith and life of each community, of each Christian, and of the whole Church. Its apostolicity, its identity in time and space with the *pleroma* (the whole) of the Church were manifested on the day of Pentecost and are to be preserved whole and undistorted by every generation, always and everywhere.

In this world the *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* Church manifests itself as a plurality of churches, each one of which is both a part and a whole. It is a part because only in unity with all churches and in obedience to the universal truth can it be the Church; yet it is also a whole because in each church, by virtue of its unity with the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, the whole Christ is present, the fullness of grace is given, the catholicity of new life is revealed. The visible unity of all churches as the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church is expressed and preserved in the unity of faith, the unity of sacramental structure, and the unity of life.¹⁴ The unity of faith has its norm and content in the Tradition. The unity of sacramental structure is preserved through the apostolic succession, which is the visible and objective continuity of the Church's life and order in time and space. The unity of life manifests itself in the active concern of all churches for each other and of all them together for the Church's mission in the world.

The nature of the Church is also to be understood primarily as the Church of the Triune God. The Holy Trinity is the ultimate basis and source of the Church's existence and, as such, the Church is in the image and likeness of God. This being in the image of the blessed Trinity constitutes the mode of the Church's existence, which, in fact, reveals its nature. Being in God, the Church reflects on earth God's unity in Trinity. What is natural to God is given to the Church by grace.¹⁵

Thus, the Trinity is the *starting point* for understanding the nature of the Church, and especially for its unity in multiplicity, as the Holy Spirit shares one life and one being. The three distinct and unique Persons are one in life and in nature. Similarly, the Church exhibits a parallel multiplicity of persons in unity of life and being. The difference between God and the Church is that, in the former, multiplicity in unity is the truth, whereas in the latter, this is only a

¹⁴ Cf. Wolfart Pannenberg, *The Apostle's Creed in Light of Today's Questions*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000, p. 3ff.; See also J. Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church*, Crestwood, N.Y., St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983, pp. 53-54; J. Zizioulas, *Being in Communion*, Crestwood, N.Y., St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985, pp. 116-117; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed., New York: Loneragan, 1981, p. 31; Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, Perennial Classics, 1991, pp.47ff.; Joseph Ratzinger, *Eglise et Théologie*, Mame, Paris 1992, pp. 150-170.

¹⁵ Cf. George Dion. Dragas. *Ibid.*,

participation in the truth. In the language of the Church Fathers the former is *ousia*, while the latter is *metousia*. The unity of the three Divine Persons in life and being is, therefore, the prototype of the unity of the Church's persons in life and in being. As Christ Himself says in His prayer for the Church : “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:22-23) The mark of unity is collegiality and love, and not subordination. Orthodox Triadology, based on the grace of the Trinity, supplies the basic ontological categories for Orthodox ecclesiology. Therefore, the Church is an *eikon* of the Holy Trinity, a participation in the God’s grace.

Hence, we must say that the Church is the Church of the Triune God *as the Church of Christ*. The link between the Holy Trinity and Christology, that is, between theology and economy, demands a similar link in ecclesiology.¹⁶ The Church is in the image of the Triune God, and participates in the grace of the Trinity inasmuch as it is in Christ and partakes of His grace. The unity of persons in life and being cannot be achieved apart from this economy of Christ, and we here encounter what the New Testament calls the Body of Christ.

Christ is the Head of the Church, and the Church is His Body. It is from this Christological angle that we can better understand the multiplicity in unity which exists in the Church. This angle of the Body of Christ is normally connected with the Divine Eucharist, because it is in the Eucharist that the Body is revealed and realised. In the Divine Eucharist we encounter the whole Christ, the Head, and the Body, the Church. But the Eucharist is celebrated in many places and among many different groups of people. Does this then mean that there are many bodies of Christ? This is not the case because there is one Head, and one Eucharistic Body into which all people in the different places are incorporated. It is the Lord Himself who is manifested in many places, as He gives His one Body to all, so that in partaking of it they may all become one with Him and with one another. In that there is one bread, the many are one Body, for we all partake of the one bread. The many places and the many groups of people where the Eucharistic Body of Christ is revealed do not constitute an obstacle to its unity. Indeed, to partake of this Body in one place is to be united with Him who is not bound by place and, therefore, is mystically (or mysterially or sacramentally) united with all.¹⁷

Several theologians speak of Orthodox ecclesiology also in terms of two models: the pneumatological (triadological) and the Christological. In fact, there are not two models, but one. The Church is both the Church of the Holy Trinity and the Church of Christ. Yet, the entire fullness of the Godhead dwells in the body of the incarnate Son, as in a temple. This is clear from the teachings of the New Testament and from the teachings of the Church Fathers. Christology is inseparable from the Trinitarian theology, or Triadology. No adequate doctrine of the Son can be developed without the Father. At the same time, the gift of the incarnate Son

¹⁶ How does the Church participate in God's mystery and grace? How is *metousia Theou* (participation in the essence of God) achieved? How does the Church become an *eikon* of the Holy Trinity? The answer, in its simplest form, lies in and through Christ. Christ has established the bond between the image of the Triune God, and that which is made after the image, namely, the Church, the humankind. In Christ we have both the *eikon* and the *kat'eikona* (that which is according to the image).

¹⁷ This is how St. Athanasius explains the prayer of our Lord that the Apostles may be one. “. . . because I am Thy Word, and I am also in them because of the Body, and because of Thee the salvation of men is perfected in Me, therefore I ask that they may also become one, according to the Body that is Me and according to its perfection, that they, too, may become perfect having oneness with it, and having become one in it; that, as if all were carried by me, all may be one body and one spirit and may grow up into a perfect man”. And St. Athanasius concludes: “For we all, partaking of the same, become one Body, having the one Lord in ourselves. What is given in one specific place is something which also transcends it, because of its particular perfection, that is, its being Christ's risen body.”

to humanity as well as His incarnate presence and our incorporation into His Body are unthinkable without the Holy Spirit.

It is also true that theologians have made different attempts to interpret this interpenetration of the Trinitarian and the Christological dimensions of Orthodox ecclesiology. Some, for instance, would see the work of Christ as referring to the unity of nature, and the work of the Spirit to the diversity of persons, whilst both Christ and the Spirit bring the whole of humanity, nature and persons under the monarchy of the Father. Others, however, would point to the biblical pattern of the revelation of the Trinity in salvation history and would see the beginning of the Church in the Father. They would also see in creation the establishment or revelation of the Church in history, in the Incarnation of the Son, and, finally, in the growth and perfection of the Church in the economy of the Holy Spirit, which reaches its end in the final resurrection.¹⁸

4. The Ekklesia: gathering and participation of God's people

Christians, gathered together, do not constitute a secular *congregation or koinotes*; they do not only come to meet each other, but rather to meet Christ who is sacramentally present in the midst of them. He is the very reason for drawing individuals together in order to create an authentic communion of saints. Orthodox ecclesiology differs on this point from other interpretations defining the motivations for fellowship. Two points need clarification.

The very meaning of the term *Ekklesia* was originally the calling of individuals to an important gathering. In this connection the emphasis is laid upon the caller and his authority as well as upon the act of his calling. Who actually calls and for what purpose? It is not a person who once appeared, and soon disappeared, or an anthropocentric body inviting out of sentimental reasons. This body has a special authority and power which has been entrusted to it from above. The call is made because something happened in history, an event which turned the tide of history. Humankind, therefore, is invited to turn its attention towards this event (Christ Resurrected) and receive redemption and salvation.

These tidings of redemption and salvation are the motives for calling all the people throughout the ages and in all corners of the world. If the apostles could not resist spreading this invitation, even though they were often threatened by death, their secret must be attributed to the fact that they knew from personal experience the height and the depth of the blessings accompanying this calling.¹⁹

While the gathering of people is highly important, it is not they who determine the legitimacy, the validity and the authority of such a gathering. Of course, the Church must be seen in its double aspect, sociological and sacramental, spiritual and temporal. Human presence is

¹⁸ This strictly biblical pattern seems closer to the ethos of the liturgical traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy, but the other model (more dogmatic and ontological) also seems to have its basis in the Church's mind concerning Christ the Lord. The Triadological and Christological dimensions cannot be divorced in Orthodox ecclesiology, because the Church is the Church of the Holy Trinity insofar as it is the Church of Christ, and vice versa.

¹⁹ Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech. XVIII, 26*; P.G. 33,1048 : The Church "*Ekklesia*" was in fact the place in time where one human person met the Risen Lord and enjoyed the offerings of the Redeemer. In this sense Cyril of Jerusalem, addressing the catechumens, describes the size of this institution beyond geographical restrictions. "*If you are in a town, do not ask only where is the particular church, but where is the Catholic Church because this is the proper name of this holy Mother of all of us; Spouse of our Christ.*"

necessary, but it is not the element which gives weight to and determines the authenticity of the Church.

It is not just the assembled people who constitute the Church, but the people with the sacramental presence of Christ. It is Christ with his people who creates the Church – head and body – the first-born Son and the after-born brethren.²⁰

Israel was treated in all kinds of ways by God so that she might become the true people, the chosen of God, the *laos tou Theou*. But on the contrary Israel made every possible effort to become one nation among the other nations. Similar new directives had to be given again and again to remind the new Israel of its vocation. All the pronouncements of Christ concerning his Kingdom must be understood in this context. The Church of Christ gives us the means of truly presenting Christ's memory. The Church becomes the historical locus, the embodiment of God's saving action in the temporal order. The Church knows that the Word (Logos) becomes flesh in its own existence. The reconciliation is not to be remembered as one particular event and moment in the past. Redemption is a continual process, the divine work of redemption takes place in and through the Church.

All the great events of Christ's sufferings and triumphs are happening again in a mysterious way, through the sacramental life of the Church. Calvary and the resurrection are the Church's daily experience. This is why in every Orthodox Liturgy refers to these events not only as belonging to the past, but as taking place right now, before us.

The Church, in its visible form, does not exist only to affirm in all seriousness that an event took place, prior to anyone's experiencing it. It is the continuation of his redemptive work; for this purpose it was given to the apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The reality of Christ must not be isolated in one particular moment of history by dissociating him from the Church. In doing this, we dichotomise the fundamental affirmation of the doctrine of the mystical body, the head from the rest of the organism. The Church has an ontological presence on Christological grounds.

5. "Called to be the One Church": Two calls in one invitation!

The Church, as it is described, is not a static and monolithic entity. The great theologian Fr Yves Congar used to write that "*the Church no longer presents a monolithic unity.*"²¹ Thus, the Church is an alive organism, where its members live and experience the hypostatic union of the Triune God in a human and divine way. This Trinitarian hypostatic union affects also the life of the Church at present and in future in accordance to God's plans for the salvation of all humanity.

This eschatological process towards salvation has its meaning and means for God's plans for deification/sanctification and for the communion of all human beings. Thus, the Church is enriching *per semper* its dynamics by God's grace and energy (*energeia*) which is empowered by the Holy Spirit for the fulfillment of His Kingdom. This Kingdom does not constitute an imaginary or abstract reality, but rather a divine one which belongs to God's eschatological

²⁰ There have been, different views on this. The assembled congregation is seen as constituting the Church and as conferring the power of the ministry to a minister because they designate him by their testimony and unanimous voice. St Augustine writes that "*without underestimating the human factor and the mandating factors, we must avoid the error of regarding the Christological vertical factor as subordinate or secondary.*"²⁰ There is no doubt that the Church is objectively *congregatio generis humani*, an assembly resulting from a gathering of people.

²¹ Cf. *In voices of Unity*, WCC, Geneva, 1981, p.21.

salvific plans for the realization of His communion with his creatures and for the integrity of His creation and of the whole world. On the other hand, this eschatological Kingdom represents also the realization and re-activation of the full communion of human beings with the Creator and the whole humanity.

This Kingdom is not only an earthly reality, but a spiritual one, mysterious and mystical at the same time, where Christ is in the center of the divine operational process of our salvation. One particular theologian, whose work has gained considerable acclaim, is Metropolitan John of Pergamon (John Zizioulas) who, influenced by the Cappadocian Fathers, argues that the understanding that *God is communion* is critical to our theology and spirituality. The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God. The Holy Trinity is a *primordial* ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather which follows it. The substance of God, *God* has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion.²²

This understanding of the Trinity, of the Divine Persons, Father, Son and Spirit, not as independent, nor even interdependent identities who influence one another, but rather, as *personally interior* to one another as a *communion of divine persons*, is expressed through the Greek notion of *perichoresis*. Within this conception of the Trinity in which in eternity Father, Son and Spirit share a dynamic mutual reciprocity, interpenetration and inter-animation, relations between the divine persons are not seen as secondary to the divine *ousia*, but rather are *constitutive* of the very being of God.²³ In contrast to Western thinking as Kant writes - shaped by Greek philosophical presuppositions,²⁴ in Eastern affirms thinking the hypostases, that is, the personhood of the Father, Son and Spirit are not added - on extras that flow from the nature of God, but rather are themselves the ontological nature of God.²⁵

As Colin Gunton, an American theologian states, "... *the persons [of the Trinity] do not simply enter into relations with one another, but are constituted by one another in the relations.*" For Gunton, "*God is not God apart from the way in which Father, Son and Spirit in eternity give to and receive from each other what they essentially are.*"²⁶ The three do not merely co-inhere (perichoresis), but dynamically constitute one another's being. From this foundational premise it derives that *God is a communion of Divine Persons.*²⁷

The Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, commenting on the absence of the doctrine of the Trinity in theological writings, stated provocatively that "*should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged*". But for

²² Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, XV.

²³ Cf. John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 2002 ed. (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, Press, 1985), See also, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (ed.) Paul McPartlan (London / New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

²⁴ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, Ph. B. 252, 33, quoted in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), p.6.

²⁵ Cf. John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 2002 ed. (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary, Press, 1985), p. 214.

²⁶ Cf. Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity - the 1992 Bampton Lectures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 163.

²⁷ J. Zizioulas., *Ibid.*, p. 164. He argues that: 1) that *being-existence* owes itself to the free gift-giving of a personal God. That is that *being-existence* is not one of *necessity* but rather of *freedom*. All of creation therefore is a gift – brought into being freely by the *ekstasis* of the Divine Persons – by a God who opens himself up to share his life and love in the act of creation, and 2) all of creation therefore is designed to be *in communion* with its Creator, and humanity, made in the 'image of God', is specifically made to be *like* God.

Humanity reflects the *imago Dei*, not through our nature – our substance/*ousia* – that is, through *what* we are, but rather through our mode of being, that is, a personalist understanding of *being-existence*.

Rahner, the great problem facing the Western Church “stemmed from its failure to realize the existential relevance”²⁸ of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Because this “*divine call*” is addressed to all of us, it is not only merely and simply an invitation – which would be very natural – but also an affirmation that this invitation refers to the One Church and only to the One Church of Christ. The Church’s Christocentric call comes from the founder and the head of this Church who is our Lord Jesus Christ. “*Called*” could also be understood as a confirmation that in confessing the One Lord we become partakers of His Church and constitute His Church as a second calling of being together humanly and spiritually in his communion.

Thus, in “*Called to be the One Church*”: there are two “*callings or calls*” in one invitation par excellence. The first one is imperative to all of us, affirming our faith and belief to the One who constitutes the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The second call, coming from the Church as “*Ekklesia*”, is an authentic prerogative confirming that we are all members par excellence of this One, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and we confirm our belonging to our Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ himself who determines these marks of the Church, because He is the One, also Holy, Catholic, universal and the continuation of the Apostolic times.

By this calling, therefore, we participate in this “*divine space*” of God’s Kingdom, and the faithful confesses, believes, and affirms the oneness of the Church in its universal and catholic dimension. There are not only many to One, but One to many who assembled at the Eucharistic table to be part of the communion of Lord’s Body and Blood.

In this light the American theologian John H. Yoder writes, “*the world of the twenty-first century will not be able to back away from having become one world.*”²⁹ Theology is the conscience of the Church in this one world. It deals with the “*real thing*” whatever our social status, race, or gender might be. It is a tool for learning and an instrument of understanding, not the merit badge of the privileged and learned. Theology becomes ideology when the mystery of its reference is lost or our hope is invested in that which is less than ultimately real. Two tendencies in theology have been to orient theological thinking either in relation to a vertical and transcendent or horizontal and immanent dimension. Particular social concerns can often become flash points for division, as happened before the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Nairobi, in 1975, and is happening today. Theological literacy is, in the first place, learning to give a reason.

6. Looking at the future with hope

What then is the Church? It is the Church of the Triune God, the Church of Christ, the Church of the Fathers, the Church of the saints, and the Church of the people of God. It is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It is the One Church in which all are called to be present and to be a part of it. Perhaps the best and clearest *eikon* of this manifold perspective of the Church is to be seen in the seal of the Eucharistic bread.³⁰ Here we have the Church in focus in the personal,

²⁸ Cf. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), pp.11,14.

²⁹ Cf. John H. Yoder, *Newsletter*, Boston Theological Institute, Volume XXXI, No. 10 (November 14), 2001, p. 2.: Everyone can in some sense become theologically literate because everyone is a theologian as they try to find their place in the world and make sense of it. Catholic-universal and ecumenical in scope, evangelical and pastoral in intent, theology is shaped not only by Scripture and church tradition, but also by the levels of human organization and technological assumption that shape our experiences and ways of reasoning. Much is hidden under the language of theology as philosophers of suspicion have taught us – much that makes the one world less than what it truly is. This diminishes us.

³⁰ *Prosphoron* : The Greek word for the bread used in the Divine Liturgy.

historical, theological, and anthropological dimensions. Here we have unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. Here we have the celebration of the whole mystery of the Church.

In concluding, Orthodox ecclesiology is holistic and does not tolerate any arbitrary division between the one and the many. It is not tied to external uniformity or to pluriformity, but it is unity in multiplicity. Unity does not demand uniformity but honours diversity, it respects tradition or traditions while encouraging individuality.³¹

The one Church today is the continuation of the apostolic community of the first days. If the churches are to overcome their present stage of division, the original communion must be restored among them. They must find the common roots of their faith, the living Tradition, which is experienced in the sacramental life of the one Church. By the power of the Holy Spirit the communion must be realised anew in each period and time. The Church exists under the call to proclaim God's purpose for the world and to live it out in historical contexts and situation.

However, the mystery of the kingdom is to be announced today and the unity of the Church will be achieved only if we, with repentance, humility and discernment, return to our common sources.³² The Church bears witness to the truth not by reminiscence or by the words of others, but from its own living, unceasing experience, from its catholic fullness.³³ God's grace and purpose embrace all people. The Church is called to discern by faith the signs of God's action in history, in men and women of other faiths and commitments. Their meaning becomes clear only as they are understood in the perspective of Christ's coming. The Church rejoices in these signs and recognises them as a judgement and bearer of renewal for the Church. In particular it needs to explore, in its search for unity, both what, out of its own experience, it may contribute to the overcoming of human barriers and divisions and also those insights which others may contribute to the life of the church itself.

Is visible unity a possibility at all in this divided world? In spite of this divided world God's promise stands. Christ prayed for the unity of his disciples, and it is on the basis of his prayer that the search for unity can be pursued with the confidence and expectation that the aim will be realised in ever new ways and with concrete perspectives. Let us recall here the words of Charles Brent, the Chairman of the Preliminary Meeting in view of the Lausanne's First World Conference on Faith and Order: "...our journey is a long one... controversy loves war and discussion loves peace... some day will be one flock under one Shepherd."³⁴

A few years ago Faith and Order celebrated the 75 years since the First World Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne - today 82 years have passed since that significant ecumenical gathering. It was a great event for that time after the First World War amidst the suffering of the Churches around the world and their search for church unity, and for the divided Christendom strongly affirmed: "*In spite of our doctrinal differences, we are united in a common Christian faith, which is proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures, to which we bear witness and which is safeguarded in the ecumenical symbol commonly called, Nicean, as well as in the symbol of the Apostles; this faith is continually confirmed in the spiritual*

³¹ Cf. Lukas Vischer, *Die reformierten Kirchen – eine unheilbar zersplitterte Familie?* in: *Gottes Bund gemeinsam bezeugen*, (Göttingen 1992), pp. 41-42.

³² Cf. (Mgr) Basile Krivocheine (+) (ed.), "*Syméon le nouveau théologien, Catéchèse I*", in: *Sources Chrétiennes*, no. 96, Paris, 1964, *Introduction*, pp. 39-40.

³³ Cf. "*What Kind of Unity?*", *Faith and Order Paper No. 69*, Geneva, WCC, pp. 120-121: Therein lies that "*tradition of truth*", *traditio veritatis*, about which St Irinaeus spoke. For him it is connected with the "*veritable unction of truth*", charisma *veritatis certum*, and the "*teaching of the apostles*" was for him not so much an unchangeable example to be repeated or imitated, as an eternally living and inexhaustible source of life and inspiration.

³⁴ Cf. Charles Henry Brent, *Report: "A Pilgrimage towards Unity"*, of the Preliminary Meeting for the World Conference on Faith and Order, Geneva, Switzerland (17-20 August 1920), p.90.

experience of the Church of Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit, is leading the Church into all truth, may permit her, while at the same time keeping her firmly bound to the witness of these symbols, our common heritage of the ancient church, to express the truths of revelation under other forms, such as might be called for from time to time by new problems."³⁵ Ecumenical memory reminds us of the considerable work and the efforts made by thousands of people who believed in and were committed to that movement, the ecumenical movement, without ever realizing that it would last so long.

Two years ago it was 25 years since the "Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry" (BEM) document was born at the Faith and Order Commission in Lima, Peru (1982), exploring the growing agreement- and remaining differences - in fundamental areas of the Churches' faith and life. BEM till today remains the most widely distributed and studied ecumenical convergence document.

In 2003, the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation made a considerable contribution; its final Report was adopted by WCC Central Committee in September of the same year. One of the results of this Report, among other things, was the proposal to endorse the *consensus* mode to be used as the method of decision making by the WCC, with the hope and the conviction that this process will in its spiritual dimension be improved and used at all levels of meetings and ecumenical gatherings. Next year it will be a century ago that 1700 missionary societies met in 1910 in Edinburgh, aware that evangelization around the world was an absolute necessity.

What are all these anniversaries for? What are the profound changes, developments or processes during the past hundred years of ecumenical struggles and ecumenical discussions? There is still hope, hope for something more positive in spite of the fact that the Churches still remain divided but try to be closer to each other and to organize themselves in common activities, actions, and ecumenical projects at various levels of their witness (*martyria*) and service (*diakonia*). There is still a space in the ecumenical landscape so that hope can create in the years ahead the necessary situations to recall the Lord's calling for church unity. In the past it was noted that the Churches were looking for a unity in diversity, a diverse situation where various church traditions and confessional denominations will continue their ecumenical journey confessing the same Apostolic Faith, but at the same time also exploring the true means of the Tradition of the Undivided Church as revealed, experienced and witnessed throughout the centuries.

Looking at the future, Orthodox hope for a situation where in their ecclesiological space and insight of their Church boundaries might be possible to recognize the "*others*" ecclesial tradition and together to be able to confess the truths of the Faith and Tradition in a communion of a "*spacing ecclesiology*". Today we are called to a new ecumenical "*ecclesial space of togetherness*" in view of celebrating one day together at the Lord's Table partaking His Body and His Blood. This diversity brings not only various Church traditions together as well as their cultures, on the condition, that all together will be *called to be the One Church*. This reality is a continuing struggle in the ecumenical movement. It is a *cross* on a long way and costly, a *cross* with obstacles and theological differences, because unity surpasses not only the capacity of human's mind but also God's will. It is a process towards a new transformation and transfiguration of the whole humanity.³⁶

³⁵ Faith and Order: *Proceedings of the World Conference at Lausanne, August 3-21, 1927*, ed. H.B. Bates, New York 1928, p. 466.

³⁶ Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Risking for Christ's Sake. Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Pluralism*, WCC, Geneva 1987, 113-114.