

THE TRINITARIAN BEING OF THE CHURCH

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The relationship between Trinitarian theology and ecclesiology has been much discussed in recent decades. It is an intriguing subject, and perhaps an odd juxtaposition. It has often been noted that although a confession of faith in “one Church” is included in most ancient creeds along with “one baptism,” the Church herself is seldom directly reflected upon; the person of Jesus Christ, his relation to the Father and the Spirit, was endlessly discussed, and the subject of a great many conciliar statements, but not the Church or ecclesiology more generally. The question of ecclesiology, it is often said, is our modern problem, one (at least for the Orthodox) provoked by the ecumenical encounter of the twentieth century. One fruit of this encounter is the realization of the trinitarian dimensions of the Church herself, so providing continuity with the theological reflection of earlier ages and grounding the Church in the Trinity.

Following in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, ecumenical dialogue in recent decades has emphasized the connection between the Trinity and the Church largely through the exploration of what is commonly referred to as “communion ecclesiology.” *Koinonia*, “communion,” was the theme of the Canberra Assembly of the WCC in 1991, and also at the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela in 1993. In this approach, the *koinonia* of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, the very being of God, is taken as the paradigm of the *koinonia* that constitutes the being of the ecclesial body, the Church. As Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) put it in his address to the meeting at Santiago de Compostela: “The Church as a communion reflects God’s

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented to the North American Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue, May 2003.

being as communion in the way this communion will be revealed fully in the Kingdom.”² Such communion ecclesiology readily dovetails with the “eucharistic” ecclesiology espoused by many Orthodox during the twentieth century: it is in the sacrament of the eucharist, the event of communion *par excellence*, that the Church realizes her true being, manifesting already, here and now, the Kingdom which is yet to come. Although, as Metropolitan John continues, “*Koinonia* is an eschatological gift,” the fullness of this eschatological gift is nevertheless already given, received, or tasted, in the celebration of the eucharist.

Painted in these admittedly rather broad strokes, the oddity of juxtaposing the Trinity *and* the Church can be seen. What is said of the Church is certainly based upon what is said of the Trinity, but the effect of speaking in this manner, paradoxically, is that the Church is separated from God, as a distinct entity reflecting the divine being. Another way of putting this, using terms which are themselves problematic, would be to say that communion ecclesiology sees the Church as parallel to the “immanent Trinity”: it is the three Persons in communion, the one God as a relational being, that the Church is said to “reflect.” This results in a horizontal notion of communion, or perhaps better parallel “communions,” without being clear about how the two intersect.

Metropolitan John is very careful to specify that the *koinonia* in question “derives not from sociological experience, nor from ethics, but from *faith*.”³ We do not, that is, start from our notions of what “communion” might mean in our human experience of relating to others, and then project this upon the Trinity. Rather, we must begin from faith, for “we believe in a God who is in his very being *koinonia* . . . God is trinitarian; he is a relational being by definition; a non-trinitarian God is not *koinonia* in his very being. Ecclesiology must be based on Trinitarian theology if it is to be an

2 Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, “The Church as Communion,” *SVTQ* 38.1 (1994): 3–16, at p.8.

3 *Ibid.* 5.

ecclesiology of communion.”⁴ However, only after stating the principles of trinitarian *koinonia* does Metropolitan John affirm, as a second point, that “*koinonia* is decisive also in our understanding of the person of Christ. Here the right synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology becomes extremely important.”⁵ He rightly emphasizes (correcting V. Lossky) that the “economy of the Son” cannot be separated from “the economy of the Spirit,” that is, both that the work of (or the “relation to”) the Spirit is constitutive for the person of Christ and that there is no work of the Spirit distinct from that of Christ.⁶

Nevertheless, besides the very serious question concerning the appropriateness of characterizing the Trinity as a communion of three Persons,⁷ this approach does not adequately take into account the “economic” reality in which all trinitarian theology is grounded and in terms of which the Scriptures describe the Church. Christology and Pneumatology may have been synthesized, but trinitarian theology is still considered as a realm apart. Although Metropolitan John emphasizes that “the Church is not a sort of Platonic ‘image’ of the Trinity; she is communion in the sense of being the people of God, Israel, and the ‘Body of Christ,’” this is followed, in the next sentence but one, with the affirmation that “the Church as communion reflects God’s being as communion.”⁸ Despite the tantalizing mention of the Church as the “Body of Christ,” we are

4 Ibid. 6.

5 Ibid. 6.

6 Cf. J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1985), 124–25.

7 A point already noted by Lossky, who observes that “In speaking of three hypostases we are already making an improper abstraction: if we wanted to generalize and make a concept of the ‘divine hypostasis,’ we would have to say that the only common definition possible would be the impossibility of any common definition of the three hypostases.” (*In the Image and Likeness of God* [Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1975], 113); see also L. Ayres, “On Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology as seen in *To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods*,” and L. Turcescu, “‘Person’ versus ‘Individual,’ and other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa.” Both in S. Coakley, ed., *Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2003).

8 Metropolitan John, “Church as Communion,” 8, my emphasis.

left with a communion of three divine Persons and the image of this in the communion that is the Church, whose structure, authority, mission, tradition and sacraments (especially, of course, the eucharist,⁹ a point to which I will return) are correspondingly “relational.” We have the Trinity *and* the Church.

The three primary scriptural images for the Church—that is, the Church as the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit—offer us, as suggested by Bruce Marshall, a way of looking at the trinitarian being of the Church in a way that integrates the Church directly and intimately to the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Moreover, each of these images links the Church in a particular way to one member of the Holy Trinity without undermining the basic Cappadocian point, that the actions of God are differentiated but not divided: it is the one God, the Father, who calls the Church into being as the body of Christ indwelt by the Holy Spirit; and, in return, the Church is conceived in terms of communion, but communion with God, as the body of his Son, anointed with his Spirit, and so calling upon God as *Abba, Father*.

I would like to begin with the basic content of these images, and then continue by suggesting how trinitarian theology, as expounded in the fourth century and beyond, directs us to combine these various images, as different aspects of the single mystery that is the Church. Following this I will offer some further considerations regarding the calling of the Church and her eschatological perfection, and concerning baptism (with which the Church is invariably connected in creedal formulations) as the foundational sacrament of the Church, and the implications this has for the question of the boundaries of the Church, and lastly how, as the

9 Cf. *Ibid.* 15: “Baptism, Chrismation or Confirmation, and the rest of the sacramental life, are all given in view of the Eucharist. Communion in these sacraments may be described as ‘partial’ or anticipatory communion, calling for its fulfillment in the Eucharist.”

10 Bruce D. Marshall, “The Holy Trinity and the Mystery of the Church: Toward a Lutheran/Orthodox Common Statement,” paper presented to the North American Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue, May 2002.

place where the human being is born again through baptism, the Church can also be considered as our mother, in which each Christian puts on the identity of Christ.

The People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit

Most fundamentally, the word “church,” *ekklesia*, means a “calling-out,” the election of a particular people from the midst of the world by God, who forms them as his own people, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own people” (1 Pet 2.9). For Christians this calling is of course that of the gospel of Christ, proclaiming with the power of the Spirit the divine work wrought in and by Christ, destroying death by his death, and by his blood breaking down the dividing wall so that those “separated from Christ, alienated from the citizenship of Israel,” may enter into the covenant, in the one body of Christ, having access in the one Spirit to the Father (Eph 2.11–18). The “citizenship of Israel” is defined by relation to Christ. Though a specific, “once for all,” event, the Passion of Jesus Christ—his death, resurrection and bestowal of the Spirit, as another advocate leading us into the fullness of the truth of Christ¹¹—as preached by the apostles, “according to Scripture,” is of eternal significance and scope. It is this gospel that was preached in advance to Abraham, so that all who respond in faith to the Word of God, as did Abraham, receive the blessings that were bestowed upon him (Gal 3.3–14). Going further back, many of the Fathers affirmed that the creation of Adam already looks towards, and is modeled upon, the image of God, Christ Jesus (and that the world itself is impregnated with the sign of his cross), and also that the breath which Adam received, making him a “living being,” prefigures the Spirit bestowed by Christ, which renders Christians “spiritual beings.” The Word, by which God calls forth and

11 Cf. Jn 14.25–26; 16.13–15. The pentecostal bestowal of the Spirit is intimately connected with the Passion of Christ, for it is at his death, when the work of God is “fulfilled” and Christ rests on the Sabbath, that Christ “gave up the ghost” or, more literally “handed down [traditioned] the Spirit” (Jn 19.30).

fashions a people for himself, is unchanging. The revelation of this mystery hidden from all eternity both enables us to look back into the Scriptures, and creation itself, to see there an anticipatory testimony to Christ, and also introduces the Gentiles into the covenant, for its basis is now clearly seen to be Christ himself, not race or fleshly circumcision: the Church, the new creation called into being by the cross of Christ, is the Israel of God (Gal 6.16).

Called into being by God through his Word, Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Spirit, the Church is the body of Christ. God “has put all things under [Christ’s] feet and has made him the head over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1.22–23). As “firstborn of the dead,” in whom “the whole fullness of divinity dwells bodily,” Christ is “the head of the body, the Church” (Col 1.18–19, 2.9). It is by holding fast to the head that “the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God” (Col 2.19). The identity is complete; it is not a loose analogy or metaphor: “You are the body of Christ and individually members of it,” all, that is, who “by the one Spirit were baptized into the one body” (1 Cor 12.27, 13). Christians are called to be “the one body,” by living in subjection to the head, Christ, allowing his peace to rule in their hearts (Col 3.15). As members of his body, they depend for their life and being upon their head, and also upon one another: “we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Rom 12.5). The grace given to each is for the benefit of the one body, so that everything is to be done in love for the building up of the one body (1 Cor 12–13).

The subsequent reflection devoted to identity of the one body, the body of Christ assumed by the Word who now dwells in those who have “put on Christ,” is so vast and profound that it is impossible to treat it here. But as it is also not satisfactory to pass it by in silence, one example must suffice. The identity of body is the central nexus in the classic work *On the Incarnation* by Athanasius, integrating trinitarian theology, Christology, ecclesiology and soteriology. As he puts it: “For being over all, the Word of God, by

offering his own temple and his bodily instrument as a substitute for all, naturally fulfilled the debt by his death; and, as being united to all by the like [body], the incorruptible Son of God naturally clothed all with incorruption by the promise concerning the resurrection; and now no longer does the actual corruption in death hold ground against humans, because of the Word dwelling in them through the one body” (*Inc.* 9). The Word clothed himself with our body, so that he might conquer death by offering his body to death, and so that we might now be clothed with his incorruption through the identity of the one body. It is very striking that when treating the Resurrection of Christ, Athanasius makes no mention of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ to the disciples as described in the gospels: that Christ is alive and his own, proper body raised, is shown by the fact that those who have “put on the faith of the Cross,” as he put on our body, “so despise death that they willingly encounter it and become witness for the Resurrection the Savior accomplished against it” (*Inc.* 27–28). The presentation of Christian theology, characteristic of many textbooks, as a collection of discrete realms—Trinity, Incarnation, Passion, Soteriology, Ecclesiology—only serves to obscure the vitality of such a vision.

As a body, the Church also has a structure, a variety of members with a variety of gifts and ministries. From the earliest times, the congregation gathered around the bishop, together with his presbyters and deacons; so intrinsic were these to the structure of the body, that Ignatius asserts that without these three orders, the community cannot be called a “Church” (*Letter to the Trallians* 3.1). That there is only one Christ means that there can only be one eucharist, one altar and one bishop (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 4). However, for all the importance given to the clergy, and especially the bishop, their roles are historically and geographically specific; as it is often pointed out, the Church of God is also always the Church of a particular place, gathering together all Christians (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*, 1 Cor 11.20). On the other hand, the significance of the apostles, upon whose proclamation the Church is based, is univer-

sal and eternal, and so, in the typologies that Ignatius proposes, they always appear on the divine side.¹² The changing understanding of the ordained ministry through history need not detain us here, what is important for the present purposes is the essential role that they have in the constitution of the Church. Yet their essential role should not be overstated, it is not by virtue of being gathered around the bishop that a community is the church, but by virtue of Christ himself; as Ignatius puts it, in words which are often misquoted: “whenever the bishop appears, let the congregation be present, just as wherever Christ is, there is the catholic Church” (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8). It is Christ who makes the congregation to be his body, the Church, and so when Ignatius writes his letters, he does so to the whole community, not to the bishop, warning them to “be deaf when anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ” (*Letter to the Trallians* 9).

Finally, it is “by the one Spirit that we are baptized into the one body” (1 Cor 12.13), and so it is as “a holy temple in the Lord” that we are fashioned into a “dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2.21–22). Those in whom the Spirit of God dwells are the temple of God (1 Cor 3.16). The Spirit is bestowed through Christ, so that it is as the Spirit of Christ that we receive the Spirit of the Father (cf. Rom 8.9–11). But it is also the Spirit who enables us to recognize Christ, to call him Lord, that is, the one spoken of in the Scriptures (1 Cor 12.3), and who unites us to Christ, making us to be one body with him, as a bride to her spouse (as in the imagery of Eph 5), so that “the Spirit and the bride say ‘Come!’” (Rev 22.17), and who enables those united in one body with Christ to call on God as Abba, Father (Gal 4.6; Rom 8.15–16). It is in “the communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13.13) that Christians have their unity as the one body of Christ; they are to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” so that “there is one body and one Spirit, just

12 Cf. Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 82. For Ignatius the bishop, deacon and presbyters image the Father, Christ and the apostles respectively (*Letter to the Trallians* 3.1; *Letter to the Magnesians* 6.1) Only with Cyprian are the apostles considered to be the first bishops and the bishops, in turn, the successors of the apostles.

as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4.3–6).

All of these images describe the activity of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the divine economy of salvation. Yet they are not merely “economic” activities different from the “immanent” relations of the Father, Son and Spirit, “missions” as distinct from “processions.” As debate concerning trinitarian theology intensified during the fourth century and beyond, discussion inevitably became more abstract but its content remained constant. As the Cappadocians in the fourth century were keen to emphasize, we only know God from his activities, as he reveals himself, and what he reveals of himself is what he is. The crucified Jesus Christ “designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1.4), of whom it is said “You are my Son, today have I begotten you” (Acts 13.33; Ps 2.7), is the same one about whom, when the Spirit rested upon him at his baptism, the Father declared “You are my Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3.17, Mk 1.11; in Luke 3.22, ancient variants have the “begotten you” of Ps 2.7), and who was conceived in the womb of the Virgin by the Holy Spirit, the Power of the Most High (Mat 1.20, Lk 1.35)—this is the one who is eternally, or better, timelessly, begotten from the Father; not, as Arius would have it, begotten as a discrete event in a quasi-temporality before the aeons, and before which God was not Father. Likewise, the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father, is bestowed upon Christians by Christ, as the Spirit of Christ, and so it is affirmed that while the Son is begotten directly from the Father, the Spirit derives from the Father “by that which is directly from the first cause, so that the attribute of being Only-begotten abides unambiguously in the Son, while the Spirit is without doubt derived from the Father, the intermediacy (*μεσιτεία*) of the Son safeguarding his character of being the Only-begotten and not excluding the Spirit from his natural relation to the Father.”¹³

13 Gregory of Nyssa *To Ablabius* (GNO 3.1, p.56).

Later Byzantine theology, especially that of Gregory of Cyprus and Gregory Palamas in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, develops these points by differentiating between the “procession” of the Holy Spirit from the Father, by which the Spirit derives his subsistence and existence, and the “manifestation” or “shining forth” of the Spirit through the Son, a relation which is not only temporal but eternal.¹⁴ The Spirit who proceeds from the Father rests upon the Son; the activity which is depicted at every key moment in the apostolic presentation of Christ manifests, and provides the basis for our understanding of, the eternal relation between Father, Son and Spirit. But the Spirit does not simply rest upon the Son as a termination, for, as we have seen, it is always through the Spirit that Christ is shown to be the Son of God, through the Spirit that he is begotten, raised, and revealed, and through the Spirit that Christians are led to Christ, incorporated into his body and so have access to the Father. The trinitarian order, from the Father through the Son in the Spirit, finds its reciprocating movement in the Spirit through the Son to the Father. In a very striking passage, Gregory Palamas relates these two movements by speaking of the Spirit as “an ineffable love of the Begetter towards the ineffably begotten Word,” a love which is “also possessed by the Word towards the Begetter,” for the Spirit also belongs to the Son, who “rejoices together with the Father who rejoices in him,” so that “the pre-eternal joy of the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit,” as common to both of them, but whose existence depends upon the Father alone, from whom alone he proceeds.¹⁵

That the Spirit is “manifested” through the Son, not only in the temporal realm, but eternally, means that the distinction between “procession” and “manifestation” does not correspond to a distinction, often made, between intra-trinitarian “processions” and

14 Cf. D. Stăniloae, “Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church,” chapter 1 in idem, *Theology and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1980), 11–44.

15 Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, chapter 36; on this aspect of Palamas’ theology, and its connection to Augustine, cf. R. Flogaus, “Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: A Reassessment of East and West in the Hesychast Controversy of 14th Century Byzantium,” *SVTQ* 42.1 (1998), 1–32.

extra-trinitarian “missions.” One fork of the argument against the term *filioque* developed by Photius, in the ninth century, confines the procession of the Spirit through the Son solely to the temporal realm (where the Son, as human, is anointed with the Spirit, and so the Spirit can be said to be “of Christ”), so introducing a distinction between the “immanent” and the “economic” Trinity.¹⁶ The consequence of this is that the intra-trinitarian communion becomes a realm apart, and the work of the Spirit becomes almost independent from that of Christ.¹⁷ Following the Byzantine Fathers mentioned, we must say that Christ’s relationship to the Holy Spirit is not only constitutive for his being on an “economic” level (the inseparability of “Christology” and “Pneumatology,” noted by Metropolitan John), but also determines how we speak, more abstractly, of the relation between Father, Son and Spirit. As the Cappadocians already realized, the relation between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is identical, and it must be so, with the pattern of divine life revealed in the Scriptures: the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father, rests upon the Son, as a bond of love returned to the Father. It is in this specific pattern of communion (and not as imagining a communion of three divine Persons) that the Church, as the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit, has her being: the “institutional” dimension and the “pneumatic” dimension cannot be separated, but together form the one body of Christ giving thanks to God

16 Photius *On the Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit* esp. 93. Cf. M. A. Orphanos, “The Procession of the Holy Spirit according to Certain Later Greek Fathers,” in *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ: Ecumenical Reflections on the Filioque Controversy*, Faith and Order Paper, no. 10 (London: SPCK/Geneva: WCC, 1981), 21–45; J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Themes*, 2nd ed. with revisions (New York: Fordham, 1987), 60–61.

17 Cf. Lossky, who states categorically that “Theologians have always insisted on the radical difference between the eternal procession of the Persons . . . and the temporal mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the world,” and then continues on the next page, “Intimately linked as they are in the common work upon earth, the Son and the Holy Spirit remain nevertheless in this same work two persons independent the one of the other as to their hypostatic being. It is for this reason that the personal advent of the Holy Spirit does not have the character of a work which is subordinate, and in some sort functional, in relation to that of the Son. Pentecost is not a ‘continuation’ of the Incarnation. It is its sequel, its result.” (*Mystical Theology*, 158–59).

in the Spirit. The Church is not just a communion of persons in relation, but the body of Christ giving thanks to the Father in the Spirit.

The Calling of the Church and Her Eschatological Perfection

This very high theology of the Church as the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit must not blind us to the other trinitarian aspect of the Church, that she is the one called by God. As called, the Church is a response, a dynamic response growing to the fullness to which she is called. We who were “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel,” have been introduced into the promised covenant of Christ (Eph 2.12), but nevertheless “our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil 3.20–1). Our prayer is that when he appears, we shall be like him (1 Jn 3.2). But he is still “the Coming One,” to whom “the Spirit and the bride say ‘Come!’” (Rev 22.17). As such, the Church, though scattered throughout the world, is not located on earth but in the Spirit: “Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is there is the Church.”¹⁸

It is within this dynamic that we can best explain such issues as “the visibility of the Church,” whether “the Church” is to be fully identified with the gathering of the baptized around the sacraments of word and eucharist, and the all too visible failings of both the individual believers, ordained and lay, who belong to the Church, and the particular church of any given place. We are called by God to be his holy Church, and by conversion and repentance we enter into that reality, becoming the body of Christ by the grace of the Spirit; the Church is holy, not by the virtues of the individual believers, but by receiving the holy mysteries, through the hands of sinful believers.

More to the purposes of an ecumenical dialogue, it is perhaps by virtue of this dynamic that we can also best understand the claim of the Orthodox Church to be the true Church. Georges Florovsky stated this in unequivocal terms, asserting that the conviction of

18 Irenaeus of Lyons *Against the Heresies* 3.24.1.

the Orthodox Church is that she “is in very truth the Church, i.e. *the true* Church and the *only* true Church.”¹⁹ With this conviction, he admits, he is “compelled to regard all other Christian churches as deficient,” and so “Christian reunion is simply conversion to Orthodoxy.” But, he continues, this is not meant to be an arrogant claim, it is not meant to be triumphalistic, for it goes hand in hand with the acknowledgement that “this does not mean that everything in the past or present state of the Orthodox Church is to be equated with the truth of God. Many things are obviously changeable; indeed, many things need improvement. The *true* Church is not yet the *perfect* Church.” Or, as he puts it elsewhere: “The Orthodox Church claims to be *the Church*. There is no pride and no arrogance in this claim. Indeed, it implies a heavy responsibility. Nor does it mean ‘perfection.’ The Church is still in pilgrimage, in travail, *in via*. She has her historic failures and losses, she has her own unfinished tasks and problems.”²⁰ Although stressing the orientation towards the eschatological perfection to which the Church is called, Florovsky himself, in his “return to the Fathers,” sought for the Christian unity in the past, the common mind that existed in the diversity of early Christianity and which has been preserved intact by the Orthodox Church: “The Orthodox Church is conscious and aware of her identity through the ages, in spite of all historic perplexities and changes. She has kept intact and immaculate the sacred heritage of the Early Church . . . She is aware of the identity of her teaching with the apostolic message and the tradition of the Ancient Church, even though she might have failed occasionally to convey this message to particular generations in its

19 G. Florovsky, “The True Church,” in idem, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach, Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, 13 (Vaduz & Belmont, MA: 1989), 134; this text is an extract from “Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement,” *The Student World* 43 (1950), 57–70. This paragraph is indebted to an unpublished paper of John Erickson, “The One True Church: Thoughts Concerning an Ecumenical Conundrum” (August 2001).

20 G. Florovsky, “The Quest for Christian Unity and the Orthodox Church,” in idem, *Ecumenism, Collected Works*, 13, p. 139–40; an article originally published in *Theology and Life*, 4 (August, 1961), 197–208.

full splendor and in a way that carries conviction. In a sense, the Orthodox Church is a continuation, a 'survival' of Ancient Christianity."²¹ Florovsky's insistence that ecumenical dialogue be not only an "ecumenism in space, concerned with the adjustments of the existing denominations as they are at present," but also an "ecumenism in time,"²² thus turns out to be a return to the past: "The way out of the present confusion and into a better future is, unexpectedly, through the past. Divisions can be overcome only by a return to the common mind of the early Church. There was no uniformity, but there was a common mind."²³

In what sense there was a "common mind" in Christian antiquity has become an extremely thorny question, especially since the work of Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (or at least since its translation into English). However, what was recognized as normative Christianity by the end of the second century was based (through the interplay of the "canon of truth," a common body of Scripture, apostolic tradition, and apostolic succession) on nothing other than the proclamation of the Gospel "according to Scripture" as delivered by the apostles (cf. 1 Cor 15.3).²⁴ It was the one Christ, proclaimed in this manner, who was then, and will always be, the uniting force for those who gather together in expectation of him as his body. The full, perfect, identity of the Church, therefore, is not something located in the ecclesial bodies and structures of the past, to be recovered by archaeology, but, as Florovsky intimates, in the future, in the eschaton, where Christ will be all in all, an orientation maintained by remaining in faithful continuity with the "faith delivered once for all to the saints" (Jude 3) regarding Christ, the coming Lord. The implications that this has for the recognition by the Orthodox Church of the ecclesial reality beyond its own bounds, is best seen

21 Florovsky, "Quest," 140.

22 Ibid. 139.

23 Florovsky, "Theological Tensions among Christians," in idem, *Ecumenism, Collected Works*, 13, p.13; originally published *The Christian Leader*, 5 (1950).

24 Cf. Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 11–48.

from the point of view of the abiding significance of baptism as our entry into the Church and the historical practice of the Orthodox Church regarding reception of converts.

Baptism, Eucharist and the Boundaries of the Church

Entry into the body of Christ is through baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. "One baptism for the remission of sins" is ubiquitously included in creedal confession along with "one Church." As the body of Christ that we are speaking of is his crucified and risen body, baptism itself is understood as sharing in his death: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6.3-5). It is very important to observe the tenses used by Paul: if we *have died* with Christ in baptism, we *shall rise* with him. Although baptism is a specific, sacramental event, until our actual death, in witness to Christ, we must preserve our state of being baptized: "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. . . . So you must consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6.8, 11). In other words, the "one baptism for the remission of sins" is not simply a gateway to be passed through as we enter into the "one Church," and then left behind. Rather, the paschal dimension of baptism characterizes the totality of the Christian life, shaping and informing every aspect of it, until we are finally raised in Christ.²⁵ As Aidan Kavanagh puts it, "The whole economy of *becoming* a Christian, from conversion and catechesis through the eucharist, is thus the fundamental paradigm for *remaining* a Christian. . . . The paschal mystery of Jesus Christ dying and rising still among his faithful ones at Easter in baptism is

25 See especially, J. Erickson, "Baptism and the Church's Faith," in C. E. Braaten and R. W. Jenson, eds., *Marks of the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 44-58, to which the following paragraphs are indebted.

what gives the Church its radical cohesion and mission, putting it at the center of a world made new."²⁶ The "one true Church" must maintain her baptismal character until, in the eschaton, she is, as Florovsky puts it, the "perfect Church."

It is in the eucharist, the "banquet of the kingdom," the event of "communion" *par excellence*, that Christians are given a foretaste of the Kingdom, invoking the Spirit "upon us and upon the gifts now offered," and praying to God to "unite all of us to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and Cup in the communion of the Holy Spirit" (Liturgy of St Basil). But we must not forget that this is given to us in anticipation, as a foretaste of the Kingdom to come, not as its final realization; no eschatology can be exclusively "realized"; Christian eschatology is always already *but not yet*. The Church is still *in via*, seeking, and receiving proleptically as a gift, her perfection that is yet to be fully manifest.

Whether the sacrament of the Kingdom, already celebrated in anticipation by the Church *in via*, can be used to define the boundaries of the one true Church is a very serious question. This is, of course, how the "eucharistic ecclesiology" espoused by many Orthodox theologians during the twentieth century views the matter. This has undoubtedly contributed to an increased ecclesial awareness, but it has also had a deleterious effect in two respects. First, the "eucharistic revival" that has accompanied such ecclesiology has emphasized participation in the eucharist to such a point that it often overshadows, if not obscures, the perpetual baptismal dimensions of Christian life; baptism is regarded as the necessary preliminary step into body which celebrates the eucharist.²⁷ Taken to its extreme, this results in a community of, in John Erickson's phrase, "eucharisticized pagans"—members of the Church who participate in the eucharist but do not otherwise have any consciousness of the life in death that is the Christian life in this

26 A. Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978), 162–63.

27 Recall the remarks of Metropolitan John mentioned earlier, at n. 9 above.

world.²⁸ Secondly, it results in a view that sees life outside the Orthodox Church, defined as coextensive with participation her celebration of the eucharist, in uniformly negative terms: “The boundaries of the body of Christ depend entirely on the eucharistic life. Outside that life, humanity is ruled by alien powers. Separation and destruction can only be averted by those who unite in Christ and prepare themselves for the joint assembly of the eucharist.”²⁹ In this perspective, not only do the Orthodox regard themselves, rightly, as belonging to “the one true Church,” but they deny the designation “Church” to any other body gathering together in the name of Christ: outside the Orthodox Church, “humanity is ruled by alien powers.”

This approach began with Cyprian in the third century. When faced with various schisms resulting from different responses to persecution, Cyprian defined the boundaries of the Church in terms of adherence to the bishop, but the bishop understood not, as with Ignatius and Irenaeus, as the bearer of the true teaching (for the schismatic groups with whom Cyprian was dealing were perfectly orthodox in their beliefs), but rather the bishop as the bearer of apostolic authority, especially the ability to forgive sins (which is connected with the only mention of the word “church” in the Gospels; Mat 16.18, 18.17), and ultimately with the Church herself. “You should understand that the bishop is in the Church and the Church in the bishop, and whoever is not with the bishop is not in the Church” (Cyprian *Ep.* 66.8). The images for the Church preferred by Cyprian all emphasize the sharp boundaries of the Church and her exclusivism: “You cannot have God for your

28 As Erickson (“Baptism,” 57) puts it: “We forget that the eucharist is but a foretaste of the kingdom, not its final realization. And then, this tendency towards a realized eschatology begins to creep from the eucharist into other aspects of church life, so that the church qua church comes to be seen as perfect in every respect. Its dependence on Christ, and him crucified, is forgotten. We want the glory and forget the cross.”

29 G. Limouris, “The Eucharist as the Sacrament of Sharing: An Orthodox Point of View,” in *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*, ed. G. Limouris (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 254.

Father if you no longer have the Church for your mother. If there was any escape for one who was outside the ark of Noah, there will be as much for one who is found to be outside the Church.”³⁰ Most famously, “outside the Church there is no salvation” (Cyprian *Ep.*73.21). Finally, when Cyprian was faced with the issue of receiving into communion those who had been baptized in a schismatic group, Cyprian insisted that they were to be baptized (i.e. “re-baptized,” though Cyprian, naturally, does not use this term). Because of the connection between baptism and remission of sins, there can be no baptism outside of the catholic church, defined as adherence to the bishop who alone bears this apostolic gift: as baptism is entry into the Church, one cannot be outside the Church and yet baptized into it.

Cyprian’s position concerning (re-)baptism has been repeatedly advocated through the centuries, and, especially since Nikodemus the Hagiorite (1748–1809), is promoted by many in the Orthodox Church today.³¹ But, as Florovsky points out, while Cyprian was right, theologically, to state unequivocally that the sacraments are performed only *in* the Church, “he defined this *in* hastily and too narrowly.”³² Moreover, as Florovsky also points out, “the *practical* conclusions of Cyprian have not been accepted and supported by the consciousness of the Church.”³³ Cyprian’s position was an

30 Cyprian *On the Unity of the Church* 6. Cf. Erickson, “Baptism,” 55–56, for Cyprian’s static, exclusivist imagery of the Church, in contrast to the variety of images to be found in Scripture and the Fathers: the temple, vine, paradise, body; not only Eve and Mary, but also Tamar, Rahab, Mary Magdalen, the Canaanite Woman, Zacchaeus: “not just images of achieved perfection, which might incline us to hold a triumphalist and exclusive view of the church, but also images of repentance, conversion and striving.”

31 For a critical analysis of the issue, see J. Erickson, “The Reception of Non-Orthodox into the Orthodox Church: Contemporary Practice,” *SVTQ* 41.1 (1997), 1–17; and idem, “On the Cusp of Modernity: The Canonical Hermeneutic of Nikodemus the Hagiorite (1748–1809),” *SVTQ* 42.1 (1998), 45–66.

32 G. Florovsky, “The Boundaries of the Church,” in idem. *Collected Works*, 13, pp. 36–45, at p. 37; this essay is stated to be “combined from a Russian original and an English translation which appeared in” *Church Quarterly Review*, 117 (October, 1933), 117–31.

33 Ibid. 37.

innovation,³⁴ and one that has not been uniformly followed by the Church. Indeed, there are several important witnesses against it. The First Ecumenical Council, at Nicaea in 325, speaks of receiving “the pure ones,” that is, those of the Novatianist schism, by the laying-on of hands (Canon 8). Addressing the same issue several decades later, Basil, in a letter (*Ep.*188) which was subsequently included in the canonical corpus of the Orthodox Church, differentiated between “heretics” (who are completely broken off and alien as regards their faith, shown in the form of their “baptism,” for instance “in the Father and the Son and Montanus or Priscilla”), “schisms” (which have resulted “from some ecclesiastical reasons and questions capable of mutual remedy,” in this case regarding penance), and “para-ecclesial gatherings” (“assemblies brought into being by insubordinate presbyters or bishops or by uninformed laity”). Basil mentions Cyprian’s practice, but sides with “the ancients [who] decided to accept that baptism which in no way deviates from the faith,” so that “the ancients decided to reject completely the baptism of heretics, but to accept that of schismatics, as still being of the Church.” In other words, those baptized in the right faith, even if not in eucharistic communion with the main body of the Church, still belong to the Church. This is not to succumb to some kind of “branch-theory” of the Church, nor to advocate immediate eucharistic communion with, in the paradoxical phrase, the “separated brethren.” Rather it is to place the issue in terms of the eschatological tension in which the Church exists in this world. But this does present a challenge, perhaps especially to the Orthodox, to reconsider how they view those outside their own eucharistic community. The celebration of the eucharist is the sacrament of the kingdom, giving a foretaste of what is already but not yet; it seems, as suggested earlier, that we should perhaps not take the character of the

34 It is noteworthy that Cyprian does not challenge the claim made at Rome that Pope Stephen’s policy was in accord with the traditional practice of that Church, nor does Cyprian appeal to “tradition” to support his case: “one must not prescribe by custom, but overcome by reason” (*Ep.* 71.3)

“perfect Church,” to use Florovsky’s expression once again, as the definition of the boundaries of the “one true Church.”

As we are to live baptismally, “considering ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus,” until we actually die in good faith and are raised with Christ, so also the eucharist in which we already partake is also, in a sense “not yet,” but is fulfilled in our own death and resurrection. As Irenaeus put it:

Just as the wood of the vine, planted in the earth, bore fruit in its own time, and the grain of wheat, falling into the earth and being decomposed, was raised up by the Spirit of God who sustains all, then, by wisdom, they come to the use of humans, and receiving the Word of God, become eucharist, which is the Body and Blood of Christ; in the same way, our bodies, nourished by it, having been placed in the earth and decomposing in it, shall rise in their time, when the Word of God bestows on them the resurrection to the glory of God the Father, who secures immortality for the mortal and bountifully bestows incorruptibility on the corruptible (*Against the Heresies* 5.2.3)

By receiving the Eucharist, as the wheat and the vine receive the fecundity of the Spirit, we are prepared, as we also make the fruits into the bread and wine, for the resurrection effected by the Word, at which point, just as the bread and wine receive the Word and so become the Body and Blood of Christ, the eucharist, so also our bodies will receive immortality and incorruptibility from the Father. The paschal mystery that each baptized Christian enters by baptism is completed in their resurrection, celebrated as the eucharist of the Father.

The Mother Church and Christian Identity

Finally, just as Paul describes himself as “in travail until Christ be formed in you” (Gal 4.9), in those, that is, whom he (though this time as a father) has “begotten through the Gospel” (1 Cor 4.15), so also, until the day when we die in the witness (*martyria*) of a good confession, the Church is our mother, in travail, giving birth to sons of God. The motherhood of the Church is an ancient

theme, one which has its roots in Isaiah, who, after foretelling the Passion of Christ, proclaims: “Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord” (Is 54.1). Of the many ways in which this imagery has been explored, one of the most stimulating brings it directly into conjunction with the Incarnation of the Word. According to Hippolytus, “The Word of God, being fleshless, put on the holy flesh from the holy virgin, as a bridegroom a garment, having woven it for himself in the sufferings of the cross, so that having mixed our mortal body with his own power, and having mingled the corruptible into the incorruptible, and the weak with the strong, he might save perishing man.”³⁵ He continues with an extended image of loom, of which the web-beam is “the passion of the Lord upon the cross,” the warp is the power of the Holy Spirit, the woof is the holy flesh woven by the Spirit, the rods are the Word and the workers are the patriarchs and prophets “who weave the fair, long, perfect tunic for Christ.”³⁶ The flesh of the Word, received from the Virgin and “woven in the sufferings of the cross,” is woven by the patriarchs and prophets, whose actions and words proclaim the manner in which the Word became present and manifest. It is in the preaching of Jesus Christ, the proclamation of the one who died on the cross, interpreted and understood in the matrix, the womb, of Scripture, that the Word receives flesh from the virgin. The virgin in this case, Hippolytus later affirms following Revelation 12, is the Church, who will never cease “bearing from her heart the Word that is persecuted by the unbelieving in the world,” while the male child she bears is Christ,

35 Hippolytus, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, 4; see also the extended metaphor in *Antichrist* 59.

36 For further use of the imagery of weaving as applied to the Incarnation, see N. Constatas and M. W. Morgenstern, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity*, Homilies 1–5, Texts and Translations, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae*, 66 (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

God and man, announced by the prophets, “whom the Church continually bears as she teaches all nations.”³⁷

In and through the images of the Church that we have explored—the Church as the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit—together with testimony to the life of the Church expressed in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, we can perhaps now glimpse more fully what is meant by speaking of the trinitarian dimensions of the Church and why it is that the Church herself was never a direct subject of theological reflection in the early centuries. The Church, as the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit, incarnates the presence of God in this world, and does so also as the mother of the baptized, in travail with them until their death in confession of Christ, to be raised with him, as the fulfillment of their baptism and the celebration of the eucharist.

37 Antichrist, 61: ... *ὃν αἰεί τίκουσα ἡ ἐκκλησία διδάσκει πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.*

A WELCOME NEW STUDY OF A VERY OLD ISSUE

John H. Erickson

In October 2003, a four-year study project of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation culminated in the issuance of a major agreed statement, running to some ten thousand words, on “The *Filioque*: A Church Dividing Issue?” The issue in question, as the statement later indicates, is in fact two issues, “one theological, in the strict sense, and one ecclesiological.” (1) Since the fourth century or even earlier, East and West have approached the mystery of the Trinity, and particularly the place of the Holy Spirit within this mystery, in different—though not necessarily opposed—ways. (2) Since at least the eighth century, interpolation of the term *filioque*—“and from the Son”—into the Latin version of the creed known as Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan or simply Nicene has been a source of controversy between East and West, not only because of doctrinal concerns but also because of ecclesiological issues raised by its adoption. The *filioque* thus is not so much a single issue as it is a “symbol of difference, a classic token of what each side of divided Christendom has found lacking or distorted in the other.”

In dealing with this as with any symbol, considerable care must be taken to avoid over-simplification—something that has taken place all too often in popular and even scholarly presentations of the subject in question. The new agreed statement is aware of this danger. It recognizes, among other things, that “our discussions and our common statement will not, in themselves, put an end to centuries of disagreement among our Churches.” While concentrating on the theological aspect of the subject, it acknowledges the overriding importance of the ecclesiological aspect: “Undoubtedly papal primacy, with all its implications, remains the root issue behind all the questions of theology and practice that continue to