

# APPROACHING THE FUTURE AS A FRIEND WITHOUT A WARDROBE OF EXCUSES<sup>1</sup>

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This paper touches on some issues having virtually no place in official Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, including moral questions around marriage and divorce; historiographical and liturgical-hagiographical questions centred on the canonization and commemoration of saints in one communion who left and/or were used in conciliar debates and liturgical texts to condemn the sister communion; and questions of synodal organization and structures in both Catholicism and Orthodoxy in the face of centralizing tendencies. It proposes a model of 'gradual' and localized sacramental communion inspired in part by the work of several contemporary Orthodox scholars—Staniloae, Bordeianu, Plekon, Arjakovsky, inter alia.

## *Introduction:*

I began my official involvement with the ecumenical movement in high-school in 1988, assisting a local chapter of the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue in south-western Ontario. Then, in 1990, I became involved with the Canadian Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches whose seventh assembly in Canberra, Australia I attended, followed by seven years of working for the WCC during which I crossed the globe to many gatherings on five continents.

I learned immediately after returning from Australia in 1991 that the overwhelming majority of Christians had never even heard of the WCC, and had little clue as to what the word 'ecumenism' or its cognates even meant, and, more alarming still, they seemed completely uninterested in learning more. Worse still, those tiny few who actually were aware of the WCC were almost uniformly hostile, picketing our worship tent in Australia every morning with Pauline proof-texts ('be ye not yoked together with unbelievers!') or later taking to the pages of that august and venerable journal of theological scholarship, *Reader's Digest*, to denounce the WCC as a vehicle for advancing what a contemporary Canadian crank, fondly imagining he has invented the phrase, calls 'cultural Marxism'.

While depressing, this realization that the vast majority of people knew little and cared even less about ecumenism was sobering and helpful when we would get

<sup>1</sup> My title is a paraphrase of a line from W.H. Auden's 1940 poem 'In Memory of Sigmund Freud'.

bogged down and spend hours in meetings trying to craft a statement on anything from the First Gulf War to dyophysite Christology. I always resented the time wasted on such things for I knew that almost nobody would ever read those statements, much less pay heed to them.

I mention all this because, after thirty years of involvement in some form or other with the search for Christian unity, I find myself, in response to all three questions asked of me here—what is overlooked in the official dialogues, what issues would arise were the major doctrinal issues to be solved, and what would sacramental unity look like?—returning to the answer of the real estate agents: location, location, location. Thus, in answer to all three questions, I shall argue that we must begin to focus on local communities and the pressing issues and experiences found therein rather than on more abstract national or international structures and concerns.<sup>2</sup>

### *What Is Not Discussed:*

What is not discussed, of course, is not thereby dead. In fact, in good Freudian fashion, I am tempted to claim that what is not discussed in official ecumenical dialogues is sometimes more interesting and more dangerous than what is discussed. Typical dialogue and discussion safely take place around texts—e.g., the Nicene creed and its troublesome interpolation (*filioque*), or *Pastor Aeternus* of Vatican I, or *Ut Unum Sint* of John Paul II.

But what if we move from the lecture hall or conference room to the bedroom? I have thought for some time that issues such as marriage and divorce, contraception and abortion, are hugely problematic within churches, and rarely discussed between them. If Orthodox-Catholic unity is ever to happen, these are the issues that will very likely be uppermost in the minds of many people because of their concrete and daily experience and application.

Similarly, one massive and glaring area of concrete and regular experience that nobody talks about is liturgy. I am thinking here in two ways in particular: first, general liturgical culture in Orthodox and Catholic parishes, about which more in a moment; and second, particular liturgical issues (e.g., hymnody in which the ‘heretics’ of one side are condemned while that same side’s ‘saints’ are lauded). Here one can think of the Orthodox Church of America feting Alexis Toth, or the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church (and indeed the entire Catholic Church) feting Josaphat Kuntsevych.

Perhaps even more intractable: two popes, both canonized by their respective churches, not least for their opposition to each other: Leo I of Rome and Dioscorus I of Alexandria. The latter excommunicated the former, and this excommunication,

<sup>2</sup> I argued something similar about the primacy of the local parish in speaking to and of Russian Byzantine Catholics in San Felice del Benaco in 2017, a lecture that was published as ‘Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through,’ *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 59 (2018): 245–262.

combined with several other factors surrounding the politics of the council led to Dioscorus being deposed by Chalcedon and exiled. If a Coptic Christian today were to start commemorating Leo as a saint, what would he do with Dioscorus's excommunication of the same? In seeking deeper unity with the Coptic Church, beyond the modern Christological agreement of 1973<sup>3</sup>, would the Catholic Church have to officially incorporate Dioscorus into her own sanctoral calendar and set aside a feast day for him? In addition to these two individuals, would Orthodox and Catholic churches of the Byzantine tradition have to adjust our own hymnody for the month of July to downplay our exultation of the triumph of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and denigration of others as when, for example, we sing in the third *sticharion* at Vespers,

O glorious Fathers of the Councils,  
you demonstrated that Pyrrhus, Sergius, and Onuphrius,  
Dioscorus, and Nestorius were in error  
concerning the doctrines of Christ.

These issues could admit of relatively straightforward solution as authorities allow those really wedded to such commemorations to keep them in certain areas without requiring their universal observance. It could also be made clear that quietly removing certain texts from annual or universal liturgical usage is not a threat to, for example, Chalcedon's Christology.

But what about general liturgical culture and sacramental practices in parishes? Here we may be facing a thicket of issues unacknowledged by anybody serious. I am thinking, for example, of widely divergent practices even within Roman Catholic parishes when it comes to the sacraments of initiation.<sup>4</sup> A lack of unity within one church is considerable enough, but if Catholics and Orthodox are suddenly facing each other on this question, what is one to do? I happen to think the only coherent arguments are in favour of the age-old practice which the East (including, happily, Eastern Catholics such as myself) has maintained of baptism-chrismation-eucharist. But the Latin practice of delaying reception of the Eucharist until, usually, somewhere around the age of seven has allowed to develop an entire infrastructure in Catholic schools, as well as an entire mythology around some so-called 'age of reason' that cannot be easily vanquished—to say nothing of the cottage industry that makes money each year selling all the gloriously tacky dresses and accoutrements for 'First Communion' parties.

More seriously, I think a major concern here comes from liturgical culture, which is most likely the single biggest variance people will encounter, often for the

<sup>3</sup> The text is here: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/anc-orient-ch-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_19730510\\_copti\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/anc-orient-ch-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19730510_copti_en.html).

<sup>4</sup> For the vexed issue of Confirmation/Chrismation, see the superlative study of the Orthodox scholar Nicholas Denysenko, *Chrismation: A Primer for Catholics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

first time. Liturgy, as we all know, and especially the idea of any changes to it, can often be a minefield of controversy, and yet this is nowhere dealt with in official ecumenical dialogues between East and West. It should be, at least so far as ensuring some kind of uniformity in liturgical recitation of the Nicene Creed *sans* the *filioque* clause if full communion is re-established.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond that, we may be in for some pleasant surprises if my students are any indication (and I have been sending, on average, 100 of them a year to an Orthodox Byzantine liturgy as a course requirement). They are overwhelmed (in a good way) with and by the sensory extravaganza of a Byzantine liturgy, and the Roman Catholic students among them have, with ever increasing frequency over the years, been expressing open and serious envy at that liturgical tradition in comparison to which they find their own massively impoverished, desiccated, and banal. There is, moreover, something of a generational injustice perceived here, as students today increasingly feel that the generation who implemented liturgical changes at and after Vatican II inflicted some serious deprivations on the rest of the Latin Church, leaving many students feeling seriously shortchanged. In this light, then, the liturgical culture of Orthodoxy would be welcomed by many younger Catholics at least.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Other Issues:*

Without doubt, the single greatest issue comes down to canonical administration, and is tied into the problem-cum-possibility of papal power as it is worked out via various pieces of legislation, including those enshrined in the two codes of canon law. In the apostolic constitution by which he promulgated the 1990 *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, the late Pope John Paul II made it plain that everything in there was provisional and subject to reform once unity with Orthodoxy had been achieved. This is an invitation that should be proleptically exploited to maximum effect.

As we all know, the universal jurisdiction claimed by the bishop of Rome for his office at and after Vatican I remains a very grave problem, but as David Bentley Hart remarked more than a decade ago, the beauty of Catholic conciliar pronouncements up to and including Vatican I is how very spare they are, allowing for a variety of interpretations.<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding that fact, for 150 years now the Catholic Church has essayed a disastrous maximalist interpretation of Vatican I in its canonical legis-

<sup>5</sup> In my own lifetime the bishops of my own UGCC have required the removal of the *filioque* in all liturgical celebrations and this change has been accomplished with no serious complaints of any sort.

<sup>6</sup> Some older and scholarly ones, too, would welcome it. See, for example, Aidan Nichols' comments on how much Orthodox liturgical culture could contribute to Latin Catholic renewal in his 1999 book *Christendom Awake* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).

<sup>7</sup> See Hart's essay in F. Murphy and C. Asprey, eds, *Ecumenism Today: The Universal Church in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2008).

lation. I think (and certainly hope!) that era is starting to end, though not without a fight whose end nobody can foresee.<sup>8</sup>

It would, if one may speak frankly, be useful to have Orthodox partners in this fight even at this stage. What needs to be made clear—as the late Ukrainian Orthodox Archbishop Vsevelod of Scopelos was so helpful in doing regularly and with refreshing bluntness—is that Orthodoxy will in nowise be prepared to live with the absurd restrictions Eastern Catholics contend with today as a result of attempting to shoe-horn quasi-synodal governance into a papal monarchy.<sup>9</sup> The independence of Orthodox synods to govern their internal affairs must be argued for in a full-throated and unapologetic manner. Why must they do so?

Consider that my own Church, the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic (UGCC), is allowed synodal election of new bishops in and for Ukraine only according to its 1991 geopolitical borders. When UGCC eparchies fall vacant in Argentina, America, Australia, Canada, Western Europe or anywhere else, the synod is only permitted to propose a *terna* of names to Rome, which then makes the selection. This practice is premised upon the claim—which only Rome takes seriously, the rest of us finding it incoherent on its face—that every other bishop and patriarch in the world is territorially limited, but the bishop of Rome and erstwhile ‘patriarch of the West’ is in fact not limited to ‘the West’ but has limitless territory and thus enjoys global ‘jurisdiction’ (a word so vague that nobody has ever been able to define it, and it is precisely this lack of definition and clarity that allows Rome to get away with many things<sup>10</sup>). This makes no sense, of course, but it is at least relative progress from the pre-Vatican II era.

The Catholic Church needs to move beyond this grudging acceptance of partial synodal governance to seeing the virtues of full synodal governance, as I have been arguing for years.<sup>11</sup> But the big fear here holding some Catholics back—and shamefully used by other Catholic ‘apologists’ against Orthodoxy and ‘ecumenism’—is the messiness and divisiveness that sometimes one finds in Orthodoxy as a result of having *only* synodal governance, that is, from having no serious primate with some real authority to rise above petty territorial squabbles (e.g., Qatar) and patriarchal rivalries (e.g., Moscow vs. Constantinople) which have, as we all know, imperilled such long-standing and much hoped-for events as the 2016 council in Crete.

<sup>8</sup> It seems to me the newest statement of the International Theological Commission—a semi-official body of Catholic scholars with a loose relationship to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—on synodality, released with almost no fanfare in March of last year, is laying a good deal of groundwork for a much less papally centralized Church. The text very much rewards close reading: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html)

<sup>9</sup> See my necrology and review essay of Vsevelod in the *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 49 (2008) L 1-12 and 152-57.

<sup>10</sup> See Giuseppe Alberigo, ‘Jurisdiction: remarques sur un terme ambigu’, *Irénikon* 49 (1976): 167–80.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, ‘A Short Defense of Authentic Synodality’, *Catholic World Report* 10 December 2018: <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2018/12/10/a-short-defense-of-authentic-synodality/>

I take it as axiomatic that Met. John Zizioulas is right when, as he has repeatedly said for decades, there can be no coherent conciliarity/synodality without primacy.<sup>12</sup> Archbishop Vsevelod, whom I quoted in my first book on papal primacy, was even more blunt in denouncing this primate-less situation within Orthodoxy. If we need reforms in the Catholic Church encouraging fuller synodal governance, then Catholics need to see reforms in Orthodoxy on the question of a primate. If, speaking bluntly, Orthodox cannot agree among themselves on the need for a primate from among their own hierarchs, how serious ought Catholics to consider them in seeking unity with the Catholic primate and pope of Rome?

### *What Would Unity Look Like?*

It seems to me the most straightforward way to deal with all the issues I have sketched here is to consider the nature of the unity we seek. I began by noting that my official involvement with the World Council of Churches started in 1991 in Australia, where for the first time I began hearing the curious phrase ‘differentiated consensus’, which seemed to me then and seems to me still to be a way of recognizing that the previous mid-century dreams of full structural-organizational unity of all churches in one institutional framework were now recognized as illusions in the strict Freudian sense.

Two decades later, I was on a panel with the late Robert Taft and Met. Kallistos Ware at the 2011 *Oriental Lumen* conference in Washington, DC, and I well recall thinking Taft absolutely right when he said that Orthodox-Catholic unity will consist simply, and only, in our being able to share the Eucharist together. He rubbished—and rightly—the idea that unity implies or requires absolute structural-hierarchical unity all down the line, with everyone dutifully reporting to the pope of Rome and having some kind of homogenous canonical administration. I think what Taft meant—he gave this as a very brief aside to another question—is that Orthodox-Catholic unity would bear some resemblance to the current arrangements between the Latin and Eastern Catholic Churches: we are in communion with one another, but have, in most instances, very separate lives. Orthodox synods would, then, continue to elect, discipline, and depose their own bishops with, at best, minimal involvement with the bishop of Rome, perhaps as an appellate court not unlike what seems to have been envisaged at Serdica.<sup>13</sup> Orthodox parishes would function as they do today and much of life would continue without necessarily requiring or even

<sup>12</sup> I sum up his views in my *Orthodoxy and the Roman Papacy: Ut Unum Sint and the Prospects of East-West Unity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> See Hamilton Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law and the Council of Serdica* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003); and, more recently, Christopher Stephens, *Canon Law and Episcopal Authority: The Canons of Antioch and Serdica* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015).



desiring significant or noticeable changes in the areas sketched above—and likely many others.

To the extent that this unity would be visible, it would be seen in, for example, the practice of hierarchs visiting each other's churches, especially on patronal festivals, as the Ecumenical Patriarch has often done by going to Rome on June 29<sup>th</sup> and as the pope of Rome has sometimes done by going to the Phanar on November 30<sup>th</sup>. This time, though, the full Eucharist would be celebrated by both and shared by both. In addition, as I proposed in *Orthodoxy and the Roman Papacy*, an international permanent ecumenical synod would require regular participation of Orthodox primates with the pope of Rome in governing a united Church.

### *How Would We Get There?*

If we wait for official dialogues—especially now that Russia, with typical puerile petulance, has suspended its participation in the official dialogue with the Catholic Church in order to draw further attention to its farouche complaint about the welcome grant of autocephaly to Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarch<sup>14</sup>—to proceed with any of these proposals or many others, then of course we and our descendants to the thousandth generation will all be dead, and their descendants will still be waiting. As Hart said in the essay cited earlier, Christian division now feeds on itself to perpetuate itself for no other reason than the perverse force of habitual sin—very clearly an example of what Freud called the 'repetition compulsion' which forms part of the death drive.<sup>15</sup>

What, then, are we to do? It is precisely Orthodox scholars—Radu Bordeianu, Lev Gillet, Michael Plekon, Antoine Arjakovsky, *inter alia*—who have persuaded me to abandon my previous conservative position that held, as both Catholic and Orthodox churches still officially do, to the requirement that all outstanding issues be resolved before full eucharistic communion is resumed. I now think this is an artificial and unhistorical standard likely impossible of fulfilment. Certainly among some vocal fringes, there is clearly set up an infinite regress of 'issues' requiring resolution, which is of course a shell-game designed never to achieve unity. Let us not play that game.

Instead, having come to a common mind on the *filioque*, and without needing to come to a common mind right now on the papacy, let us begin celebrating the

<sup>14</sup> A decision I have cheered: 'Union of Orthodox Churches in Ukraine a Cause for Rejoicing', *Catholic World Report* 5 January 2019: <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2019/01/05/union-of-orthodox-churches-in-ukraine-a-cause-for-rejoicing/>.

<sup>15</sup> See his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, J. Strachey, ed. (New York: Norton, 1990 [orig. 1920]). Two recent and important studies have revived this most controversial of Freud's ideas. See Benjamin Fong's fascinating book, *Death and Mastery: Psychoanalytic Drive Theory and the Subject of Late Capitalism* (Columbia: Columbia UP, 2018); and M.A. Holowchak and M. Lavin, *Repetition, the Compulsion to Repeat, and the Death Drive: An Examination of Freud's Doctrines* (Lexington Books, 2018).

Eucharist together wherever two communities wish to do so. This will be messy and inconsistent, but so what? Let people do as their consciences guide with the clear understanding that while none must celebrate together, all may do so, and none may be condemned for doing so.

If the requirement for maintaining or resuming full communion seems historically to have been for Christians to recite the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed together, as Catholics and Orthodox can and have done for decades now at, for example, the above-mentioned patronal festivals, then we should insist on nothing more or other than this. This is both necessary and sufficient grounds for celebrating the Eucharist together. Demanding homogenous and uniform practice, and trying to assert, and then presumably measure, mass adherence of nearly two billion Orthodox and Catholic Christians to some doctrinal standard beyond this is impossible—or do we expect Catholic and Orthodox clergy to do what clergy in Scotland were still doing in the interwar period when my grandmother was growing up? There the minister of the kirk had to visit her and her family and all people in his district desirous of receiving communion to examine them on both faith and morals before giving them a card with his check-mark on it to be presented at church the following Sunday without which they would be denied the sacrament.

Let us instead resume celebrating the Eucharist together, for if the excommunications were lifted in 1965, as they were by Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, there is no real reason not to. Let Catholics go to Orthodox priests for Confession if they wish, and vice versa. Let them be married in either parish. Let families in mixed marriages attend either or both churches and commune freely in both. Let Orthodox and Catholic bishops work out arrangements for joint sharing of buildings where this is necessary, and let their clergy work interchangeably in the other's parishes, schools, etc. where needed. Let every form of cooperation blossom on 'social' issues, but let our common *diakonia* in service to justice be consummated around the one table of the Lord—*today*.