

The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanassieff: Prospects and Challenges for Contemporary Ecumenical Dialogue

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One of the most fruitful theological developments to emerge out of the Second Vatican Council is the exploration of the concept of communion as a foundation for contemporary ecclesiology.¹ Indeed, the concept of communion or *koinonia*, has become an increasingly central category within ecumenical dialogues.² Many are unaware, however, of how much this ecclesiology of communion owes to an earlier ecclesiological trajectory, the eucharistic ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanassieff, a Russian Orthodox theologian who effected an ecclesiological renewal within Orthodoxy and indirectly influenced much of the renewal in Roman Catholic ecclesiology reflected in the documents of Vatican II. In this article we wish to reconsider the twentieth century origins of this eucharistic ecclesiology in the writings of Afanassieff and its contributions to contemporary ecclesiology and ecumenical relations between East and West. In the first part of this essay I will explore the origins and influences on Afanassieff's thought followed by a sketch of its defining features. This will be followed by a second section which will critically assess his eucharistic ecclesiology and explore its potential for both the renewal of ecclesiology in Roman Catholicism and the furthering of ecumenical dialogue between East and West.

I. Nicolas Afanassieff and Eucharistic Ecclesiology

A. Afanassieff's Theological Sources

A proper understanding of Afanassieff's ecclesiology requires that we look first to the theological milieu in which he developed his thought. While the majority of his career before his death in 1966 was spent at the St. Serge Orthodox Institute in Paris, he was still very much a *Russian Orthodox* theologian.³ As such, he could not help but be influenced by the ecclesiological renewal in Russian Orthodoxy which occurred in the nineteenth century. Two of the key figures in this renewal were Metropolitan Filaret and Alexei S. Khomiakov.

Metropolitan Filaret represents the cornerstone of nineteenth century Orthodox ecclesiology. For Filaret, ecclesiology began in the Garden of Eden when God conversed with Adam and Eve. Filaret held that from the very beginning of human existence the Church was the divinizing communion between God and the human person."⁴ The human person is fundamentally ecclesial because he or she shares in the relationality of the triune God. Christ comes to us in the Incarnation in order to restore the "communion of Eden."⁵ Filaret taught that the relationship between God and humankind is a relationship grounded in love. As the basis for all ecclesial relationships is love, he maintained that juridical criteria for ecclesial unity are insufficient. Consonant with the East's apophatic tradition, Filaret stressed the centrality of mystery in the unity of the church. As we shall see, this conviction that unity is grounded in love and mystery and not in any juridical criteria will be maintained by Afanassieff as well.

A.S. Khomiakov was one of the best known members of the Slavophile movement, a group of Russian philosophers, poets and theologians who were convinced that it was the mission of Russian Orthodoxy to bring salvation to Western civilization through its critique of the philosophical and theological foundations of the West. Somewhat ironically, however,

Khomiakov's theology is at several key points similar to that of an important figure of the West, Johann Adam Möhler, the German Catholic theologian of the Tübingen School.⁶ Both were influenced by the German idealist Friedrich Schelling. Like Möhler, Khomiakov emphasized the organic character of the church animated by the Holy Spirit. The oneness of the church belongs to its very essence. To be one and to be catholic are two aspects of the same reality; Khomiakov conceived of catholicity as a kind of "full integrity." The church possesses all which is necessary for its "wholeness." Catholicity is primarily then a qualitative term, with the quantitative or spatial aspect being only a manifestation of the more fundamental qualitative reality.⁷ Though he will disagree with Khomiakov on precisely what constitutes the focal point of this catholicity, it is this re-thinking of the notion of "catholicity" which will undergird Afanassieff's own conviction that the universality of the church is not to be understood quantitatively.

Afanassieff's emphasis on the eucharist, while distinctive in the ecclesial significance which he ascribed to it, was not unique in Russian Orthodoxy. Serge Boulgakov and George Florovsky, two other Russian emigrants, had already given the Eucharist a central place in their theology. Michal Kaszowski suggests that there may have been psychological factors at work in the pronounced emphasis on the eucharist by these Russian emigrants; there may well have been a nostalgia for their homeland which caused them to look to the eucharist for at least a spiritual union with the church of Russia.⁸ Be that as it may, we find in all of these writers an emphasis on the eucharist as the nourishment for the spiritual life and, more importantly, as the means for realizing a participation in the mystical body of Christ which was itself an entrance into the divine life of the triune God.

Another source for Afanassieff's thought is evident in the two popular scholarly fields of inquiry among Orthodox theologians, patristics and the study of ecumenical councils. Patristic

studies had played an important part in the nineteenth century ecclesiological renewal mentioned above. In the early 20th century Nicolas Zernov and George Florovsky had already paved the way for Afanassieff with their opposition of the ecclesiology of Ignatius of Antioch to that of Cyprian of Carthage.⁹ The study of the first ecumenical councils was also quite popular in the 1920's because of the Muscovite synod of 1917 and the patriarch of Constantinople's plan for convoking an ecumenical council. It was in his study of the first ecumenical councils that Afanassieff began to consider the question of the local and the universal church and whether or not a council represented an authority *over* the local church.

Finally, we must emphasize Afanassieff's love of the scriptures. He will emphasize time and again that his work is nothing more than a reflection on the ecclesiological implications of the biblical teaching on the Eucharist as the constitutive event for the church. As will become evident, however, Afanassieff was guilty of a very selective review of the New Testament, focusing almost exclusively on I Corinthians 10 and Acts 2, to the exclusion of other eucharistic texts which might have challenged his conclusions.

B. The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanassieff

One sees even in the earliest of Afanassieff's writings a critical appraisal of any *quantitative* understanding of the catholicity of the Church in a manner not unlike Khomiakov in the nineteenth century. Peter Plank, in his 1980 study of Afanassieff's thought, finds in several of his early writings in Russian an already clear distinction between what he referred to at the time as a *quantitative* and a *qualitative* ecclesiology.¹⁰

The path toward a quantitative or *universal* ecclesiology was first embarked upon, according to Afanassieff, by Cyprian of Carthage. In Afanassieff's reading, Cyprian was convinced that a concord of local churches united in love was an insufficient guarantor of church

unity. Cyprian viewed the Roman imperial idea as the solution to the then current problems of church division.¹¹ Although made up of a number of sub-cultures, the empire was one organic unity with the emperor as its soul. Having in mind St. Paul's metaphor of the one body made up of many parts, Cyprian saw one church made up of many parts.¹² Therefore the church is catholic because it has its fullness and totality in being dispersed *per totum mundum*. According to Cyprian, no local church could be fully catholic, for catholicity is expressed in the union of the churches through the union of bishops.

According to Afanassieff, Cyprian viewed episcopal unity in terms of the church's unity. As it is the one faith in Christ which makes the church one, it is the one throne of Peter which makes the episcopacy one. The chair of Peter is possessed by the whole episcopate, with each bishop being Peter's successor, but only in so far as he is part of the episcopate. While Afanassieff admits that Cyprian did not explicitly ascribe to the Church of Rome a juridical primacy (Cyprian's attitude toward Rome during the Stephen controversy makes this obvious), by emphasizing the unity of the episcopacy as the guarantor of the unity of the church, and then placing at the center of that unity the bishop of Rome, Cyprian plainly left the door open for the later development of a universal ecclesiology.

Afanassieff maintained that a universal ecclesiology, while most apparent in the Roman Catholic church, is not altogether absent in the Orthodox tradition. This contention added a good deal more "bite" to Afanassieff's thesis as previous Orthodox theologians had used ecclesiological tracts primarily as a way of attacking the West. For example, Afanassieff cited the Moscow Council of 1917-18 which defined the diocese as "one part of the Russian Orthodox Church, when governed by a bishop according to canon law."¹³ Here too was evidence of a universal ecclesiology which viewed the local church as merely a part of the whole. e quantitative

ecclesiological view which began with Cyprian was so dominant that *both* traditions have forgotten, Afanassieff contends, the more primitive ecclesiology of the church of the first three centuries. Yet this "qualitative" ecclesiology was the only ecclesiology known to the church of the New Testament.

Fundamental to Afanassieff's argument is St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. When St. Paul writes to the church at Corinth and reminds them that they are the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:27) it was impossible for Paul to not have in mind the liturgical significance of that metaphor, i.e. the eucharistic formula "this is my body."¹⁴ Afanassieff was convinced of the intrinsic relationship in the mind of Paul between the church as the body of Christ and the *koinonia* into the body of Christ in the eucharist. Peter Plank has rightly noted the centrality in Afanassieff's ecclesiology of the relationship between I Cor. 10:16 and 17.¹⁵ Verse 16 views the believer's partaking of the bread and cup as a *koinonia* in the body of Christ. In the following verse St. Paul considers the community of believers' membership in the one body. Afanassieff's point is that these verses must be read together. It is the eucharistic *koinonia* which constitutes the community of believers as the body of Christ.

Several important studies have corroborated much of Afanassieff's reading of I Cor. 10:16-17. The key insight is that the usage of *koinonia* in this instance is not to be understood first of all as a referent to some social reality. Werner Elert notes that in early Greek theology, going all the way back to St. Paul, "*koinonia* of the body and blood of Christ is used of the single communicant without any reference sideways to those who communicate with him."¹⁶ This is not to say that this use of *koinonia* is not instructive for an understanding the church as a social reality. In fact, this is precisely Afanassieff's point. One can only understand the church as a community *as the result of* the relationship of each believer to the body of Christ through the

Eucharist. As Jerome Hamer noted in his classic study on the ecclesiological notion of *communion*,

when we consider the New Testament use of the word [*koinonia*], we must beware of reducing it to mere friendly relationships between [one human person and another]. The vertical dimension is the primary one: *koinonia* is founded wholly on Christ and in the Spirit...The horizontal dimension in *koinonia* must thus be regarded as resulting from a vertical relationship, and can only be explained through this.¹⁷

Afanassieff would outline St. Paul's ecclesiology as follows. Through the eucharist the believer enters a *koinonia* into the body of Christ. This *koinonia* is then what constitutes the community, through the eucharist, as itself the body of Christ. Therefore, wherever the eucharist is celebrated the body of Christ is present. Furthermore, since it is impossible for the body to be only partially present, as if it could be apportioned, wherever the eucharist is celebrated there the *whole* body of Christ is made manifest. This serves as the foundation of Afanassieff's eucharistic or qualitative ecclesiology. Where the eucharist is, there the *whole* church is.¹⁸ Like Khomiakov, Afanassieff understands "catholicity" qualitatively to characterize that church in which the fullness of the body of Christ is made manifest. He differs from Khomiakov, however, insofar as for Khomiakov the wholeness or integrity of the body of Christ was preserved and grounded in the faith of all believers. For Afanassieff that wholeness or catholicity is guaranteed and grounded in the Eucharist.¹⁹

Having granted this eucharistic definition of the church, Afanassieff responds to the paradox which it seems to create:

The fact is that a large number of local churches *do* exist, in empirical reality, as they did in the days of the Apostles. Does this mean that *one* Church cannot exist, only a *number* of Churches of God in Christ? The impossibility of such a conclusion is absolutely clear: there cannot be a plurality of Churches of God in

Christ, for Christ is one, and unique. We could not very well apply Euclidean arithmetic, since ecclesiology works with quantities that cannot be reckoned up...[W]here ecclesiology is concerned, to add up the local churches would be a waste of time. We should always have a total no larger than each item of the addition sum. 'One plus one is still *one*' in ecclesiology. Every local church manifests all the fullness of the Church of God, because it *is* the Church of God and not just one part of it.²⁰

The rationale behind Afanassieff's rejection of any universal ecclesiology is now clear. The local church can never be viewed as simply part of the universal church, for to make this claim would be to reject the full presence of the indivisible body of Christ in the eucharistic community.

C. The Ecclesiological Implications of Afanassieff's Thesis

1. The Necessary Re-situating of the Bishop from a Eucharistic Perspective

One of the important consequences of this eucharistic ecclesiology is the inevitable reconsideration of the place of the bishop in the local church. Once again, Afanassieff maintains that he is not offering any ecclesiological innovation but is rather hearkening back to the early church. While much is made of St. Ignatius' stress on the role of the bishop, John Romanides notes that Ignatius' understanding of the episcopacy was completely determined by the eucharist. Ignatius did not understand the bishops to be successors to the apostles for "the apostles could command in a general manner, while the jurisdiction of a bishop is limited to one community."²¹ Rather, the source of the episcopacy is found in the liturgical practice of the church; it is as presider over the eucharist that the bishop possesses his authority. When the bishop is viewed from this liturgical perspective, he is seen not as above the community but as at the center *within* the community.

Afanassieff puts a great deal of stress on the Greek expression "*epi to auto*" as found in Acts 2:47. Often translated simply as "community," Afanassieff reads in the expression the sense

of "gathering in the same place for the same reason."²² This common bond is, he contends, the eucharist. The same expression is used to refer to the eucharistic community in St. Ignatius' writings.²³ It is the eucharist which brings the community together and is its source of unity. The bishop was the symbol of unity for St. Ignatius only *through* his ministry as presider at the eucharist.

Not coincidentally, Afanassieff suggests, when the understanding of the eucharist changed, so did the role of the bishop. Once the eucharist shifted from its preeminent place as the sacrament *of* the church and gradually became a sacrament *in* the church, the *epi to auto* ceased to be the principle of ecclesial unity, having been replaced by the bishop in and of himself.²⁴ The bounds of the local church were no longer determined by the eucharistic celebration itself but by the jurisdiction of the bishop. This was particularly evident in the practice of some urban churches (most notably Rome) by the late third century. Whereas in Alexandria each liturgical center within the city had its own bishop, the practice developed in Rome relatively early for the one bishop of the city to delegate a presbyter to preside at the Eucharist of the various liturgical centers within the city. The tradition of the *fermentum* (sending a portion of the eucharistic elements consecrated at the bishop's altar to the other eucharistic celebrations under his jurisdiction) makes it clear that it was not the eucharistic celebration itself any longer which constituted the local community but the office of the bishop itself.²⁵ Now the bishop is not bishop *because* he is the local community's presider at eucharist, but rather it is precisely his authority as bishop which governs the celebration of all eucharists, such that no eucharist may be celebrated which is not a share in *his* eucharist.

2. The Distinction Between Priority and Primacy

In this paper we have been drawing much of Afanassieff's thought from an important essay he wrote in a collection entitled, *The Primacy of Peter*. The title of this work signals another important consequence of Afanassieff's eucharistic ecclesiology, the rejection of any universal primacy. To understand the import of this rejection we must explore a fundamental distinction which Afanassieff makes between *primacy* and *priority*.

According to Afanassieff, the concept of primacy presumes the existence of a universal church which stands over all of the local churches. This universal church requires an authority or leadership as does each local church.²⁶ The rejection of such an authority follows logically from Afanassieff's eucharist-centered view of the local church. Because the whole body of Christ is present in each church, there can be no authority over the local church for there can be no authority over the body of Christ itself. In fact, from Afanassieff's perspective, the real question of primacy is not a question of the primacy of a particular bishop but of a particular community. Bishops are equal because communities are equal. In Romanides' study of the ecclesiology of St. Ignatius of Antioch he notes that "one local manifestation of the body of Christ could not be more body of Christ or less than another. Likewise, the living image of Christ, the bishop, could not be more image or less image than another image, because Christ, whose image bishops are," by virtue of their place in the eucharistic assembly, "is identically One and Equal with Himself."²⁷

Yet the question remains, if there is no unifying entity above the local church, then what is the relationship between each of the local churches? Afanassieff responds:

If we were guided by our empirical consciousness, we should have been forced to picture this multitude as being in dispersion, since each local church was independent and autonomous. But the categories of empirical consciousness cannot apply in this matter. The multitude of local churches was *not* dispersed, it

was united. The union was something absolutely *sui generis*: the unity was not the result of separate parts reuniting, but it was the unity of one and the same Church.²⁸

This union of the local churches is a union founded on "concord and love." "Every local church must be in concord with all the other churches, because within the church of God, ever one and only one, there can be no discord."²⁹ In actual practice, then, this union is realized as each church chooses to accept the witness of the other churches (*receptio*). Conversely, a rejection of what transpires either in teaching or practice by another church itself bears witness that the practice or teaching does not conform with God's will.

This understanding of *receptio* was reflected in the early church practice regarding eucharistic fellowship between the churches. Elert has demonstrated the ecclesiological significance of the practice of "letters of commendation." These letters were documents testifying to an individual's church membership upon moving to another geographic locale and hence to another church. The main purpose of these documents was to certify the believer's standing with regard to reception of the eucharist. These certificates of commendation also served as an affirmation of the fellowship which existed between congregations.³⁰ When a community accepted into eucharistic fellowship an individual possessing a letter from another community, it was implicitly signaling its *receptio* with regard to that community.

Afanassieff is careful to clarify that when he says that each church is equal, this does not mean that the weight of every church's witness is equal. "The Church of God lives fully present in the eucharistic assembly of the local churches, but each of them has a different way and degree of making the presence actual in its own life."³¹ Hence it is natural that certain churches would have realized through time the presence of Christ to greater and lesser extents, the witness of those churches thereby bearing greater weight. To those churches which have a greater witness,

Afanassieff grants a *priority* but not a *primacy*. Such a "church-in-priority" certainly possesses *de facto* authority, but not a juridical power over other churches. It can never impose its decisions on others, it can only influence by virtue of the respect which its witness demands. Furthermore, since such a church-in-priority can still err, it too depends upon the witness of other churches.

The distinction between primacy and priority in a eucharistic ecclesiology should now be clear. Primacy involves a juridical power granted to an office/church/council *over* other local churches. This must be rejected because the body of Christ fully present in the eucharistic community can never have any authority over it. Priority, on the other hand, is founded strictly on the authority of witness.³² In his essay, "The Church which Presides in Love," Afanassieff pays careful attention to the ancient Roman claims to primacy, particularly in the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Irenaeus of Lyons. His conclusion, not surprisingly, is that the authority of the church at Rome was one of priority, based on its extraordinary witness, rather than one of primacy. "If every church's life is founded on love, if love underlies all relations with other churches, then priority too must spring from love, and be a living example of love's authority."³³ Hence for St. Ignatius the church of Rome possessed authority because of its witness of love. It is not surprising then that Afanassieff does not have any serious quarrel with the papacy *per se* but with the notion of supreme primacy upon which it is founded.

3. Eucharistic Ecclesiology and Ecumenism: The Body of Christ Cannot be Divided

The final, and in many ways most intriguing implication of Afanassieff's thesis was developed in several articles written in the last years of his life. The Russian theologian was quite interested in the events of the Second Vatican Council, particularly with regard to the ecumenical

question. He was fond of Pope John XXIII and dedicated one of his last essays, "*Una Sancta*," in memory of "*Le Pape de l'Amour*."³⁴ Talk of the scandalous separation of the churches was very much in the air. Afanassieff was concerned, however, that this scandal not be misunderstood. In a brief article in *Irénikon* Afanassieff explained his concern, noting that while the divisions which existed with the church were indeed a tragedy, they should not be over exaggerated. Because of the unity which must exist among those communities which validly celebrate the eucharist, the divisions must be seen as being primarily canonical in character.³⁵

Afanassieff stressed in these last writings that a eucharistic ecclesiology denied the possibility of church division. "How can one speak ecclesiologically of division in the church? Is this not the negation of our faith in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church?"³⁶ Where the eucharist is celebrated, there the church of Christ is in full. One must distinguish between the separation of churches, which is not possible, and a rupture of communion between the churches, which in fact often took place in the first centuries. Afanassieff held that it is only in the eucharistic celebration that the local church is an ideal manifestation of the church of God. All local churches are thus in full union *in the celebration of the eucharist*. In all other ecclesial acts each church is only relatively, more or less, a full manifestation of the church of God.³⁷ This was due, he maintained, to the eschatological tension in the church. From the point of view of this eucharistic ecclesiology, the question of ex-communicating another church is rendered moot for two reasons: first, because the church of Christ is indivisible by nature and second, because no church or authority has the power to accomplish an act of separation from the church of Christ.

His own analysis of the ecumenical state of affairs at the time of the council was that, in their ongoing ecclesial life, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches were indeed not in fraternal communion with one another. They were nevertheless united in the one body of Christ

manifested wherever the eucharist is celebrated. He preferred to view the situation as that of one *group* of local churches not being in fraternal communion with another such group.³⁸ Afanassieff was convinced that the ecumenical situation was not hopeless and that the differences which separated the two traditions were not particularly profound, given what they shared in the eucharist.

II. A Critical Analysis of Afanassieff's Ecclesiology

When Afanassieff's theological writings first appeared, they stood as a challenge to the ecclesiologies of both East and West, and indeed, they still have much to offer us. Nevertheless, while his thesis is quite provocative, it has also shown itself to be problematic in a number of respects.

A. Emphasis on the Local Church

The emphasis on the local church is one of the principal consequences of a eucharistic ecclesiology. Here Afanassieff must be credited with retrieving one of the central characteristics of the early church's self-understanding. The universal church is a *communio ecclesiarum*, a communion of churches wherein the one universal church is manifested in the local eucharistic communities. This recovery of the importance of the local church is evident in Vatican II's constitutions on the liturgy on the church. There we find an important reversal of the pre-conciliar tendency toward what Afanassieff has called a universalist ecclesiology. If Vatican II was not always consistent in its development of a theology of the local church, this is perhaps more understandable when we see Afanassieff's own ambiguity regarding the precise nature of the local church. As Edmund Hussey has noted, in both the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic traditions it is common practice for a priest to preside at the eucharistic celebration.³⁹ Yet

Afanassieff develops his argument on the basis of the primitive church where the local church was generally defined by the eucharistic community gathered around the local bishop. Such a community was indeed considered catholic for it fulfilled the essential criteria for catholicity insofar as (a) *the whole community* was gathered around (b) *the bishop* at (c) *the eucharist*.⁴⁰ But today the eucharist is generally celebrated not by the bishop but by a priest and often times in a parish where more than one eucharist is celebrated each Sunday. Can such a celebration, where all of the members of the parish are *not* present and where the bishop is *not* the presider, still be considered catholic? That Afanassieff did not address this question is not insignificant. In point of fact, he often seems guilty of the genetic fallacy, assuming that earlier is better and thus using the praxis of the early church to invalidate any later ecclesiological developments. Indeed, Hussey has suggested that for Afanassieff, history virtually stopped after the third century.⁴¹ Is it not possible to read the late third century shift from communities in which the eucharist was celebrated by a bishop to those celebrated by a presbyter as a positive sign of the church's adaptation to its growing size and influence? Afanassieff does not seem to consider this.

A related danger in the emphasis on the local church has been observed by both Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians, namely, that of congregationalism. John Meyendorff, a disciple of Afanassieff, accepts the central thrust of his mentor's theology. However, he has expressed concern with regard to the danger of granting too much to each local community as considered apart from its communion with other churches. As we saw in Afanassieff's essay, "*Una Sancta*," a local church's break in fraternal communion with other churches in no way injured the catholicity of that church. But Meyendorff responds: "Indeed, while each local church has the fullness of the presence of Christ, this fullness exists *on the condition that it is in union with all the other churches*. No local church can be 'catholic' in isolation."⁴² Meyendorff thus calls for a

more balanced view of the relationship between the local and the universal. His concern about congregationalism leads us then to a second major difficulty with Afanassieff's ecclesiology, the seeming opposition of the local and the universal church.

B. The Local and The Universal Church: A False Opposition?

John Zizioulas, a Greek Orthodox theologian who, as we shall see, has taken Afanassieff's work and developed it in a somewhat different direction, questions the "localism" present in Afanassieff's theology. This "localism" fails to see that local and universal are not necessarily opposing concepts, but are notions which must be held together at one and the same time.⁴³ Each requires the other for an adequate understanding of "catholicity." The celebration of the eucharist represents a concretization of the universal *in* the local church. This bond between universal and local is given witness in the ancient rite of episcopal ordination in which several bishops from neighboring churches participate at the ordination of a local bishop, a point which Zizioulas believes Afanassieff has overlooked.⁴⁴

Afanassieff's opposition of the eucharistic and universal ecclesiologies has led him to reject notions of juridical primacy in favor of a moral priority grounded in church witness. Here he has in mind, presumably, the witness of one church to the other. But how is the church of Christ's witness to the world affected by this conceptualization? Can the local churches carry out a common mission into the world without some institutional or juridical ordering? As Hussey puts it, "can a unity of 'love and concord' carry the whole strain of difficult labor in a common cause?"⁴⁵ The one-sidedness of Afanassieff's approach allows little room for any developed theology of mission, a theme which, not coincidentally, is barely touched on in his work.

In Afanassieff's schema the communion among the churches is grounded in "concord and love," not in any juridical primacy granted to a superior authority. In the early period of the

church, the mutual witnesses of the local churches served as a corrective to any church which fell into error. The priority of witness which certain churches achieved gave them additional moral "clout" in chastizing other erring churches. This emphasis on the moral authority of the churches, and in particular the church of Rome, is welcome. It is difficult to argue with the contention that Roman Catholicism has so juridicized the primacy of the church of Rome and its bishop that the moral weight of papal leadership has at times been lacking. Indeed, in Roman Catholic ecclesiology after the eleventh century, the origins of papal primacy in the pope's episcopal leadership of the local church of Rome was almost completely obscured by the imperial configuration of the papacy. However, Roman Catholicism would want to question Afanassieff's absolute denial of a ministry of primacy which goes beyond mere moral priority. Afanassieff does not address the real possibility that a church possessing the "greater realization of the Church of Christ" might not be recognized as such by the other churches. Since he grants a supreme power to no local church, he seems to have simply given up on the possibility of all churches remaining in communion, for it is clear that historically the moral suasion of particular churches was not always sufficient to keep all the churches in communion. For Zizioulas, on the other hand, universal institutions with at least some juridical authority may be justified, but only for the purpose of preserving the communion of the churches.⁴⁶ Afanassieff's "concord and love" seems insufficient for preserving the communion of churches in a world in which each church is subject to social and political influences which condition its recognition of the truth.

Roman Catholicism has insisted on the Petrine ministry as necessary for the preservation of universal communion. Can this be conceived in a way that honors the qualitative ecclesiology advocated by Afanassieff while going beyond his opposition of priority and primacy? Perhaps the

answer can be found in a more profound exploration of the sacramental character of the episcopate. We must recall that Vatican I's *Pastor aeternus*, for all its papo-centric tendencies, did insist on the episcopal character of the papacy. Each bishop must receive, through episcopal consecration, that power which is necessary for the achievement of his pastoral charge. The pastoral charge of the bishop of Rome is unique in as much as it involves, in addition to a pastoral concern for the church of Rome, a pastoral concern for the communion of churches.

For the bishop of Rome, as for all the bishops, everything derives from one and the same sacrament (episcopacy), from one and the same mission to build and to keep the Church in communion, from one and the same power given for the sake of this mission. But this power operates in different ways according to the office which each member receives within the college. In the case of the bishop of Rome, the dimension of *solicitudo universalis* is extended to a special degree, though always remaining within the sacramental grace of the episcopate.⁴⁷

The peculiar demands placed, since ancient times, on the see (*sedes*) of Rome, requires that the episcopal authority of the one who possesses the see (*sedens*) take a peculiar form. The basic principle operative here is that the power (*potestas*) associated with episcopal authority only exists in relation to the particular pastoral charge (*officium*). Thus the pastoral charge of the bishop of Rome demands a power and authority which, while not duplicated by that of other bishops, is nevertheless episcopal in form. This understanding of the bishop of Rome justifies the universal pastorate of the pope as more than "first among equals," yet without compromising his identity as bishop of the local church of Rome.

Vatican I taught that the pope possessed ordinary, immediate and universal jurisdiction over the whole church. But it was not the intent of the bishops at Vatican I to place papal jurisdiction in competition with the jurisdiction of the local bishop.⁴⁸ We should recall that for all of Vatican I's emphasis on the universal jurisdiction of the pope, the council did insist, in a much

neglected passage, that the ordinary jurisdiction of the papacy did not undermine but rather supported and strengthened the ministry of the local bishop.

This power of the sovereign pontiff in no way obstructs the ordinary and immediate power of episcopal jurisdiction, by which the bishops, established by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28) as successors to the Apostles, feed and govern as true pastors the flock committed to each one. On the contrary, this power is asserted, strengthened and vindicated by the supreme and universal pastor, as Gregory the Great says: "My honor is the honor of the universal church. My honor is the solid strength of my brothers (the bishops). Then am I truly honored when honor is not denied to each one to whom it is due (DS 3061).

It may be then, that there is a way to articulate the Roman Catholic position on primacy in a way that does not place the papacy *over* the local churches but situates it as an effective ministry within the *communio ecclesiarum* and in service of that communion.

C. The Foundational Sacrament of the Church: Eucharist or Baptism?

Finally, while Afanassieff is to be commended for his welcome retrieval of the early church's stress on the ecclesial character of the eucharist, we must challenge his neglect of the importance of baptism. Peter Plank has criticized Afanassieff on precisely this count. While St. Paul did indeed speak of a eucharistic *koinonia*, in I Cor. 12:13 and Phil. 2:1 we see ample evidence of a more pneumatological grounding of the body of Christ.⁴⁹ For St. Paul there was an inseparable unity between eucharist and baptism--the building up of the church and the incorporation into it. Afanassieff's emphasis on the *koinonia somatos* apparently caused him to ignore the *koinonia pneumatos*, for it is clear that St. Paul viewed baptism as the incorporation into the universal body of believers.⁵⁰ It would appear that Afanassieff's agenda prevented him from viewing St. Paul's ecclesiology in its entirety.

One must also question another aspect of Afanassieff's eucharistic approach, namely its tendency to absolutize the identity between the eucharistic celebration and the church.⁵¹ This approach suggests an "all or nothing" view of church membership. It is no surprise that Afanassieff rejected the notion of the *vestigia ecclesiae*, for in a eucharistic ecclesiology the church can never only partially exist.⁵² This raises the question, however, of the status of the "addressees of the missionary engagements of the Church."⁵³ Even in the early centuries catechumens were considered members of the church. In fact, Gerhards has pointed out that a quantitative ecclesiology, from a missionary perspective, is a prerequisite for a eucharistic ecclesiology because the Eucharist is always both "the culmination and point of departure for further missionary work."⁵⁴

In general, Afanassieff's ecclesiology simply does not grant a place for the presence of the church outside of the eucharist. But every act of the believer which is an act of love is thereby also an expression of the church. To not grant an enduring presence to the church in between eucharistic celebrations is to reduce the church to a "blinking" reality; this is the result of failing to consider the interrelationship of baptism and eucharist. The church, already present in the community of the baptized, is built up and brought to perfection in the eucharist.

Perhaps the most interesting critique of Afanassieff's ecclesiology is that of John Zizioulas. While himself heavily influenced by Afanassieff, Zizioulas has taken his eucharistic ecclesiology in a different direction with his more ontological considerations. Zizioulas understands his own project as that of creating a "neo-patristic synthesis."⁵⁵ He is critical of Afanassieff's attempt to force the mystery of the church into sacramental categories. A true eucharistic ecclesiology cannot be founded simply on the celebration of the sacrament of the eucharist. For Zizioulas the eucharist is central because it is in the eucharist that one is brought into the life of the triune God.

It is an event of communion, the bringing together of

the "one and the many." Thus the human person realizes in the eucharist his or her "true being as image of God's own being."⁵⁶ Zizioulas' ecclesiology seeks to develop a foundation for the church in a trinitarian notion of persons-in-communion, and deserves more attention than it has received of late. Unfortunately, a more in depth consideration of his thought would take us beyond the limits of this paper.

III. Conclusion: Directions for the Future

The many criticisms which have been leveled against Afanassieff should not blind us to his more lasting contributions. If it is true that his perspective was rather one sided in its focus on 1) the local church over the universal church, 2) priority over primacy and 3) eucharist over baptism, it is also true that the state of Orthodox and Roman Catholic ecclesiology in the 20th century was, and to a great extent still is in need of the corrective offered by Afanassieff's thought. In the Roman Catholic tradition the Second Vatican Council itself tried to move away from a neo-scholastic conception of the church which was too juridical and indeed, too papal in its view of authority. Afanassieff's work suggests the need for more theological reflection on several key questions. First, while admitting that priority and primacy need not be placed in opposition, it is still not clear how these two can be brought into a more complementary relationship. This ambiguity is reflected in Roman Catholicism where the 1984 Code of Canon Law still assumes a universalist or quantitative ecclesiology at odds with the thrust of the Second Vatican Council. How do we preserve structures which serve to safeguard church communion while not succumbing to a rigid juridicism? Orthodoxy, for its part, must evince a greater willingness to consider the ways in which the principle of synodality, a principle which affirms the fundamental equality of the eucharistic churches, need not preclude a Petrine principle in which one eucharistic

church, the church of Rome, exercises a true and effective ministry of unity within the communion of churches.

Roman Catholicism must also recover the pneumatological foundation of the

church implicit in Afanassieff's ecclesiology. An exaggerated Christo-monism, particularly as it developed in the Roman Catholic church of the counter-reformation, tends to view church structures as Christ's once-and-for-all gift to the church, a *depositum* sufficient for its mission.⁵⁷ A pneumatological foundation sees the Holy Spirit not as *in*-stituting the church at one point in time, but rather as *con*-stituting it.⁵⁸ In this latter schema, church structures are valid only insofar as they arise from the Spirit animating the whole church. While this approach does not preclude a divinely willed permanence for at least some church structures, it certainly calls for a greater willingness on the part of Roman Catholicism to consider more forthrightly which structures truly are necessary for the furtherance of the church's mission.

While Afanassieff did not provide a satisfactory answer to the question of the status of the local church where the local bishop is not present at a celebration of the eucharist, neither have his critics. Vatican II was ambiguous in its documents as to how the local church was to be defined. *Sacrosanctum concilium* #41 attempts to hold the bishop and the eucharist together in its definition of the local church when it emphasizes that those gathered around the bishop's altar represent the principal manifestation of the church. Article 42, however, admits that in practice smaller groupings of the faithful will celebrate a eucharist presided over by a priest in the place of the bishop. The church seems to be still caught in the bind of whether to stress the bishop or the eucharist in its definition of the local community. Further work is needed to develop a theology of the local church which gives to the bishop and to the eucharistic community each its proper place.

Finally, Afanassieff's suggestion that the eucharist might be a good place to begin work in ecumenical dialogue has already born fruit. In 1979 the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church produced

an important document entitled, "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity," which elucidates the theological and dogmatic consensus which exists between these two traditions with regard to the foundational role of the eucharist.⁵⁹ This document has yet to receive the attention that it deserves.

As with many who take their field of study in a new direction, in the 20+ years since the death of Afanassieff much of his work has now been superseded. Nevertheless, he must be credited with calling theologians back to an examination of the sacrament of the eucharist as the basis for a dynamic ecclesiology of the local church. If this has yet to be fully realized in either Roman Catholicism or Orthodoxy, the task is much clearer because of Afanassieff's provocative thought.

¹For some of the more significant works see, Hervé-Marie Legrand, Julio Manzanares, Antonio García y García, eds., *Iglesias y catolicidad: Actas del Coloquio internacional celebrado en Salamanca, 2-7 abril, 1991*, (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia, 1992); J.M.R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, trans. R.C. De Peaux (Collegeville: Glazier, 1992) [originally, *Église d'Églises: L'écclésiologie de communion* (Paris: Cerf, 1987)]; Robert Kress, *The Church: Communion, Sacrament, Communication* (New York: Paulist, 1985); James H. Provost, ed., *The Church as Communion* (Washington: Canon Law Society of America, 1984); Antonio Acerbi, *Due ecclesiologie. Ecclesiologia giuridica ed ecclesiologia di comunione nella "Lumen Gentium"* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1975); Ferdinand Klostermann, *Gemeinde---Kirche der Zukunft. Thesen, Dienste, Modelle*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1975); E.L. Dóriga, *Jerarquía, infallibilidad, y comunión intereclesial* (Barcelona: Herder, 1973); Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes. Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969).

² Cf. Aram Keshishian, "Report of the Moderator: Growing Together Towards a Full *Koinonia*," The Ecumenical Review 44 (1992): 491-501; M. Kinnamon, ed., Signs of the Spirit [official report of WCC seventh assembly, Canberra] (Geneva: WCC, 1991), 97-8; "Church as a Communion: 1991 ARCIC II Report," Catholic International 2:7 (1-14 April 1991): 327-38; Communio-Koinonia: A Study by the Institute for Ecumenical

Research (Strasbourg, 1990); Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses (Geneva: WCC, 1990), 147-51; The Church: Local and Universal [A study commissioned for and received by the joint working group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches] (Faith and Order # 150, Geneva: WCC, 1990); "Final Report of ARCIC I" in Growth in Agreement, eds. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 64-7. Additionally, by the publication of this article the fifth world conference on Faith and Order will have taken place in August 1993 at Santiago de Compostela, Spain. The major theme for this conference is "Towards a *Koinonia* in Faith, Life and Witness."

³ For biographical information on Afanassieff see O. Rousseau, "In Memoriam: R.P. Nicolas Afanassieff," *Irénikon* 2 (1967): 291-298.

⁴ Paul Evdokimov, "The Principal Currents of Orthodox Ecclesiology in the Nineteenth Century," *Eastern Churches Review* 10 (1978): 30.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Yves Congar, *L'Eglise De saint Augustin à l' époque moderne* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 416.

⁷ Evdokimov, 34.

⁸ Michal Kaszowski, "*Les Sources de l'ecclésiologie eucharistique du P. Nicolas Afanassieff*," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis* 52 (1976): 336-37.

⁹ Ibid., 333.

¹⁰ Peter Plank, *Die Eucharistieversammlung als Kirche: Zur Entstehung und Entfaltung der eucharistischen Ekklesiologie Nikolaj Afanas'evs (1893-1966)* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1980), 49-62.

¹¹ Nicolas Afanassieff, "The Church Which Presides in Love," in the collective work *The Primacy of Peter*, ed. by John Meyendorff (London: The Faith Press, 1963), 60.

¹² Ep. 55, c. 24.

¹³ Ibid., 59.

¹⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹⁵ Plank, 223.

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- ¹⁶ Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 16.
- ¹⁷ Jerome Hamer, *The Church is a Communion* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964), 162.
- ¹⁸ Nicolas Afanassieff, "Una Sancta," *Irénikon* 36 (1963): 459.
- ¹⁹ Jerome J. Holtzman, "Eucharistic Ecclesiology of the Orthodox Theologians," *Diakonia* 8 (1973): 14.
- ²⁰ Afanassieff, "The Church Which Presides in Love," 75.
- ²¹ John S. Romanides, "The Ecclesiology of St. Ignatius of Antioch," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 7 (1961-62): 70.
- ²² Paul Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie* (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1959), 129. Afanassieff's treatment of this passage is here summarized by Paul Evdokimov.
- ²³ cf. Eph. 13:1; Magn. 7:1
- ²⁴ Nicolas Afanassieff, "Le sacrement de l'assemblée," *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 46 (1956): 207.
- ²⁵ Romanides, 72.
- ²⁶ Here we must recall again his claim that conciliarism can never be the solution to the problems of papal primacy for in such schemas synods and councils are generally understood as simply an alternative authority over a universal church.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 72-73.
- ²⁸ Afanassieff, "The Church Which Presides in Love," 78.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ Elert, 137.
- ³¹ Afanassieff, "The Church Which Presides in Love," 79.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 82.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 94.
- ³⁴ Afanassieff, "Una Sancta," 436.

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- ³⁵ Nicolas Afanassieff, "L'Eucharistie, principal lien entre les Catholiques et les Orthodoxes," *Irénikon* 38 (1965): 339.
- ³⁶ Afanassieff, "Una Sancta," 439.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 456-57.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 465.
- ³⁹ Edmund Hussey, "Nicholas Afanassiev's Eucharistic Ecclesiology: A Roman Catholic Viewpoint," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 12 (1975): 246.
- ⁴⁰ John Zizioulas has offered these criteria as those of the ancient church's understanding of catholicity. Cf. John D. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 24.
- ⁴¹ Hussey, 245.
- ⁴² John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), 135.
- ⁴³ Zizioulas, 25.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.
- ⁴⁵ Hussey, 246.
- ⁴⁶ Zizioulas, 139.
- ⁴⁷ J.M.R. Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1983), 40-1. This account of the papacy is indebted to Tillard's work on the topic
- ⁴⁸ Gustave Thils, "Potestas Ordinaria," in *L'Épiscopat et l'Église universelle*, eds. Yves Congar and B.-D. Dupuy (Paris: Cerf, 1962), 689-708
- ⁴⁹ Plank, 230-31.
- ⁵⁰ Albert Gerhards, "Die Eucharistieversammlung als Kirche," *Liturgische Jahrbuch* 31 (1981): 189.
- This article is an extended review of Peter Plank's book.
- ⁵¹ Cf. Bernhard Schultze, "Okumenische Glaubenseinheit aus eucharistischer Überlieferung," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 44 (1978): 276.
- ⁵² Afanassieff, "Una Sancta," 444.
- ⁵³ Gerhards, 190.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 191.

⁵⁵ Zizioulas, 26.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁷ For a fine treatment of the lack of an adequate pneumatological grounding in the ecclesiology of the Counter-Reformation see Yves Congar, *L'Eglise De saint Augustin à l' époque moderne*, 380-85, 417-424.

⁵⁸ Zizioulas, 140. It is interesting that from a radically different theological perspective, Leonardo Boff has also criticized the Western Church for its christo-monist ecclesiology and has called for a reconsideration of the Church as the "sacrament of the Holy Spirit." Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power*, (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 144-153.

⁵⁹ Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity," *Origins* 12 (1982-83): 157-59.