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Uniformity, Diversity and the Unity of the Church

Ioannis Zizioulas

I. Introduction

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to participate in the Symposium organised on the 125th anniversary of the Old Catholic Theological Faculty of this University. I am very grateful for the invitation to be a speaker in this meeting and to share with you some reflections on the subject of the unity of the Church as we approach the third millennium of the Christian era. The twentieth century has been called the "century of ecclesiology", and rightly so. The rise of the Ecumenical Movement brought with it a wide and profound discussion of the doctrine of the Church and her unity. It is now time, at the close of this century, to raise the question which constitutes the theme of this conference: what are the ecclesiological perspectives at the beginning of the new millennium? How does the problem of the unity of the Church appear after the ecumenical efforts of our time?

Any attempt to deal with the question of the unity of the Church in a profound theological way inevitably involves a discussion of the problem of the relation between *unity* and *diversity* in the Church. A glance at history would be sufficient to show how crucial this problem has been in the Church's life throughout the centuries. In the Apostolic times this problem dominated the entire issue concerning the acceptance of the Gentile Christians into the body of the Church. The questions whether the observation of certain provisions of the Jewish Law, such as circumcision, was to be demanded from all illustrated the significance that the question of diversity had from the beginning for the unity of the Church[1]. The same problem arose in the second century in the form of the observation of fasting in connection with the celebration of Easter, when St. Irenaeus made the famous statement that "the diversity with regard to fasting constitutes the

[1] The bibliography on this question is abundant. See for example *Ernst Käsemann*, Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?, in: Evangelische Theologie 11, 1951, pp. 13–21, for an extreme view in favour of diversity; *James D.G. Dunn*, Unity and Diversity in the New Testament, London: SCM, ²1990; *John Charlot*, New Testament Disunity. Its Significance for Christianity Today, New York: Dutton, 1970.

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concord of faith" (ἡ διαφωία τῆς νηστείας τὴν ὁμόνοιαν τῆς πίστεως συνίστησιν)[2]. It is also well-known how crucial this issue was at the time of the first major clash between Rome and Constantinople in the 9th century when Photius had to insist that the Eastern part of the Church had always kept different customs form those of the West with regard to the election of bishops as well as other matters[3]. The whole conflict between Rome and Constantinople which finally led to the great Schism of 1054 AD, as well as the polemic that surrounded and followed it for a long time in the Middle Ages, involved differences between East and West which were regarded as essential by some for the unity of the Church, such as the celebration of the Lord's Supper with unleavened bread, the beard of clergymen etc. One could say that the deeper the division between East and West the harder it was to reconcile the two sides on the basis of legitimate diversity. Each side sought to establish its particular identity by allowing for as limited a diversity as possible. Even today diversity in matters such as the date of Easter, the beard of clergymen etc. are emphasised and used as means of establishing ecclesial identities and solidifying and hardening division. Traditions with a small "t" take the place of Tradition with a capital "T"[4]. The deeper the division the harder it is to distinguish between these two.

The same problem arises not only with regard to customs but also with regard to *faith*. Is there such a thing as legitimate diversity in matters of faith? To what extent can there be diversity of opinion on dogmatic matters? Anglican "comprehensiveness" presents difficulties to people of other confessions, particularly if there are no recognisable limits to the diversity involved. By what means do we establish such limits? Is it simply a matter of distinguishing between "faith" and its "formulation" or what Roman Catholic theologians call today "the expression of faith"[5]? To what extent are formulations of the faith binding for the unity of the Church?

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[2] *Eusebius*, h.e. V, 23–25.

[3] See *Photius'* Second Letter to Pope Nicholas I, in: PG 102, cols. 604–605 and 616. Also the Acts of the Council of 789 AD, in: Mansi 17a, pp. 373–524.

[4] This important distinction was proposed, elaborated and discussed in detail during the Fourth World Conference of Faith and Order in Montreal, 1963; see *Lukas Vischer*, Foi et Constitution 1910–1963, Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1968, pp. 172–185.

[5] See, for example, *Emmanuel Lanne*, Tradition et communion des Églises, Leuven: LUP/Peeters, 1997, pp. 462, 469 [reprinted from: Irénikon 46, 1973, pp. 298–342]. Also, *Yves Congar*, Diversités et communion, Paris: Cerf, 1982, pp. 245 f.

Similar problems arise with regard to "order" of the Church's ministry and structure. What is essential and therefore unchangeable in the structure and ministry of the Church? Is everything pertaining to "order" changeable as belonging to the Church's *bene esse* or is it to be organically related to the *esse* of the Church?

The Ecumenical Movement has paid little attention to these questions so far. There have been, of course, several attempts to deal with the question of unity and diversity: particularly in the context of Faith and Order work[6]. But there has been no attempt to establish the theological *criteria* by which to judge what constitutes *theologically legitimate* diversity, and what is theologically necessary for the *esse* of the Church's unity. Such criteria can only be established with the help of fundamental principles of Christian faith. To such principles we shall try to devote a few observations before we come to more concrete and practical aspects of the problem of unity and diversity.

II. Some Theological Principles

The relation between unity and diversity is linked with fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, particularly with Trinitarian theology, Christology and Pneumatology. Implicit in these doctrines is the philosophical issue of unity and otherness, or the "one" and the "many", which preoccupied the human mind at least since the time of Plato[7]. Does unity precede otherness? Is unity more important than otherness? Do the "many" exist for the sake of the "one", as Plato would insist in his *Laws*[8]? These questions are basic to any discussion of the problem of unity and diversity. The Church and Christian theology cannot answer such philosophical questions in any other way except with the help of the basic doctrines of faith on which our very identity as Christians depends. Let us consider some of these doctrines with special attention to the problem of unity and diversity before we apply this to ecclesiology which is the main object of this presentation.

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[6] See *L. Vischer* [note 4], passim, and later Faith and Order studies, particularly the documents of the World Conference of Faith and Order at Santiago de Compostela in 1993; see *Thomas F. Best / Günther Gassmann* (eds.), On the Way to Fuller Koinonia (Faith and Order Paper 166), Geneva: WCC, 1990.

[7] See particularly his *Parmenides*.

[8] X, 903 c-d.

1. Unity and diversity in the light of Trinitarian theology

Trinitarian theology involves in its basic structure the problem of the relation between unity and diversity in the form of the ontological relation between the *one* and the *many*. The faith in "one" God who is at the same time "three", i.e. "many" implies that unity and diversity coincide in God's very being. The question whether unity precedes diversity logically or ontologically in God is of crucial importance. Medieval theology succumbed to the logic of essentialism or substantialism which it inherited from classical Greek thought and gave priority in Dogmatics to the chapter "De Deo uno" which received precedence over that of "De Deo Trino". God, logically speaking, is first "one " and then "many". This theological monism is the equivalent to the philosophical monism which characterised ancient Greek thought form the Pre-Socratics to Neoplatonism[9]. Plato wrestled with this problem in his *Parmenides* but did not succeed to give to the "many" the same ontological priority which he attached to the "one". The same thing happened with Medieval Scolastic theology with regard to God: unity in God comes first; the Trinity follows. The difficulties that Western theology has faced ever since in accommodating the doctrine of the Trinity in common logic are well-known[10].

Now, the position of Medieval theology with regard to the priority of the One God in relation to the Triune God was accompanied by another ontological order, namely that of the priority of *substance* over *personhood*. Ever since St. Augustine the One God was identified with divine substance (*divinitas*), and Medieval theology elaborated this by understanding the three Persons of God as "substances" within the one substance. Given that personhood stands for otherness and plurality in God's being, the identification of the One God with divine substance and the assignment of logical priority to it has meant that otherness and freedom – two basic ingredients of personhood – must finally succumb to the necessity of substance. We shall see below how closely this matter is connected with ecclesiology. If the Church is truly "the Church of God", she must reflect the way God exists. Greek Patristic ecclesiology was not unrelated to these characteristics of Trinitarian theology on which the Greek Fathers contrast with Augustine and Western tradition concerning the relation between the "one" and the "many" in God.

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[9] Cf. *Klaus Kremer*, Die neuplatonische Seinsphilosophie und ihre Wirkung auf Thomas von Aquin, Leiden: Brill, 1971, pp. 79 ff.

[10] See *Karl Rahner*, *The Trinity*, London: Burns & Oates, 1970, esp. pp. 58 ff.

For the Greek Patristic tradition the Trinity is as primary ontologically as the unity of God. The "one" and the "many" coincide fully in God. Substance is a relational notion, according to St. Athanasias and the entire Greek Patristic thought: without the Son the Father's substance is "depleted", argues the bishop of Alexandria against the Arians[11]. Besides, the One God is for the Greek Fathers the person of the Father, and this means that otherness – and by extension diversity – is built into the very notion of oneness or unity. God is not first one and then three, but simultaneously one and three. The general is inconceivable without the particular.

2. Unity and diversity in the light of Christology and Pneumatology

The same problem of the relation between the "one" and the "many" in Trinitarian theology applies also to the doctrine of Christ. A fundamental presupposition in this case is the understanding of the person of Christ in close and unbreakable relationship with that of the Holy Spirit, as the very term Christ indicates, i.e. the one "anointed" with the Spirit. If we accept that the Holy Spirit *constitutes* the Christ-event (Christ is *born* of the Spirit, *anointed* by Him, *accompanied* by Him *in His passion* and *raised* by Him from the dead)[12], we are led to the conclusion that Christ is inconceivable without this body, i.e. the "many" who form His body by the operation of the Spirit.

Now, it is a specific characteristic of the Holy Spirit's operation to unite by *diversifying*[13], to personalise the reality of Christ by particularising Him in terms of persons, space, time, culture etc. If we understand Christ as a Pneumatic being, we have to think of Him always not as an isolated individual but as a reality of communion in which the "many" are *constitutive* of Christ's identity. Therefore, otherness and difference, in other words diversity, is a constitutive ingredient in Christology owing to the fact that the Spirit's operation is a constitutive dimension of Christ's identity.

3. Diversity and the unity of the Church

The Church is the mystery of the "One" and the "Many", i.e. the realisation of the event of Christ constitutes by the Spirit in space and time. Ecclesiol-

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[11] *Athanasius*, Ar. I, 20, Cf. *John Zizioulas*, Being as Communion, Crestwood NY: SVSP, 1985, pp. 84 f.

[12] Mt. 1:18–20; Lk. 1:35; 4:1; 4:18; Rom. 8:11 etc.

[13] 1 Cor. 12:11. Cf. Acts 2:3.

ogy is, to recall the expression of the late Father Georges Florovsky, "a chapter of Christology"[14], yet of a Christology conditioned by Pneumatology in a constitutive way. Just as in the Holy Trinity and in Christology the "many" are as primary ontologically as the "one", unity in the Church is inconceivable without multiplicity. The Church is not first one Church and then many Churches. She is one by being many, and many by being one.

In the early sixties two of the most renowned Roman Catholic theologians of our time, the late Karl Rahner and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, wrote in common a book under the title "Episkopat und Primat"[15]. It was an attempt to reconcile the idea of the Universal Church with that of the local Church – a problem that became central in the theology of the Second Vatican Council. The approach to this problem adopted in this book was basically conditioned by the philosophical axiom that substance precedes existence, and by analogy the universal Church precedes the local Church in ecclesiology. This approach is still operative in Cardinal Ratzinger's ecclesiology which claims that the local Church is the place where the universal Church "subsists"[16]. In other words, if the local Church is in any true sense ἐκκλησία, it is because she is united with the one universal Church whose centre and head is the Church of Rome and its bishop. This implies that unless the bishop of Rome is mentioned in the eucharistic synaxis of a local Church, indicating in this way the unity of this Church with the Church of Rome, there is no true and full ecclesiality in this particular Church. The Church universal logically precedes and validates the local Church ecclesiologically.

Vatican II seems to have adopted a position that, in contrast with Vatican I, recognises the ecclesiological integrity and fullness of the local Church. But it left open the question of how this "catholicity" of the local Church relates to the Church universal. Roman Catholic theologians such as Emmanuel Lanne[17] and Jean-Marie Tillard[18] have tried to answer this

[14] *Georges Florovsky*, Le corps du Christ vivant, in: La sainte Église universelle. Confrontation œcuménique, Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1948, p. 12.

[15] Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1961, esp. pp. 26 f.

[16] For a critique of Ratzinger's ecclesiology from a Congregationalist point of view, see recently *Miroslav Volf*, After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1998, esp. pp. 67–72.

[17] See especially his "L'Église locale et l'Église universelle» in: Irénikon 43, 1970, pp. 480–511.

[18] See particularly his well-known studies: The Bishop of Rome, London: SPCK, 1983; L'Église locale. Ecclésiologie de communion et catholicité, Paris: Cerf, 1995; Église d'Églises. L'ecclésiologie de communion, Paris, Cerf, 1987.

question with the help of the idea of "communion of Churches" allowing more room than Ratzinger does for the constitutive role that the local Church should play in the unity of the Church. The question, however, still remains open and will undoubtedly occupy a central place in the ecumenical dialogue of the years to come.

The essence of the problem lies, in my view, in the extent to which we are prepared to allow a primary and constitutive role for the local Church in ecclesiology. If we do that diversity becomes automatically of the *esse* of the Church, because the basic and fundamental meaning of the diversity is not moral but ontological. Diversity is necessary in the Church not because, for various reasons, it is a morally good thing, but because without it the Church ceases to exist. This can make sense only if the Church is primarily a *local* reality.

If we attach to Pneumatology a fundamental role in ecclesiology, then the one Church will be understood as many Churches incarnating, so to say, the Church in a particular space and time, and in a concrete cultural context. Unity in this case will not precede diversity but will have to be realised in such a way as to safeguard the integrity of the local Church with its specific cultural characteristics. On the other hand, the affirmation and protection of the integrity and specificity of each local Church should be realised in such a way as to protect the unity of all local Churches in one Church. Diversity should not destroy unity, and unity should not destroy diversity. This is the golden rule, but how can it be achieved?

The Church has found historically only one answer to this question. It is in and through *synodality*. Synodality is an institution aimed precisely at safeguarding the right balance between the "one" and the "many", or between unity and diversity. The proper understanding of synodality is of crucial importance in this case, for there have been in the course of history many misunderstandings of this institution with serious consequences for the unity of the Church. The following are the two most important misconceptions of synodality.

In the first place there is an understanding of synodality as a mere instrument of consultation, while the final decisions are to be made by some other institution whose authority is higher and final. This sacrifices the integrity of the local Church to the Church universal.

On the other hand there has been an understanding of the synodical institution as an authority standing above the local Church and imposing its decisions on it. This is what the movement of *Konziliarismus* intended to do by replacing the authority of the Pope with that of the Council. But

in this case, too, the local Church is in danger of ceasing to be a full and integral Church. Synods should never be understood as institutions standing *above* the local Churches; they exist as instruments of *communion* of these Churches so that their unity may emerge as a *symphonia* of diverse ways of living the same Gospel.

In order to achieve this the ancient Church applied certain rules which are quite instructive for our subject. One of them was that no Synod could interfere with the internal affairs of a local Church. This was expressed by St. Cyprian in his famous declaration that each bishop is responsible directly to God for matters pertaining to his diocese[19]. Another rule was that all matters affecting the other local Churches should be brought to the synod of the bishops concerned (Canon 5 of Nicea). In all Synods there is a "head", a *primus*, who cannot decide anything without the rest of the bishops, while the latter cannot act synodically without him (34th "Apostolic Canon" – 4th century AD)[20]. All these provisions meant that each local Church is in communion with the rest of the local Churches without losing its ecclesiological integrity. The universal Church is not an institution above the local Churches, but a communion of full and "catholic" Churches. Unity does not destroy diversity.

All this may suffice to show why it is a matter of theological principle to avoid any conception of unity which destroys diversity and imposes an authority which subjects the "many" to the "one". What would the concrete implications of such a principle be for our ecumenical situation?

III. Unity and Diversity in the Ecumenical Context of our Time

1. Unity and Confessional Diversity

Diversity is essential for the unity of the Church for profound theological reasons – this is what we have tried to show so far in this presentation. A monolithic unit is not an ecclesial unity. The one Church is made up of many Churches, and this is of the very *esse* of the Church. This statement, however, has to be qualified. What kind of diversity do we have in mind when we make such a statement?

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[19] Cyprian, *Ep.* 55 (52), 21.

[20] For the importance of this canon cf. *Pierre Duprey*, The Synodical Structure of the Church in Eastern Orthodox Theology, in: One in Christ 7, 1971, 152–182, esp. pp. 154 f.; *Emmanuel Lanne*, L'origine des synodes, in: Theologische Zeitschrift, 27, 1971, pp. 201–222.

The Ecumenical Movement of our time has strived to bring together Churches understood mainly as *confessions*. Since the appearance of confessionalism in the 17th century the term "Church" acquired also a meaning which it did not have up to that time, namely that of a "confessional family". It has become customary in the Ecumenical context to speak of the "Orthodox Church", the "Roman Catholic Church", the "Old Catholic Church", the "Anglican", "Lutheran" etc. Churches, whereas in the Pre-Reformation period the term "Church" had a strictly geographical character: the "Church of this or that city"[21]. We cannot enter into a discussion of the causes of this development. The consequences, however, of this confessionalist ecclesiology are of importance for our subject. Let us comment briefly on them.

By introducing the idea of confessional Church and using it in our ecumenical dialogue we have implicitly or explicitly allowed ourselves the possibility of speaking of the diversity of Churches as *diversity of confessions*. From the earlier "Branch theory" to the more recent idea of "reconciled diversity"[22], visions of unity have been proposed which conceive of the future unity as a variety and diversity of confessions reconciled among themselves, but retaining their confessional identities. This is very different from what the WCC Assembly in Nairobi proposed as being the goal of the Ecumenical Movement, namely the unity of *local Churches* visibly and truly united. Is the Ecumenical Movement going to follow the one or the other of these two visions?

If we opt for the model of a reconciled diversity of confessional Churches, our ecumenical dialogue should concentrate on the question which of the Christian truths we can confess together and which we can keep as *adiaphora* or *theologoumena* on which we can differ while still being united. This has been more ore less the prevailing method in ecumenical dialogue. Is it a satisfactory approach to the unity we seek?

If we consider, as two examples, the theological dialogues between the Orthodox on the one hand and the Old Catholics and the Oriental Orthodox on the other we can see how problematic this method is. With both of these Churches the Orthodox have reached almost full agreement on what

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[21] Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 1:1; Acts 8:1; 11:22 etc. Cf. *J. Zizioulas*, The Unity of the Church in the Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries, Athens, 1965, pp. 29 f. (in Greek).

[22] See *Harding Meyer*, Einheit in versöhnter Verschiedenheit – Organische Union. Gemeinsamkeit und Differenz gegenwärtig diskutierter Einheitskonzeptionen in: Ökumenische Rundschau, 27, 1978, pp. 337–400.

is essential and what can be regarded as legitimate diversity in confessional terms. This, however, has not led to the restoration of unity as one might expect. The crucial problem that keeps these Churches divided is *how they can form a united Church at the local level*. The ultimate question, therefore, in the Ecumenical Movement is not the common confession of faith, as many people, including the Orthodox, would insist, but what sort of structure the local Church should have so as to be visibly united, in the words of the Nairobi Assembly. To this implicitly belongs also the question of what sort of structure the local Churches should have at the regional or universal level in order to be truly united into one Church.

All this means that the future agenda of the Ecumenical Movement will have to go further than the discussion of what is essential and what is secondary in terms of faith understood in a confessionalist sense, and address the question of the kind of structure required for the unity of all Christians at the local and universal level. This does not mean that the confessional aspect of unity is to be abandoned. It means that the ultimate vision of unity cannot involve a diversity of confessions understood as *Churches*. Diversity of confessional views or positions can exist only *within a local Church* in the form of theological opinions (*theologoumena*). Yet without a local Church in existence and operation it is not possible to tell what is a *theologoumenon* and what is a *dogma*. For it is the community that decides what is *adiaphoron* and what is *anagkaion* (necessary) in the confession of faith.

The idea of *theologoumenon* was proposed for the first time by the Russian Orthodox theologian Vasilij V. Bolotov[23] in connection with the attempts to bring together the Orthodox and the Old Catholics after the communion of the latter with Rome was broken in 1871. Bolotov, together with another Russian historian Aleksandr L. Katanski, produced a report concerning the *Filioque*, in which the idea of *theologoumenon* was proposed by Bolotov in the following sense:

> "The *theologoumena* are the theological opinions of the holy Fathers of the one undivided Church: they are the opinions of those among whom are found persons we rightly call οἱ διδάσκαλοι τῆς οἰκουμένης. The *dogma* contains the *necessaria*, the *theologoumenon* the *dubia*: In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas!"

[23] See his «Thesen über das ‹Filioque›» published without his name in: Revue internationale de Théologie, 6, 1898, pp. 681–712.

This idea of Bolotov has not enjoyed universal acceptance by the Orthodox. And yet it is a valuable tool in the discussion of the problem of unity and diversity, if it is combined with what we have just tried to say concerning the distinction between confessional diversity and geographical Church. The crucial question is what constitutes a *dogma* in the Church. A *dogma* belongs by definition to the *necessaria*; there can be no diversity concerning dogmatic formulations. In order, however, to call a certain truth "dogma" it is necessary to apply certain fundamental conditions, including the following:

a) It must be proclaimed by a council or synod of bishops, not as individuals but as heads of local Churches. The wider the representation and participation of these Churches, the greater the authority of the decisions proclaimed (e.g. an Ecumenical Council).
b) It must be *received* by the local Churches, i.e. by the entire community of each local Church[24]. The cases of Ephesus 449 and Ferrara-Florence which were rejected by the communities, although they were convened as Ecumenical Councils, illustrate this point.
c) It must acquire a *doxological* character as part of the community's worship, particularly its Eucharist, where, the "Amen" of the Church makes Truth an event of communion with God and humanity[25].

Every other formulation or confession which does not fulfill these conditions, even if it comes form the greatest of Church Fathers and teachers, is not a *dogma* and it is, therefore, not a *necessarium*. St. Athanasius' teaching, to use an obvious example, would have remained a *theologoumenon* had it not been endorsed and proclaimed by the Council of Nicea.

All this means that confessional truth in itself cannot become a *necessarium* for the unity of the Church unless it is adopted by the local Church as a community or by the local Churches as a communion of Churches. If we apply this to our ecumenical situation and its future possibilities, the following questions acquire decisive importance:

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[24] On the notion of reception see *E. Lanne*, La réception dans l'Église ancienne, in: *idem*, Tradition et communion des Églises [note 5], pp. 637–655; *Werner Küppers*, Reception: Prolegomena to a Systematic Study, in: Councils and the Ecumenical Movement (WCC Studies No 5), Geneva: WCC, 1968, pp. 76–98; *J.D. Zizioulas*, The Theological Problem of Reception, in: One in Christ 21, 1985, pp. 187–193.

[25] See *J. Zizioulas* [note 11], esp. pp. 116 f.

a) Are we prepared to accept as *necessaria* the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils which were received by the Church before our divisions?
b) Are we ready to regard as *theologoumena* all formulations and views that do not belong to the above category?
c) Can we agree on the need to restore the basic structure of the Church as a local community and as a communion of Churches, which will absorb and replace our confessional identities?

If we are ready to answer these questions in the affirmative, our ecumenical work will have a sound and healthy basis on which to build its future.

2. *Unity and Cultural Diversity*

Agreement on dogma with the help of the above criteria can be a good basis for ecumenical work, but it cannot exhaust the agenda. Unity on the basis of our common Tradition – what Florovsky used to call "ecumenism in time"[26] – would always leave open the question of the *interpretation* of this Tradition. And interpretation takes place always with the help of *culture*. To what extent can cultural diversity be allowed to play a role in Church unity? This question will be of crucial importance in the future, since we are rapidly moving into a multi-cultural society.

Cultural diversity has always been regarded positively by the Church. Such a diversity would include the use of language in worship, catechesis, preaching etc., and would go as far in the ancient Church as to involve the use of philosophical concepts in theology or even liturgical symbols and imagery in worship borrowed from local culture. Tendencies to impose a certain language in worship universally or forms of social behaviour of a certain "Christian" culture, are now regarded as mistakes of the past to be condemned and corrected. There is a tendency to speak today of *inculturation* as the right attitude of the Church towards the various cultural settings in which the Gospel is preached[27]. All this is acceptable as a matter of principle, but in reality the application of this principle is by no means easy. A few examples would suffice to illustrate the difficulties.

If we take as an example the African cultural context, we may reasonably ask whether polygamy, or the use of elements other than bread and

[26] *G. Florovsky*, The Tragedy of Christian Divisions, in: *idem*, Ecumenism I. A Doctrinal Approach (Collected Works 13), Vaduz: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1989, pp. 28–35, here p. 32.

[27] See *Y. Congar*, [note 5] pp. 55 ff.

wine for the Eucharist, or the linkage with the ancestors, belong to *adiaphora* that can be tolerated for the sake of inculturation. Similar problems arise in the context of Indian culture and the extent to which theology can adopt and use religious ideas borrowed from Oriental religions. Even in the context of Western culture which is supposed to be traditionally Christian, it is not an easy matter to decide which aspects of Christian faith and life form part of a legitimate cultural diversity or constitute *necessaria* for the unity of the Church. If one studies carefully the differences between Eastern and Western theology, one would come across aspects of theology or Church life which divide the Churches although they relate to cultural differences, such as the juridical and forensic approach to salvation which has been characteristic of the West, and the more ontological or mystical tendency of the East, etc. Even within Western Christianity it is not easy to decide whether certain issues that tend to be divisive, such as the ordination of women to the priesthood, homosexuality etc. relate to legitimate cultural diversities or to the hard core of the *necessaria*.

The Ecumenical Movement will soon realise that we need theological criteria by which to make decisions on cultural diversities of this kind. History, ancient as well as contemporary, has shown that appeal to the authority of the Bible would be insufficient in this case. The Bible itself is open to interpretation, and cultures will always play a role in the process of such an interpretation[28]. There is talk today of a "canon within the Canon" of Scripture[29], and unless we adopt an extreme fundamentalist approach to the Bible we cannot expect a great deal of help from it for this kind of problem. Where then can we draw assistance from?

The problem is very serious and should receive high priority in the ecumenical agenda of the new millennium. In my modest personal view we need a *hermeneutic* of an *existential nature*. Neither the Gospel nor the

[28] The Bible itself is culturally conditioned, at least with regard to Semitic and Greek cultural influences. Cf. *James Barr*, The Semantics of Biblical Language, Oxford: OUP, 1961. Also, *Martin Hengel*, Judentum und Hellenismus, Tübingen: Mohr, 1973.

[29] The idea seems to have stemmed from E. Käsemann's address to the Faith and Order World Conference of Montreal (1963), see note 1 above. Cf. *idem*, Das Neue Testament als Kanon, Göttingen: V&R, 1970; *Isidor Frank*, Der Sinn der Kanonbildung. Eine historisch-theologische Untersuchung der Zeit vom 1. Clemensbrief bis Irenäus von Lyon (Freiburger theologische Studien 90), Freiburg i.Br.: Herder,1971; *Leonhard Goppelt*, Die Pluralität der Theologien im N.T. und die Einheit des Evangeliums als ökumenisches Problem, in: *Vilmos Vajta* (ed.), Evangelium und Einheit, Göttingen: V&R, 1971, pp. 109–115.

Church exist in order to provide material for thought and speculation to theologians; they exist in order to offer salvation to Gospel and the Church, and unless we dig deep into the soteriological core of the Gospel and the Church, we shall never grasp the true *necessaria* of Church unity. I believe that the Fathers of the Church did precisely that in formulating dogma. If dogmas are necessary they are so only because they are necessary soteriologically, i.e. existentially. This should be the ultimate criterion in any attempt to decide what is legitimate and acceptable or tolerable in cultural diversity.

This is a formidable task, indeed. The Ecumenical Movement must start asking questions of existential significance and put in the light of the answers given to these questions by the Gospel all particular problems posed by cultural diversities. What sort of human being and of human existence does the Gospel of Christ bring with it? What mind of attitude to the world does the Gospel demand? Are our dogmatic or moral differences a hindrance to the soteriological content of the Gospel? Are our Church structures, our Sacraments and Ministries necessary for the existential needs of the world? Is a particular cultural difference significant in terms of the soteriological content of Christian faith? In order to answer questions of this kind we need a *new type of theology*, perhaps a radical revision of the curriculum of our Theological Faculties so that the existential content and significance of Christian faith may become evident and serve as the ultimate criterion of what is essential and necessary in the unity of the Church.

I have tried in this paper to submit to your consideration some reflections on the crucial subject of the relation between unity and diversity in the Church in view of the entrance of the Ecumenical Movement into the third millennium. I have attempted to show in the first place how important diversity is, not only for the life but also for the very being of the Church. Indeed, diversity is built into the very being of God and, in the Holy Spirit, also into the identity of Christ. There is no unity without diversity, as there is no "one" without the "many". Church unity should not be confused with uniformity, for the Holy Spirit unites by differentiating.

However, the balance between unity and diversity has always been difficult to achieve. Christians have been divided in the course of history precisely because they failed to achieve this balance. All attempts at a restoration of the broken unity have to pass the test of this balance. The unity of the Church will prove to be a utopia if we do not develop the proper crite-

ria by which to judge what is necessary and what can be regarded as legitimate diversity in the Church.

As we move into the third millennium our ecumenical work will have to take seriously into account the fact that the Church will exist in a multi-cultural world in which she will have to co-exist with other faiths and cultures while keeping her distinct identity, i.e. her faithfulness to the Gospel. This will prove to be difficult if the Christians remain divided. Christian unity is now more necessary than ever before. The Ecumenical Movement must intensify its efforts. Equally, however, it must review its method of work and its agenda. Serious and profound theological work should be done in order to bring out the existential significance of whatever is claimed to be necessary for unity, and make this the ultimate criterion in all ecumenical discussions. Historical and Biblical theology can be of great help. But it is *systematic theology* that is now called to make the decisive contribution. We cannot re-unite Christendom on the basis of history alone. We have to put our historical divisions in the light of the deeper needs of the human being and the world as a whole. This is what the Fathers of the Church did in their own time. This is what we are called to do today, too.

The coming millennium will bring with it a challenge to our confessional identities. There is no doubt that each confession carries with it a richness that can be valuable for the unity of the Church. A great deal, however, of our specific confessional traditions comes from cultural sources (Roman, Byzantine, Enlightenment, etc.). In a rapidly changing cultural context we shall have to ask the question what of all this is still valid and for what reason. Our confessional identities which we all cherish so much, must be ready to undergo sacrifices for the sake of the unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which exists not for her own sake but for the salvation and life of the world. All confessional identities will have to sacrifice something of their cultural heritage for the sake of unity. They should even go as far as giving up confessionalism altogether for the sake of the emergence of local Churches truly and visibly united.

The model of peaceful and amicable co-existence of our Confessions may appeal to most of us as the nicest and easiest solution of the ecumenical problem, since it involves practically no sacrifice by anyone. It can be described as diversity rather than unity. Equally, the model of organic absorption of all confessions by one particular confessional family would amount to a unity without diversity, a totalitarian kind of unity.

Only a unity which results from constantly placing our confessional particularities in the light of the Kingdom of God as it relates, critically as well as positively, to the existential needs of the world can form a healthy basis for ecumenism. It is on such a basis that "ecumenism in time", i.e. unity on the basis of our common past, can become also "unity in space", i.e. unity in our world as it actually is with its variety of cultural expressions and existential needs. Through this process of "re-reception" of the Gospel ecumenism can acquire meaning and advance in the third millennium.

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