

Evaluation of the Dialogue between Representatives of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and Orthodox Theologians

Orthodox Position

Ciprian Burlacioiu

1. Introduction

Since 2002 the Protestant-Orthodox dialogue has been enriched by a new dimension: a new theological dialogue has been initiated. Orthodoxy was represented by theologians from various autocephalous churches which are members of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). On the other side were Protestant theologians representing the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). The organisers were CEC and the CPCE.

Three consultations have been held so far, at two-year intervals. The first took place on Crete, 28 November – 1 December 2002, the second 25–27 June

2004 in Wittenberg, Germany and the third 27 March – 2 April 2006 in Constantinople. At all these meetings the main theme was the doctrine of the Church. The working method characteristically involved pairs of presenters, one from each side. Some of the papers to be presented were available to these co-presenters before the consultation, so that they could prepare their own papers as responses. During the meetings, the plenary discussions played an important role. The debates were very lively and contributed a great deal to the content of the consultations. The results were written up as joint communiqués in which the most important points in the debates were included.

The task of evaluating this dialogue is structured as follows: first, reflection on the context in which it took place; second, focus on the different ecclesiological aspects of the debate; third, presentation of problems concerning the sacraments, with a particular focus on baptism; fourth, a concluding overall evaluation of the dialogue and the prospects for future possibilities.

2. Remarks on the context of the dialogue

From the Orthodox viewpoint, this dialogue is considered something new. There are various reasons for this. Previous relations through dialogue had been structured as follows: in some dialogues, individual Orthodox Churches met in bilateral relationships with churches of various confessions; in others, all Orthodox Churches together met as dialogue partners with other confessional families, such as the Lutheran World Federation or the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. In addition there is cooperation through the World Council of Churches (WCC) or through regional ecumenical organisations such as CEC. This dialogue with the CPCE is different from these previous models. This is due to the mixed structure of the CPCE, which is not regarded as a church in either the Orthodox or the Protestant view. It is rather an alliance of the many Protestant Churches in Europe.

This fact has consequences for the dialogue. First of all, it is not considered as an “official” dialogue between churches. These are conversations between professional specialists, ex-

ploring together the possibilities for future ventures. Thus there is no pressure to adopt a final document at the end that represents capacity for consensus but also remains true to the confessions represented. Nevertheless, this action is taken seriously by the Orthodox side because of the way the committee was constituted; it was chaired by a bishop and included well-known theologians as members. Secondly, however, this form leads to difficulties with the reception of the results. They will have less influence than other ecumenical papers and initiatives beyond the circle of the participants themselves.

It is worth noting that in the case of this dialogue, Orthodoxy has shown flexibility with regard to the new realities within European Protestantism; the creation of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship/CPCE (1973), the Scandinavian-Anglican Porvoo Communion (1993), and to a lesser degree the Meissen Declaration (1988), have transplanted Orthodox-Protestant dialogue in Europe into a different church scene. These relations among Protestants and Anglicans, which bring with them completely new theological content, have moved European Orthodoxy to participate in this new form of dialogue.

3. The doctrine of the Church

The dialogue was mainly devoted to the doctrine of the Church. The organisers’ idea in planning it thus was, rather than comparing isolated items of doctrine from the theology of each side, to let the doctrinal context of each side be the central consideration. And the doctrine of the Church was regarded as the place

where confessional identity can be most completely seen.

In the Orthodox tradition, ecclesiology is relatively new as a systematically organised doctrine. Not until the interconfessional contacts between Orthodox Churches and other churches in the 19th and more so in the 20th century were Orthodox theologians moved to reflect systematically on the position of their own church in the context of pluralistic societies. Traditionally, this topic has been regarded as the question of “Orthodoxy” as opposed to “heresy”. At least by the end of the 20th century, the increasingly pluralistic societies of the different traditionally Orthodox countries, but also the presence of Orthodox Christians in other geographical areas, made it necessary to consider the conduct of Orthodoxy towards other churches. Practical matters have confronted not only Orthodoxy, but in the same way all churches with the problem of living and working together with other churches or confessions.

However, this practice-oriented perspective was not possible until theological decisions had first been taken. Such questions had to be clarified as, whether the other churches are *churches in the real sense*, whether their ministries are valid, whether these ministries administer valid sacraments, and whether a change of confession represents a problem. Theological enquiries were

undertaken into mutual recognition, church order and structure, apostolicity, catholicity, and the unity of the church. These issues – apart from church order and structure – also determine the coordinates of this new dialogue between Orthodox theologians and representatives of the CPCE.

3.1 The essence of the Church

The document for discussion at the first consultation on Crete in 2002 was the study *The Church of Jesus Christ [Leuenberg Text 1, 1995]*. One of the chapters of this study is entitled “The Essence of the Church as the Communion of Saints”. In a paper, Michael Beintker referred to this study and presented the Church as “founded on Jesus Christ alone”.¹ He regarded as equally important the distinction between the ground and the form of the Church, which was recorded as a principal theme of ecclesiology. Consequently, a further distinction was made between divine and human actions in the Church. “What makes the Church to be the Church in the first place and precedes all human reactions and actions, is the justifying, liberating action of God which is witnessed through the preaching of the gospel and celebrated through the sacraments.”² This statement points to the importance of the *Confessio Augustana* VII for the Leuenberg Agreement in particular and for the Protestant

¹ Michael Beintker, “The Study ‘The Church of Jesus Christ’ from the Protestant Viewpoint” (Paper presented in Crete 2002), at the *Consultation between the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (LCF) on the Question of Ecclesiology* (hereafter cited as Leuenberg Texts 8), Frankfurt/M. 2004, pp. 73–88.

² *ibid.*, p. 78.

Churches in general. The logical conclusion here is that “invested with the authority of God” cannot be attached to the church as an institution.³

From the Orthodox perspective, Grigorios Larentzakis notes on two occasions⁴ that to define the Church, what it is according to its essence, is difficult and appears to be impossible. There are two reasons for this: first, the Church is a mystery; second, it is a living thing, not a theory, and as the body of Christ it is beyond any definition. As stated clearly in the communiqué from the 2004 Wittenberg consultation, the word *mysterion* is, for the Orthodox side, the appropriate expression for the reality of the Church.

The statement about the work of God as the foundation of the Church is to be affirmed, from the Orthodox viewpoint. Equally worthy of affirmation is the conception of the Church as the body of Christ. The preaching of the gospel and the sacraments underline the pneumatological dimension of the Church, and through it the Church lives as a community. The only problematic statement in the study *The Church of Jesus*

Christ is the one about the Holy Spirit as “the power of community originating from the Father and the Son”⁵, which indicates a view including the *filioque*. However, the question remains open as to whether the principal ecclesiological theme of distinguishing between the ground and the form of the Church can be reconciled with the concept *mysterion*. This calls for reflection on the role of justification for the Church, especially since, in the Protestant view, this doctrine is *articulus stantis et cadentis Ecclesiae*. Larentzakis regarded the theme of justification as specifically anchored in the dispute between the Western churches, and drew the conclusion that this doctrine “is [not] congruent with the Orthodox view”.⁶

A clarification of the Protestant distinction between the visible and the invisible Church is also indicated. Larentzakis interprets the statement in the study,⁷ about the Church as the object of faith and as a visible community, as a perichoretic view. The Church is not limited to its social reality, but rather is a work of God and of human beings. As Christoph Marksches⁸ emphasised, this – although it is often falsely inter-

³ *ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴ Grigorios Larentzakis, “Ecclesiology in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship: Remarks from an Orthodox point of view” (paper presented in Crete 2002), in *Leuenberg Text 8*, pp. 117–140, here p. 117; and “The One Church and Its Unity. Some considerations from the Viewpoint of Orthodox Theology” (paper presented in Wittenberg 2004), in *Consultation between the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) on the Question of Ecclesiology* (cited hereafter as *Leuenberg Text 11*), Frankfurt/Main 2008, pp. 70–105.

⁵ *The Church of Jesus Christ*, I, 1.3, p. 120.

⁶ Larentzakis, “Ecclesiology in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship”, p. 110.

⁷ *The Church of Jesus Christ*, I, 2.2.

⁸ Christoph Marksches, “The One Church and its Unity” (paper presented in Wittenberg 2004), in *Leuenberg Text 11*, pp. 105–118, here p. 110.

preted among Protestants – does not mean in any way that the Church is separate from the body of God. Again, Luther’s distinction between a true and a false Church refers only to the visible Church.

3.2 The boundaries and the unity of the Church

Three papers from the Protestant side⁹ discussed, directly or indirectly, the boundaries and the unity of the Church. Beintker mentioned the *notae ecclesiae* (which Markschie also mentions, as “characteristics of the true Church”), according to the *Confessio Augustana* VII as criteria for unity. Markschie described Martin Luther’s position, in which Luther refuses to consider the other confessional parties as being the Church, because he “saw in them that the word [of the gospel] was being obscured or not preached at all”.¹⁰ Risto Saarinen took up the theme in more detail. He observed in Protestant theology a certain anxiety in the face of formal criteria for the catholicity of the Church, and spoke of an “‘internalism’ or ‘spiritualism’”, although this is not carried through consistently. However, the *notae ecclesiae* remain necessary as “outward sign”. On the basis of WCC

ideas of unity, Saarinen drew the conclusion that there is a tension in Protestant theology between the local and the universal dimension, between one’s own identity or autonomy on one hand and unity on the other. This makes it possible to speak of “different ‘ecclesial densities’” and the distinction between “Church [as] autonomous entity” and “church community”.¹¹

This set of problems was discussed in three papers by the Orthodox side.¹² Larentzakis had already noted at the Wittenberg meeting that, for Orthodox theologians, the question of the boundaries of the Church can be answered in two possible ways: on one hand, many would identify the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church” with the Orthodox Church; on the other hand, the Orthodox Church is seen in the continuity and continuation of identity with the church of Christian origins. In the case of identification of the canonical boundaries of the Orthodox Church with those of the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”, the direct granting of divine grace by the Lord to those outside its canonical boundaries, heretics or schismatics, is not accepted. This raises the question as to whether any church can exist outside the Orthodox Church. This question is answered

⁹ Beintker, “The Study ‘The Church of Jesus Christ’...”; Markschie, “The One Church and its Unity”; Risto Saarinen, “Unity and Catholicity of the Church” (paper presented in Constantinople 2006), in *Leuenberg Text 11*, pp. 164–180.

¹⁰ Markschie, “The One Church and its Unity”, p. 108.

¹¹ Saarinen, “Unity and Catholicity of the Church”, pp. 174–175.

¹² Larentzakis, “Ecclesiology in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship” and “The One Church and its Unity”; Konstantinos Delikostantis, “Identity as Communion. Basic Elements of Orthodox Ecclesiology” (paper presented in Constantinople 2006), in *Leuenberg Text 11*, pp. 198–213.

positively with documents from various Orthodox authors: such a church is conceivable where the unity of the faith and, very closely bound up with it, the apostolic succession are present. The Third Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambésy in 1986 recognised “the factual existence of all churches and confessions”¹³, but did not draw any practical consequences from this. In the same way, the patriarchal encyclical from 1920 onwards, addressed “to all churches of Christ everywhere”, and the efforts, which are to be taken seriously, of Orthodoxy together with all other churches to restore *koinonia*, are to be assessed as factual recognition. It should nevertheless be pointed out that there is no standard and official Orthodox position on the issue of the boundaries of the church. No pan-Orthodox synod has declared itself on the subject.

This issue is closely bound up with aspects of salvation. As is well known, the Church has always regarded the eternal salvation of schismatics and heretics as impossible. Today, however, the debate on the boundaries of the Church can no longer be carried out within this paradigm of schismatic heresy. As new approaches in Orthodox theology maintain, today we should speak more of a general schismatic situation. It is not that there are schismatic persons, but rather the historical churches with their divisions represent

the schismatic condition of the one undivided Church. If we do not forget this, we have an opportunity for *metanoia*, repentance and overcoming the chaos. We have an example of the way to conduct a meaningful debate on the boundaries of the Church in the words of St. Gregory of Nazianzus. He wonders who is “in” the Church and who is “out”. “Just as there are many among us, among our fellow Christians within the church, who are not really with us because in their way of life they have alienated themselves from the Body in which we share, just so there are many who are outside, not part of us, but who have attained faith through their way of life, and they are lacking only the name, since they already possess the reality.”¹⁴ Here, other criteria for the boundaries of the Church are noted.

The *koinonia* within the Trinity, for example as described in the Gospel of John, Chapter 17, serves as a model for the unity of the Church. This *koinonia* is made possible by the bond of love. This model makes of the Church “the immanent which contains the transcendent within itself; it is communion with the divine Persons of the Trinity, who are full of infinite love for the world, and in this the church finds itself in an unending movement of self-transcendence in love.”¹⁵ Only the form of unity following the example of the Trinity can be the model for the unity of the Church. As a concrete model for unity, a “fede-

¹³ Larentzakos, “The One Church and its Unity”, pp. 70–105.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, quoted on p. 79.

¹⁵ Dunitru Staniloae, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik II*, pp. 162–163, quoted in Larentzakos, “The One Church and its Unity”, p. 97.

rated community of autonomous church structures”¹⁶ is proposed, which allows for the diversity of ways of expressing the faith. But simple coexistence and tolerance of others, in a context of hospitality, cannot be the goal of efforts toward unity. The unity of the Church is to seek more than unity, and not to affirm the status quo of today’s confessional divisions. Konstantinos Delikostantis took as his model the ecclesiology of the Eucharist. The unity of the Church takes place in the Eucharist, which is “also the foundation of the unity of local churches in a global church. Since all local churches draw their being as churches and catholicity from the Eucharist, they cannot be thought of apart from their unity with one another.”¹⁷ Just as a true Eucharist overcomes the divisions in a place, in the same way it bestows on a local church unity with other church communities in the world. The office of bishop also, in Orthodox theology, is only properly understood in the perspective of the eucharistic gathering. In this way, synodality becomes the framework for the unity of the Church.

It is not the overall picture of ecclesiology which is problematic for dialogue. Theologians on both sides have emphasised that the representations of their dialogue partners can very well be reconciled with their own theology. For example, the trinitarian, christological and pneumatological dimensions of the Church are unanimously upheld. Difficulties arise, however, when the content of some expressions such as “unity in

diversity” – correct on both the Protestant and the Orthodox side – have to be made concrete and precise. This is not a quarrel over concepts, but rather about clarifying the possibilities for putting the theoretical consensus into practice.

3.3 The understanding of the classical “*notae ecclesiae*”

So that there will be no ambiguity about terminology, we are speaking here about the classical *notae ecclesiae*, as they are named in the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed. Protestant theology also speaks of *notae ecclesiae*, or marks of the true Church and of church unity, with reference to the criteria mentioned in *Confessio Augustana* VII; the [right] preaching of the word and [the right administration of] the sacraments. However, Protestant theology does not dispute the high value accorded to the ecumenical *notae*. Since the preceding paragraph has already spoken of the one Church, we now turn to the other three: holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.

3.3.1 Holiness of the Church

According to the Orthodox understanding, the Church owes its holiness to the God the Three in One as the source of life and to Jesus Christ as head of the Church. This is where the trinitarian and christological dimensions of the Church are visible. The act of worship is carried out in the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit through *mysteria* and

¹⁶ Larentzakis, “The One Church and its Unity”, p. 98.

¹⁷ Delikostantis, “Identity as Community”, p. 202.

through the word of God. Human error and individual guilt are nevertheless not excluded. The Church is therefore not the assembly of the saints, but rather of sinners praying to God for their salvation.

Although the holiness of the Church was not a main theme for discussion, in both Crete and Wittenberg it was felt to be a point of dissent. The Protestants joined Martin Luther in calling the Church “the greatest sinner”. According to the Orthodox understanding, however, such an undifferentiated statement about the Church as the divine organ of worship was unacceptable. They asked how we can think of the Church in which we *believe* as “the greatest sinner”. This lack of agreement remains.

3.3.2 *Catholicity of the Church*

Two papers¹⁸ presented in Constantinople lifted up catholicity as a central theme. For the Protestant side, Risto Saarinen lectured on the various models of catholicity as found in texts of the World Council of Churches. He observed that Protestant theology shows a reticence towards global structures, which conceals a tension between the local and universal dimensions. He concluded that “For these reasons, many Protestants tend to favor the model of ‘catholicity of each local church’, because it is a complacent solution to the problem of Christian universality”.¹⁹

Saarinen also presented a relevant evaluation of two contemporary Protestant representations of ecclesiology. First he quoted from Hans-Peter Großhans, who regards catholicity as an effort to preserve one’s own historical identity and ascribes a central role to “re-formation” in upholding catholicity. His vision is that the Church is the earthly space for the truth of the gospel. This also lends emphasis to the importance of its presence in time and space. Saarinen also brought into the debate the analysis of K. Vanhoozer, who sees the canonical Scriptures as the standard and guarantor of unity. Protestant theology differs from Roman Catholic or Orthodox theology in that neither the tradition nor the teaching authority of the church is the standard for interpreting the Scriptures, but rather the church itself. This brings about a sort of “soft identity”, which according to Paul Ricoeur is seen as “ipse-identity”. “In Ipse-identity, we do know who you are even though you sometimes adjust your change views and react to new situations. Ipse-identity is not pluralism, but a non-identical repetition of central practices.”²⁰ Thus he assumes that there can be, consciously or unconsciously, changes in the interpretation of Scripture.

The Orthodox side addressed the theme of catholicity of the Church in two presentations. Larentzakis saw this attribute as an avoidance of any limitations on the Church. “The quantitative and qualitative *catholicity* of the Church is therefore above confessional consid-

¹⁸ Saarinen, “Oneness and Catholicity of the Church”: Delikostantis, “Identity as Community”.

¹⁹ Saarinen, “Oneness and Catholicity of the Church”, p. 155.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 162.

rations.”²¹ Delikostantis, too, understood catholicity more in a qualitative than a quantitative sense: “Orthodox” should point to the qualitative dimension of catholicity and complete the spatial understanding of the concept. The place where catholicity is made manifest is any eucharistic gathering. The model for the local church is the eucharistic gathering with the bishop presiding. Through it, the importance of the Eucharist for the catholicity of the Church is made visible, and the ontological equality of all bishops becomes the sign and guarantor of the catholicity of every local church: no particular church can be the source for the catholicity of all churches. The local church is therefore identical with the Church universal. Synodality plays an important role in this. “Without synodality, unity risks being sacrificed in favour of the local church. But a synodality which suppresses the catholicity and integrity of the local church can lead to ecclesiastical universalism.”²²

Although there are no direct contradictions to be found between these presentations, one can see how different the emphases are. The Protestant side accords an elevated status to the Scriptures for the catholicity of the Church. The Orthodox positions begin with the eucharistic dimension of the Church. The relation between local and universal also is expressed differently. These differing statements can be inter-

preted in different ways: on one hand we can see, by this means, a legitimate diversity of theological visions; on the other hand, views are being expressed which, while they do not contradict one another directly, can indicate differing basic theological models. For example, one can wonder whether the expression “local church” has the same meaning in Orthodox and Protestant theology. Further theological clarification will continue to be needed in this area.

3.3.3 *Apostolicity of the Church*

The apostolicity of the Church was not a focus of the discussion. However, this theme was included by means of brief remarks in the context of the other *notae ecclesiae*.

Larentzakis began with a point in the study *The Church of Jesus Christ*: “The Reformation understanding of the apostolic succession is the constant return to the apostolic witnessing.”²³ It is in the interest of the study to reject a purely mechanistic, legalistic and magical succession through the laying on of hands only. In response to this idea, Larentzakis emphasises rightly that in the Orthodox understanding it is not just the laying on of hands which effects the apostolic succession, but rather the laying on of hands within the eucharistic *synaxis* and in connection with the creed: “The laying on of hands is necessary in the sacramental act of consecra-

²¹ Larentzakis, “Ecclesiology in the Leuvenberg Church Fellowship”, p. 122

²² J. Zizioulas, “The Church as Communion”, an offprint from *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 38, 1994, No.11, quoted from Delikostantis, “Identity as Community”, p. 203–204.

²³ *The Church of Jesus Christ*, I, 2.3, p. 122.

tion, not in itself, but rather as a sign and symbol, and only in the context of the existing prerequisites for faith and for the Church.”²⁴ The bishop therefore stands, not as individual guarantor for the apostolicity of his church, but always in his presiding role in the eucharistic assembly, without being isolated from the people and in community with the other bishops. A bishop has no right to exist on his own. “There is in fact nothing that warrants the dignitaries or even the bishops remaining in the true faith within the Church. There are bishops and patriarchs and popes that have renounced the true faith ...”²⁵

Although apostolicity and the apostolic succession have not been adequately discussed in the context of this dialogue, a difference in relation to the criteria for apostolicity can be noted. The guarantee of apostolicity through the historical office of bishop is firmly rejected by Protestant theology. On the other hand, Protestant theology as well as Orthodox understands apostolicity as faithfulness to the apostolic witness. In order to move forward on this issue, the issue of the office of bishop and synodality must be discussed directly, all the more because Protestant theology has asked whether the Protestant churches are lacking something, with regard to apostolic succession, and if so, how can this *defectus* be remedied.²⁶

4. Sacraments/*Mysteria*

The final session of the consultation in Constantinople in 2006, with two papers presented,²⁷ was devoted directly to the problems of baptism and indirectly to the wider, complex theme of the sacraments/*mysteria*. The inclusion of this topic seemed to make sense, for two reasons: first, in the earlier consultations the dialogue partners had emphasised the importance of the sacraments for their own theology; second, a debate on baptism was inevitable in the context of the issue of mutual recognition as churches.

The Protestant side had repeatedly pointed out the necessity of mutual recognition as churches. This should be the first step on the way to church unity. Baptism accordingly became a fundamental issue. The Orthodox practice, customary in many places, of “re-baptising” non-Orthodox Christians who wanted to join the Orthodox Church, was problematic. Other practical difficulties such as baptism within mixed marriages and the confession of godparents in Orthodox baptisms also were catalysts for this debate.

From the Orthodox side, as always, the view was being heard that recognition of non-Orthodox baptism cannot be undertaken in isolation, but only in the

²⁴ Larentzakis, “The One Church and its Unity”, p. 92.

²⁵ Larentzakis, “Ecclesiology in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship”, p. 123.

²⁶ Markschies, “The One Church and its Unity”, p. 128.

²⁷ Hans-Peter Großhans, “Baptism – a Sacramental Bond of Church Unity. A contribution from the Protestant perspective on mutual recognition of baptism between Protestant and Orthodox churches” (paper presented in Constantinople 2006), in *Leuenberg Text 11*, pp. 242–267; Grigorios Larentzakis, “Baptism and the Unity of the Churches. Orthodox Aspects”, (paper presented in Constantinople 2006), in *Leuenberg Text 11*, pp. 294–319.

context of its ecclesiology, since the main interest is actually recognition of one another's churches. And in the Orthodox view, precisely the question of the aim of recognising baptism was very important: "What outcome we want? Do we want "coexistence and cooperation between our churches", "proper relations between churches of different confessions", or the "visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in the one faith"?²⁸

4.1 Baptism

It was soon apparent that there was a common position on the term *mysterion*, as being more theologically appropriate than *sacrament*. However, this will not be readily accepted by Western theology.

For the Protestant side, Hans-Peter Großhans' paper recalled a statement in the final communiqué of the theological dialogue between the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) and the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2004. This statement affirmed that, although the two churches do not have a relationship of church communion, they nevertheless recognise one another's baptism, even in case of a person's change of confessional membership. This provided a solid basis for the discussion.

The two papers presented the content of baptism with similar words and arguments for its importance both for the individual person and for the church as community. Differences in the presentations may be observed, where Larentzakis presents baptism in the context of Orthodox sacramental life: "...Baptism in the Orthodox Church does not take place in isolation. Baptism is administered together with *chrismation*, an unction signifying confirmation, so that the two sacraments are accepted and respected as two, but at the same time are regarded as an inseparable unity. When these two sacraments are administered, one cannot tell where one ends and the other begins."²⁹ In this sacramental unity, the Eucharist is also included and given to the person being baptised as part of the same liturgical act. This Orthodox ecclesiological context shows that the question of baptism cannot be regarded in isolation, and that other themes come together here: "For example the relation between baptism and confirmation, the Holy Eucharist and the ministry. The inner relationship between these and among all sacraments in general is a given, so that it is not possible to isolate them. Even a mutual recognition of baptism which is only a matter of canon law, without the greater context of the other sacraments and of ecclesiastical reality itself, does not seem very meaningful."³⁰ Thus we cannot yet speak of a final clarification of the question of baptism.

²⁸ Larentzakis, "Baptism and the Unity of the Churches", p. 298.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 300.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 312.

5. Overall Evaluation

The problems around baptism point to many fundamental difficulties. Although Orthodoxy has granted that it in fact does recognise the baptism of other churches – and this is occasionally given clear expression, as in Constantinople in 2004, in the bilateral dialogue between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the EKD – we cannot speak of an explicit recognition which would have theological consequences. From the Orthodox side, we are right to have asked, with what aim in mind and in what context such recognition should take place. If it is only for the sake of coexistence and cooperation between our churches, or for proper relations between churches of different confessions, nothing much has been gained beyond the ecumenical state of affairs today.

The entire dialogue actually faces the same dilemma. Since it began as an unofficial “conversation among theologians”, this dialogue has largely remained unnoticed beyond the circle of its participants.

With respect to the dialogue so far, it can be observed that we keep coming back to many of the same questions from the ecclesiological context of problems. This is because of a certain

lack of receptivity on the part of the dialogue partners, and the fear of betraying one’s own position. In addition there is the fact that the given framework and the status of this dialogue were not clear to all participants from the beginning. All these elements could, in many instances, have given the impression of stagnation. Nevertheless, a certain maturity can be observed in the presentations in Constantinople in 2006. The effort was made – even when the theological positions were not the same – to carry on a constructive discourse and thus to outline some points of convergence. Further discussion sessions can be expected to confirm this positive development. In this regard, reading the Church fathers together, as Christoph Marksches proposed in Wittenberg, could be a meaningful exercise.

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Ciprian Burlacioiu is assistant professor for church history at the University of Munich. He has published his PhD thesis in 2008 about the Leuenberg Church Fellowship and Meissen Agreement. He is a participant in the consultation process between Orthodox theologians and representatives of the Community of the Protestant Churches in Europe (Leuenberg Church Fellowship).