

Toward Reconciliation of Unity: Ecclesiology of ‘*Sister Churches*’ and *Koinonia*

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1. Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, Paul VI, Chiara Lubich and their Vision on Ecumenical Unity Based on Ecclesiology of Sister Churches

The New Testament text which reflects in the most explicit way the term of ‘*sister Churches*’ is *2 John*: “*The children of your chosen sister send their greetings*”¹. It was a term used between local churches by exchanging official letters, especially during the period of the Pentarchy between the five patriarchal thrones. The Church of Rome always had the first position among other sisters Churches. In modern church history Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras was the first one to use it as a term in his official correspondence to Rome, when he received by Pope John XXIII his fraternal letters and gestures for unity.

After that, the Second Council of Vatican used again the same terminology in order to qualify Rome’s fraternal relationship with the Christian Churches developed within the ecumenical movement². Especially, the term *sister Churches* can be found in the important declaration *Brief Anno Ineunte* (August 1967) during their official meetings between the Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras both in Rome and Constantinople.

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1. *2 John*, 2, 13.

2. A. Bairactaris, «Une interprétation ecclésiologique et théologique de l’expression ‘églises sœurs’ vis-à-vis le contenu de terme ‘églises locales’», *Kleronomia* 36 (2004), pp. 119-140.

I quote from the official text:

Par le baptême nous sommes un dans le Christ Jésus. En vertu de la succession apostolique, le sacerdoce et l'Eucharistie nous unissent plus intimement: participant aux dons de Dieu à son Église, nous sommes mis en communion avec le Père par le Fils dans l'Esprit Saint. Devenus fils dans le Fils en toute réalité, nous sommes devenus aussi réellement et mystérieusement frères les uns les autres. En chaque locale s'opère ce mystère de l'amour divin et n'est pas là la raison de l'expression traditionnelle et si belle selon laquelle les églises aimaient à s'appeler Églises sœurs? Cette vie d'Église sœur nous l'avons vécue durant des siècles, célébrant ensemble les conciles œcuméniques qui ont défendu de dépôt de la foi contre toute altération. Maintenant, après une longue période de division et d'incompréhension réciproque, le Seigneur nous donne de nous redécouvrir comme *Églises sœurs*, malgré les obstacles qui furent alors dressés entre nous³.

Thus, according to that text the basis of the affirmation resides on the mystery of the sacramental presence of Christ, who is the offer and the offered in the holy service in every local Church. That confirms in a certain way an existing, however not full and completed, communion between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church. Elements of that existing spiritual unity are the following: the baptism, the apostolic succession, the Eucharist and generally speaking the history of the first millennium where both were celebrating commonly the Eucharist as defenders of the faith and they were participating equally in the Ecumenical Councils against the heretic groups.

According to the Pope Paul VI the question of reconciliation of unity of the unique Church comes from Jesus' willingness. There is a fundamental unity between all baptized Christians which exists in the faith of Jesus and in the invocation of the Holy Trinity. Additionally, it must be given a special attention to the mysterious ways that the Holy Spirit works. It is quite clear that the modern *rapprochement* between East and West during the 20th century has nothing to do with the past. Today it is understood as a sign of mutual recognition and acceptance between local and equal Churches. Unity in faith is the unique and necessary

3. *Tomos Agapis*, Vatican – Phanar (1958-1970), Rome – Istanbul 1971, pp. 389-390.

pre-condition for *sister Churches* to mutually establish a sacramental and canonical relationship.

Pope Benedict XVI when he was professor at the university said: "Reunion could occur if the East abandon its attacks on the Western development of the second millennium as being heretical and accept the Catholic as legitimate and Orthodox in the form which it experienced in its own development. Conversely, reunion could occur if the West recognized the Eastern as Orthodox and legitimate in the form in which it has maintained itself"⁴.

In that framework the first meeting between Chiara Lubich (founder of the Focolare Movement) and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras took place in Constantinople June, 13th in 1967. Chiara describes him as one of the greatest personalities of the past century, who had expressed many times his will to become a simple focolarino! Because of their mutual friendship Chiara met him 23 times during the following five years, until his death, working as the official liaison between Pope Paul VI and Athenagoras. Chiara was like the mouth, ears and eyes of the Pope when she was meeting Patriarch Athenagoras.

The existing bond of unity between Chiara and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras was their common passion, vision and desire to recompose the full unity, living the ecclesial communion between the two Churches within the one mystical Body of Christ. Athenagoras used to call her *Tecla*, after the name of Apostle Paul's assistant. In one occasion he told her: «Tu es ma fille! Tu as deux pères: l'un, grand, à Rome, et autre âgé, ici»⁵. At the same time Paul VI and Athenagoras were sharing the same esteem and appreciation for each other. Once, Ecumenical Patriarch said to Chiara: «C'est incroyable comme je me sens uni au pape. C'est un mystère pour moi-même. Je ressens avec lui une inexprimable unité de pensée et de cœur»⁶. The unity he was supporting did not reduce

4. S. E. Kardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre: Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie*, Munich 1982, p. 209; Id., *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, New York 1987, pp. 81-82.

5. A. Riccardi, P. Coda, Maria Voce, *Paul VI & Chiara Lubich – La prophétie d'une église qui se fait dialogue*, Nouvelle Cité, Roma 2017, p. 158.

6. A. Riccardi, P. Coda, M. Voce, *Paul VI & Chiara Lubich...*, *op.cit.*, p. 154.

difference to uniformity⁷. Chiara Lubich and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras had realized that as the wounds of division and separation affect all Churches, so all Christians must be called to be agents of unity. They both believed that the medicine for the illness of separation was the pure love for Jesus.

Chiara in one of her letters saved an interesting information; Patriarch Athenagoras was planning to prepare a holy service with the participation of the Pope of Rome and all Patriarchs of the Orthodox Churches. That information is a clear sign of their common desire to receive the sacramental body and blood of Jesus from the same chalice. In another letter Chiara conveyed a similar question from Athenagoras to Paul, asking the following: «C'est un désir commun, qu'on retrouve ici et parout, d'arriver au même Calice... Je voudrais savoir comment Sa Sainteté voit cette chose-là»⁸. Athenagoras recognized that theological teaching in separated Churches takes the form of a monologue, limited to a theological presentation of the distinctive doctrines and practices of each particular Church. Thus, along with Pope Paul VI, he shifted the agenda of the dialogue from the confessional identity to the truth itself, that is to the person of Christ, and they based their vision of unity upon the ecclesiology of sister Churches (ecclesiology of communion).

Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras served the ecumenical vision of Christian's unity with genuine and honest boldness without fearing the consequences of his actions and his openness toward all Christians. Undoubtedly, Athenagoras set the pace within the Orthodox world *vis à vis* the ecumenical movement and he also inaugurated the *dialogue of charity* between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church. He was the one who convened Panorthodox Councils gathering the local autonomous Orthodox Churches during the 60's for the first time after centuries of silence and inactivity. He was timid as a person, but at the same time he was a clergyman of prayer. Athenagoras had significantly heightened

7. Joan P. Back – A. Bairactaris, “Gesù crocifisso e abbandonato: chiave dell'unità”, *Nuova Umanità trimestrale di cultura*, 233 (2018), p. 99: “Quindi, la ricerca dell'unità attraverso l'immagine del Cristo crocifisso e abbandonato non si fonda sull'uniformità, ma sulle espressioni multiple di una fede comune e di una missione comune”.

8. A. Riccardi, P. Coda, M. Voce, *Paul VI & Chiara Lubich....*, op.cit., p. 156.

the sense of *responsibility* of Church leaders. Therefore, the Church leader must be prepared to relieve his people from burdens of a complex history, while also embracing the dynamic experience of faith to create new conditions for life⁹. Athenagoras was a visionary leader, and he infound Chiara Lubich a companion on his ecumenical journey.

Moreover, Athenagoras avoided to be carried away by extreme opinions of divisive sectarianism and liberal indifference of his time serving the golden balance between social reality and Christian spirituality. He constantly followed the axiom: “*Bear one another’s burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ*”¹⁰. Another characteristic of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras was his constructive language whenever addressing to people, as he shared along with Chiara and Pope Paul VI the talent of speaking to large audiences. He was a champion of substantial theological dialogue, building bridges of communication and pastoral care, while isolating arrogance. He supported an eschatological reading of history, and although he was the first among the Orthodox patriarchs, he never forgot that he was a servant of Jesus, a preacher of the Gospel and a brother in Christ. In response to the spiritual thirst and hunger of the people, Athenagoras believed that only the Church could provide society with the proper “food and drink” through its spirituality of unity and mutual love. Thus, his name, along with those names of Chiara and Paul VI, will be remembered among the pioneers of the Ecumenical Movement who led the Orthodox Church into the new era of Christianity.

2. Reconciliation of Unity and Eucharist

Primarily, it is necessary before anything else to reach a common *locus* of agreement regarding the question of *what is the Church*. Ecclesiology is perhaps the most ambiguous and controversial topic of discussion within the ecumenical dialogue. Hence, discussing the nature of the Church is something which deserves a lot of prayer, and not a lot of studying.

9. D. Tsakonas, *Athenagoras the Ecumenical of the New Ideas* (in Greek), Athens 1976, pp. 123-127.

10. *Gal.* 6, 1-2.

The ecumenical movement, the official theological dialogue between the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches, and the issue of ecclesiology of *sister Churches* are somehow interrelated. “Ecumenism is not some sort of appendix, but rather it is an organic part of Church’s life and work [...] it must be like the fruit borne by a healthy and flourishing tree which grows to its full stature”¹¹. With these words Pope John Paul II presented the importance of modern ecumenism in the famous encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*.

Thus, the ecumenical movement and the theological dialogue between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church in the 20th century have achieved significant progress toward the goal of Christian unity. From the outset the theological dialogue between the two Churches proved that the ultimate goal is to proclaim the oneness of the Church of Jesus, calling the Churches to visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship. To achieve Unity the Church must be seen as a sacrament, a gift, a calling, and a communion (*koinonia*)¹².

Both Churches following the model of *ecclesiology of sister Churches* believe that the Church is not a collection of static and self-sufficient local churches. The Church remains apostolic as long as it expresses the dynamism of unity. How beautifully Saint Augustine defined it: “I am in the Church, whose members are all those Churches about which we know in truth from Holy Scripture that they originated and grew by the activity of the Apostles. I will never give up communion with her, neither in Africa nor anywhere else, so help me God”¹³.

The Church is the Eucharist and the Eucharist means communion with all who receive Jesus through His sacraments, His holy blood and His holy body, becoming equally members of the one Body of Jesus¹⁴. Thus,

11. *Lettre Encyclique Ut Unum Sint du Saint Père Jean-Paul II, sur l’engagement œcuménique*, Cite du Vatican, Rome 1995, p. 20.

12. *The Nature and Mission of the Church – A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No 198, WCC, Geneva 2005, p. 7.

13. Saint Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, 3, 35, 39, PL 43, 517.

14. Chiara Lubich, *Une Spiritualité de Communion*, Nouvelle Cité, Rome 2004, p. 63: «Que signifie alors vivre l’Église comme communion ? Cela veut dire instaurer de charité dans toutes les articulations de l’Église : entre ses membres, dans ses divers structures... ainsi qu’avec les autres réalités auxquelles elle est liée d’une façon ou d’une autre : les autres Églises et les autres religions, où sont présentes les ‘semences du Verbe’, ainsi que les

communio in sacris offers to the Church the dimension of catholicity, since whoever receives Him in Eucharist simultaneously lives in unity with all their brothers and sisters. In this direction, Eucharistic ecclesiology has been rightly developed the *Eucharistic ecclesiology* and should be seen as complementary to the *logion* of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst"¹⁵.

Thus, the two Churches wish to highlight the following: in the local gathering of the parish (*synaxis*) Jesus is alive in the eucharistic celebration, offering Himself as the bond of unity among peoples. Additionally, He is present during the preaching of the Gospel. Pope Pius X invited the faithful to receive Communion more frequently, and later, Pope Paul VI, through his Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* (1965), emphasized the sacrifice of Jesus and communion in Christ with the brothers and sisters through the Eucharist.

Our Savior instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood [...] a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace [...] that Christ's faithful when present at this mystery of faith should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. [...] they should take part in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word, and nourished at the table of the Lord's Body¹⁶.

The two historical Churches commonly believe that the Church is *Communion*, as it is the Body of Christ, who brings people together making them one people¹⁷.

Chiara aligns with this view, as expressed in the document of the Second Vatican, which states:

Then we receive communion in deep silence. The Eucharist is at the centre, at the climax of our meetings: we need only think how everything else can be

autres cultures avec leurs valeurs propres».

15. *Matthew* 18, 20.

16. "The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy", pp. 47-48, in the *Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, in: Au. Flannery O. P. (ed.), Dominican Publications, Dublin 1975, pp. 16-17.

17. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion – Understanding the Church today*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1996, p. 76.

considered as a preparation of this personal meeting with Christ, and that almost everyone present goes up to receive communion. At the end the assembly is overwhelmed by a wave of joy; a witness to its unity with the risen Christ¹⁸.

Moreover, it is quite important what follows after the end of the holy service. I quote again from the same text: “as an extension the priests and the faithful go off to bring charity all day long, into homes, and offices and gatherings. Here communion continues and brings liberation for the development of human kind”¹⁹. This brings to mind the famous phrase given to Archbishop Anastasios of Albania, “*liturgy after the liturgy*”, which carries the same theological meaning with that of Chiara’s message. Both express that all faithful members of the Church are called to be agents of mission in their daily lives. Thus, communion and liturgy form a common theological ground between the two sister Churches the communion and the liturgy, having an enormous beneficial impact on the lives of people, while simultaneously gives a wider spectrum of mission in modern terms and times.

When discussing liturgy, Church, Gospel, Jesus, and God, there is a demand for purity of mind, prayer, and a deep knowledge of the Holy Spirit, and not a low level knowledge of doctrinal theology²⁰; it is a matter of spiritual contemplation and personal experience, rather than mere academic theological argumentation. The above-mentioned elements reveal that there is an intertwined connection between Eucharist and unity, since, according to Chiara Lubich, *Jesus in Eucharist* and *Jesus in our midst* comfort the faithful during their trials in a way that no one else can, for the head of the Church is *Jesus Forsaken*²¹.

It must also be noted that at the beginning of the formation of the movement, Chiara Lubich was not in favor of being involved in the ecumenical adventure of bringing together Christians from different traditions. In 1950, during a meeting with Igino Giordani and Charles

18. Chiara Lubich, *The Living Presence – Experiencing Jesus in the Word, the Eucharist and Our Midst*, transl. C. Slipper, New City, London, Dublin, Edinburgh 1997, p. 76.

19. Chiara Lubich, *The Living Presence...., op. cit.*, p. 76.

20. Chiara Lubich, *My ecumenical journey*, Maria Wienken and D. Goller (ed.), New City 2020, p. 55.

21. Chiara Lubich, *The Living Presence...., op. cit.*, p. 99: “I am the head of the Church”.

Boyer she was asked if she was considering promoting the ecumenical idea between the Churches, and her answer was “no”, since the movement initially addressed only Catholics²².

However, some years later, she developed the *dialogue of life* with people who belong to different Churches. This form of dialogue means coming together, to live together and sharing together all the things that Christians have in common, rather than focusing on their differences²³. The same methodology was used in the official theological dialogue between the Catholic and the Orthodox Church during the first period of the so-called *Dialogue of Charity*.

Additionally, the two sister Churches believe that the Church is the spiritual locus of *reconciliation* between humans and between humans and God, since reconciliation is demanded as a precondition for the sacrament of the Eucharist²⁴. Serving the dialogue of unity is not an easy task. It involves moving from *tolerance* to *acceptance*, which is a *substantial recognition* of the other. Substantial recognition of the other entails becoming conscious of their very being and existential identity²⁵.

This is also the task of *ecclesiology of communion*; to bring the two sister Churches together in the same place, allowing them to communicate without the burdens of a guilty past and to cleanse their historical memories. In this spirit, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras stated in 1967: «Supprimons avec la plus totale abnégation tout ce qui dans le passé a semblé contribuer à l'intégrité de l'Église, mais en fait rendu les divisions plus difficiles à surmonter»²⁶. Thus, ecclesiology of the sister Churches has a twofold mission to accomplish: firstly, to articulate the necessary points for theological convergence (doctrinal dimension) and secondly, to bring the two Churches back to their common path (pastoral dimension). Both theological perspectives are directed toward unity. The theological principle of *ecclesiology of sister Churches* leaves

22. Chiara Lubich, *My ecumenical journey*, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

23. Chiara Lubich, *Spirituality of Unity – The Focolare Movement its way and life*, Bhalchandra Printing Press, Mumbai 2000 p. 34.

24. *Matthew* 5, 23.

25. A. Bairactaris, “Ecumenical Dialogue: A Necessity of our Era and the Inner Source of the Renewal”, *The Ecumenical Review* 62, 3 (2010), p. 303.

26. “Paul VI et Athénagoras; Istanbul, 25 Juillet 1965”, *Irénikon* XL (1976), p. 329.

an open space for the Paraclete to be invoked, to come and heal the historical, traumatic, wounds of division, restoring the unity.

The *ecclesiology of sister Churches* is, in fact, based actually on Eucharistic ecclesiology. Thus, the ecclesiology of sister Churches emphasizes two things: a) the notion of *locality* (since Christ is fully and really present in every local Church during the Eucharist), and b) the role of bishop within the life of the Church. As a result, the Church is transformed from a *public place* to a *sacramental place* where unification, reconciliation, and sanctification take place.

What are the specific ecclesiastical elements which guarantee the internal structure of the Church, which the *sister Churches* are seeking for? Apostle Paul provides an answer: “*One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father*”. These ecclesiastical criteria can serve as the basis for unity between *Sister Churches*. Whoever belongs to one local Church belongs to all Churches. To become a member of the Body of Christ it means to be united with and in Christ; this ultimately defines the nature of the Church. These are the foundation stones of sacramental unity. Incorporation and participation of sister Churches into the one Body of Christ means sharing with another without absorbing, absolving, or abandoning their self-identity. In this way, Christ comes into the very center of Church life.

Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI believed that through baptism, Christ receives humanity into Himself, uniting all people with Him in His suffering on the Cross and His death. Christ is the one who raises humanity with Him to new life through His resurrection. Christ is the one who sends His Spirit upon the Church for the salvation of the world. All these are ecclesial elements of the first community of the first millennium; they are part of their common treasure shared, when tolerance, mutual acceptance, and charity dominated in the Church relationships between West and East.

Another common element shared by the two Churches is *faith in Christ* and *in one God*. Again, Christ calls humanity to respond to His calling in faith. Here, faith means the ordering and opening of the self to Jesus, including hope, trust, humility, obedience and love. Thus, faith is linked to worship, declaration proclamation of the Gospel, as well as to a life of

love in accordance with Jesus' example. All of these are ways of people participation in Him and in one another²⁷.

We should particularly focus on the pure and solid baptismal unity reflected in the relationship between the two historical sister Churches. It is important to emphasize that participating in the body of Christ is not simply about a momentary event –the baptism itself– but rather a process in which the sacrament of baptism is only the starting point. It is essential to avoid an endless discussion without results, regarding the differences in the baptismal rites used in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, since both Churches accept baptism as a sacrament, sign, and seal within the life of the local Christian community. The discussion should then center on the *theological essence* of the sacrament, the meaning of baptism for the entire life of the baptized community, the relationship between faith and baptism, and its eschatological aspect. In conclusion, participation and incorporation in Christ is something which has reference to the entire life of people and are not limited to the baptismal rite as such. Then the life of the baptized is formed and determined by Jesus' life and it is inseparably linked to the local community, which is spiritually His body.

Therefore, I firmly believe that a common baptismal faith, shared by the two sister Churches, could be articulated, pointing to the fact that faith is directed not to the sacrament itself (to the liturgical rite), but *through* the sacrament to Christ. Faith, grace, and baptism are all joined in the New Testament, explaining the issue of salvation. Baptism then becomes the necessary means of receiving the salvation offered by Jesus.

3. *Koinonia* and Ecclesiology of Communion

The first and most predominant feature of the ecclesiology of sister Churches is the theological perspective of *koinonia*. *Koinonia* should be seen as the most gracious fellowship in Christ between the two Churches, expressing their own traditional, liturgical, and pastoral richness of the gift received from God. *Koinonia*, unfolded on a multi-dimensional level

27. O. Tomkins (preface), *One Lord, One Baptism, Studies in Ministry and worship*, WCC – Commission on Faith and Order, SCM Press LTD, London 1960, pp. 58-69.

of faith, life, and witness, is addressed to the Triune God, namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, both Churches, the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches confess the apostolic faith, share the same Gospel, accept the participation of the faithful in Jesus' death and resurrection through baptism, witness the living presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic sacrament, and ultimately strive to be faithful to God. Ecclesiology of communion must be based on Trinitarian theology. *Koinonia* is also crucial in the understanding of the person of Christ. Both Churches must stop thinking of Christ in confessional terms and see Him as God, who in His very being is *koinonia*. How, then, does this *koinonia* influence Churches' structure, identity and efforts towards visible unity in order to overcome the scandal of separation?

In the light of Ecclesiology of communion of sister Churches, it is believed that God sent His Begotten Son so to release humanity from the consequences of Adam's fall by re-establishing communion between all people and between human-kind and God. In that *koinonia*, *Jesus Forsaken* reveals, firstly, the relationship between Himself and His Father, in whom He abides His Church, and secondly, the grace of the Holy Spirit, which works in both Churches, flourishing their sacramental life in mysterious ways. Thus, Jesus is transfigured (*metamorphosis*) into *Jesus in the midst* of the two sister Churches, where at the heart of their dialogue, the Cross of *Jesus Forsaken* is revealed.

Additionally, through the power of the Holy Spirit the believers die and rise in baptism with and in Christ. Baptismal unity then signifies the existing and real *koinonia* based on mutual participation in the reality of God's grace. Every faithful member of the Church acts as an agent of Jesus' love.

The Church, as a local community, highlights in *locus et tempus* the relationship among baptised members while also serving as an eschatological image of the relationship between God and His people, revealing at the same time a shared life, where unity, as well as diversity, go hand in hand²⁸. *Diversity* is a precious part of apostolicity,

28. However, it is a long and difficult conversation *vis a vis* the *legitimate limits of diversity*, since some Churches give or do not give value to some aspects of this ecclesiological method. So, for instance diversity in the Gospel's interpretation and in

just as *unity* is a valuable part of catholicity. Both elements contribute to the sanctification of God's people. Moreover, diversity and unity are the two major pillars of *koinonia*, since all members belong to the same Body of Christ without being identical to one other. Preserving legitimate differences, the two sister Churches maintain their historical and traditional identity while avoiding from the danger of *ecclesial homogenization*; consequently, each part needs the other, and no one can exist in isolation, as the very nature of the Church is to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

Under this understanding, the Church, established by the miraculous event of Pentecost, stayed united by Jesus' baptism, faith, hope, love, and sustained by Jesus' blood and body, becoming a historical and spiritual community linked to the first apostolic community of Jerusalem. Within this same framework, the Church is One, yet the local Churches are many; albeit each local Church is a whole and catholic but only as long as it remains in relationship with the other local Churches. The many Churches are constitutive elements of the one *Una Sancta*.

The nature of the Church is relational, because exists in relation to God and to one another (at the local level). In other words, there is no way for a Church to exist by itself; likewise, it is impossible for a Christian to exist alone (*unus Christianus, nullus Christianus*). Unity and Oneness are guaranteed whenever and wherever a local community is present. No Church can say to another "I have no need of you". Therefore, due to this diversity of communion of the sister Churches, each Church is indispensable, bringing its gifts and charismata to One Body. Their differences make them necessary, and no Church should be excluded from *koinonia*. However, that this diversity must never act against unity; rather, unity must safeguard diversity, and diversity must preserve unity. A careful balance between the one and the many must

Church's liturgical life could be reasons of richness towards the visible unity, while for some others could be reasons of a deeper conflict and separation. This is the outcome of the denominational identity given to the Body of Christ. Consequently, the Body of Christ and even Christ himself acquire some denominational boundaries and elements, which seriously damage the spirit of unity. In that perspective unity cannot be reached, because the vision of visible communion cannot extend beyond the particular confessional limits.

be discovered, and in this point comes the episcopate, which works as the ministry of unity and not as a means of power and authority.

Consequently, it becomes clear that the Church is an actualization of the relationship within the Holy Trinity, where the One God is three persons, but each divine person is also a full God being in relationship with the other two hypostases of the Holy Trinity. So, there is not any kind of separation in the Holy Trinity, but only a distinction between the three hypostases/persons of the One God.

The most sacred moment of the Church's liturgical life is the offering of the blood and body of Jesus to the baptized faithful. The Eucharist manifests the Christ's victory over death, offering Himself as sacrifice on the Cross and again as spiritual nourishment to His people. Moreover, it is a foretaste of the Kingdom to come. This Eucharistic theology is commonly accepted by both historical Churches and could also serve as a common theological ground for their theological convergence. The Eucharist not only brings unity among people but, more importantly makes them partakers of God's energies through *theosis*. In this way, all believers become "one with Him, lost in Him", as Chiara wisely expresses it²⁹. Thus, her perspective aligns closely with Orthodox theological point of view.

Accordingly, the *ecclesiology of communion* of the sister Churches is of great significance, because it stresses the values of forgiveness, renewal, self-criticism, acceptance of the other, a willingness to listen to the other, and mutual trust and love. Thus, *koinonia* demands that both historical Churches apply the so-called *kenosis* (self-emptying), creating the necessary free space, where *Jesus Forsaken* could act properly. In this sense each Church is called to abandon all elements that hinder potential Eucharistic unity and, secondly, to admit that they have followed a mistaken path by living in isolation from one another. *Koinonia*, additionally, reveals the existing imperfections and challenges of visible unity while countering the false spirit of self-triumphalism and arrogant attitude that both Churches exhibited in the past. *Koinonia* is

29. Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings: Spirituality, Dialogue, Culture*, Michele Vandeleene (ed.), New City Press, London 2009, p. 129.

offered to them as a chance for taking their historical responsibility for the schism.

The pain and suffering caused by separation of these two sister Churches is another sign which demands more than ever the ministry of *Jesus Forsaken* to be used as a methodology in the ongoing dialogue of truth and love which takes place between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches³⁰.

Pope John Paul II, in his famous encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, clearly defined that *the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches are the two lungs of the One and Undivided Church of Christ*. The oxygen of this sacramental body is their common history, shared apostolic tradition, legitimate local liturgical rites, apostolic succession, baptismal theology, monastic legacy, Eucharistic ecclesiology, and most importantly, the seven Ecumenical Councils and their canons, which serve as the pillars of Unity³¹.

4. Concluding Remarks

Christ asked His disciples to be united. In this context no one and nothing is insignificant; therefore, we must strive, to make the impossible possible. The unity of Christianity is like a marathon, with many miles yet to run. As the Churches go ahead to meet *the eschatological Christ*, just as the disciples encountered Him on the road to Emmaus, they will face moments of sorrow and moments of happiness. Athenagoras, Paul VI, and Chiara were undoubtedly charismatic persons with prophetic gifts; *the spirituality of unity, reconciliation along with the dialogue of life* are some theological tools which could be used in fruitfully in the

30. Th. Best and G. Gassman (eds.), *On the way to Fuller Koinonia – Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order – Santiago de Compostela 1993*, Faith and Order Paper no.166, WCC, Geneva 1994, pp. 230-233.

31. *Lettre Encyclique Ut Unum Sint du Saint Père Jean-Paul II, sur l'engagement œcuménique*, op. cit., p. 64: «L'Église doit respirer avec ses deux poumons! Pendant le premier millénaire de l'histoire du christianisme, cette expression évoque surtout la dualité Byzance – Rome [...] remonte à une époque où l'Église d'Orient et celle d'Occident n'étaient pas divisées, on comprend clairement que la perspective dans la quelle on doit rechercher la pleine communion est celle de l'unité dans une légitime diversité».

ecumenical dialogue. In other terms these three ecumenical pioneers proposed a theological dialogue of love *ad intra et ad extra*, remaining always in accordance with the teaching of the Church. Participating in the ecumenical dialogue and working in the field of Christian unity was a response to their divine calling and not a chance of making public relations.

The case of Christian unity is full of pain that we encounter and it must be accepted so to give value and meaning to the suffering, according to Jesus' logion: "*If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me*"³². Thus, *Jesus Forsaken* is the key and the light to follow Christ taking up one's daily cross. Where all see a crisis of the current ecumenical movement and everybody speaks about the need of reconfiguration of that, these three persons with a steady voice and full of love and grace used to say that all is needed is love for Jesus and praying for their neighbor. They were a combination of witness and service, while they felt spiritually committed to the vision of unity. They did not rely on humans' capacities and abilities, but on the Cross of Jesus. That is why their true mission was to reconcile all Christians in one Body through Jesus' Cross.

32. *Luke* 9, 23.