

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Sorin Şelaru, *Unity and Communion in the Church, Orthodox Ecclesiology Studies*, Eikon Publishing, 2015, 235p.**

**T**he work of the Father Sorin Şelaru is divided into three chapters, talking about the unity and communion both from the Orthodox and the Roman-Catholic points of view, especially after the Second Vatican Council.

At the beginning of the first chapter, entitled “Unity of the Church in the light of communion”, the author shows his intention to participate in the revaluing of ecclesiology by linking it directly to the mystery of the union of distinct natures in the one person of the Saviour and the Holy Trinity. There is a desire to develop an ecclesiology of communion that would have a particular resonance in the ecumenism, as well as understanding the unity of the Church for an open ecumenical dialogue. The author recalls the declaration of Toronto in 1950, of the World Council of Churches, according to which the participation in this Council is not a “relativisation of the ecclesiologies of the member churches” (p. 15), but actually, there is a desire for a unity in diversity reconciled, problem which is found in the attention of the ecumenical dialogue for a long time. Further, Father Sorin Şelaru presents the declarations on unity of the World Council of Churches (New Delhi, 1961; Nairobi, 1975; Canberra, 1991, Porto Alegre, 2006, Busan, 2013), focusing on the Busan declaration, in South Korea. At this conference, the members of the Council expressed their desire to move forward together and in the earlier consultations, the Orthodox participants expressed their wish that the ecclesiological passages to be stated with clarity.

The Romanian theologian appreciates the presence of the language of communion in the texts of the World Council of Churches, showing that “for the Orthodox ecclesiology, the principle of ecclesial communion is primarily Trinitarian and Sacramental / Eucharistic” (p. 45). At the conference in Busan, the role of faith for the Church’s unity and the role of

*Sorin Şelaru, Unity and Communion in the Church...*

baptism are highlighted, not mentioning the participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, as suggested by the Orthodox in the pre-assembly. With regard to the Eucharistic communion, the Christian traditions believe that it cannot exist without the ecclesial communion, the vice versa being valid. So, the Church's unity is a Eucharistic one. Among the concerns of the conference, there were present the ministry and the synodical principle or the synodal assemblies, as well as the approach of the theme "unity and diversity" indicating that the inter-Orthodox consultation argues that diversity has certain limitations. After the analysis of Father Sorin Selaru, the declaration in Busan, about unity, aims at finding a common denominator that can be accepted by all. Regretfully, it states that this ecclesiological minimum may not be satisfactory for the Orthodox.

Explaining the term "communion", our author shows that "the ecclesiology of communion is in its essence a Trinitarian and Christological ecclesiology" (p. 77), but also a Eucharistic one. With respect to the Christological principle, it shows that only the communion with Christ makes possible the communion between people, and the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of the Communion". "In the unique Body of Christ, the unique Holy Spirit, present in every believer, is the one who unites into a whole those who partake of the Body of Christ" (p.85). The inter- and intra-personal relations of the Holy Trinity are an example for the unity of the Church, even the Saviour praying for such unity (John 17.21-23). But the Trinity does not represent just a model for unity, but is its source and also the target towards which it tends. The Orthodox churches, members of the World Council of Churches, insisted that the unity of the Church is closely linked to the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In the Orthodox Church, the unity of the Church is seen as a dogmatic unity and the economy practice does not affect the dogmas. The close link between the Eucharistic communion and the dogmatic unity are highlighted, the author believing that "there cannot be true Eucharist, where the truth was altered" (p. 101). The mystery of the Eucharist is guaranteed not only by the right faith, but also by the true priesthood, acknowledged. Viewed from the Orthodox perspective, the dogmatic unity, the Eucharistic unity and the ecclesial unity are inseparable and interdependent.

After drawing up a brief presentation about the participation and adherence of the Orthodox Churches to the World Council of Churches, the author wants to show some of the problems raised by the presence of the

Sorin Șelaru, *Unity and Communion in the Church...*

Orthodox in the Ecumenical Council of Churches. The first challenge is represented by the tension created by the presence of the Orthodox Church in a community of churches and its claim to be, not just a mere branch of Christianity, but the guardian of the whole treasure of faith. The second tension is created between the special mission of the Orthodox Church for Christian unity and the difficulty to assume the ecumenical movement as its own work. In Orthodoxy, for different reasons, there are reticences about the ecumenical dialogue, the long period of the ecumenical dialogue not bringing the result hoped. Father Sorin Șelaru identifies another tension in ecclesiology, between theology and practice. The project of the Pan-Orthodox Synod met many obstacles, the ecumenical reform in Orthodoxy hitting a defensive and isolating mentality. The author believes that the Orthodox theologians must leave this defensive attitude “and define positively the ecclesiality of the other Christian traditions, to positively appreciate the effort of the others for unity and holiness” (p. 120).

The second chapter of the study deals with the ecclesiology of communion after the Second Vatican Council. The attention of the author is moving towards the openness shown by the Roman-Catholic Church towards the other Churches and towards the two documents *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*. The unity of the Church is patterned after the unity of the Holy Trinity. From the shortcomings of the Second Vatican Council, the author recalls that the proper articulation between Christology and pneumatology could not be expressed. Regarding the College of Bishops, the Second Vatican Council tries to switch from a pyramidal ecclesiology to one of communion, the Pope Paul VI establishing the Synod of Bishops, which has only an advisory role. The Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* referring to ecumenism promotes the restoration of the Christian unity and takes into account the progress made in the ecumenical dialogue. The doctrinal questions between the West and the East are minimized by the aforesaid decree, except the Papal Primacy. Another important aspect is that by *Unitatis redintegratio* are recognized “the authentic theological traditions of the Orientals” (p. 158). If in the Orthodoxy the ecclesiological criteria of reporting to other Christian confessions are not clearly established (see p. 112), in Roman-Catholicism, by the decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, there are clearly established in a positive manner the principles of Western ecumenism.

Sorin Şelaru, *Unity and Communion in the Church...*

In the last chapter, entitled “The theological dimensions of the Christian in society” the author deals with the positioning and the value of the Christian in society, from the anthropological, cosmological and eschatological points of view. The world is presented as a gift of God to men, as a ladder that you can climb spiritually, while developing an attitude of gratitude towards the giver. Father Sorin Şelaru shows the connection between the plan of creation and of salvation, Christ being the archetype by which we are shaped and towards which we are all striving. The image of God can be reached through charity, the Christian philanthropy having its roots in the divine one. At the end of the study, the author states that the authentic Christian values that were the foundation of the European construction were replaced by others, unfriendly to society. “Selfishness, protectionism, secrecy and deception used by the Member States overcame honesty, transparency, solidarity and unity” (p. 193).

The study of the Father SorinŞelaru deals with the unity of the Church in the light of communion. Viewed from the Orthodox point of view, the ecclesial unity and the communion are current issues in the context of a multi-confessional society. The recognition of the sacraments outside the Church, the way an unorthodox is received into the Orthodox Church, the mixed marriages and the assumption of the inter-Christian dialogue is only a part of the arduous problems encountered by the Orthodoxy.

**PhD student, Rev. Cristian Rădulescu**