

## For the Unity of All: A Prayer Worth Reviewing

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Few theological reflections penned by Orthodox authors begin with a foreword contributed by His All Holiness, Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople–New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch. The present book not only begins with such a foreword, but the reader is at once advised by His All Holiness: “It is with joy that we welcome and recommend *For the Unity of All*, by the Reverend Dr. John Panteleimon Manoussakis”.<sup>1</sup> Such a glowing commendation for this little book (102 pages) allows the reader to immediately appreciate the old expression that big things often come in small packages.

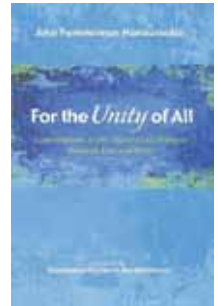
Dr. Manoussakis sets for himself a modest but noble task. After explaining that he will not recount the complex historical situations that led up to, or now sustain, the schism between East and West, much less enter upon a detailed analysis of polemical rhetoric past and present, he clarifies:

*Rather, our goal is to offer some theological reflections on the issues that, for some time now, have been cited and presented as the grounds on which the separation of the two churches can be explained and, for some, even justified. By reflecting on these issues briefly, I hope to show whether they are real differences or only apparent ones—whether, that is, we can talk of different theologies or rather of differences in theological style.*<sup>2</sup>

He goes on to cautiously imply that these differences are indeed only apparent, rather than real, and offers an irenic hope that, with the help of the Paraclete and the intercessions of the Virgin Mary, “our common Mother,” such apparent differences will be understood in a new and reconciling light.

The book is comprised of five chapters divided into two parts. The first explores three well-worn (real or apparent) differences between East and West: (1) Mary’s Immaculate Conception, (2) the procession of the Holy Spirit and *filioque*, and (3) Petrine primacy in the papacy. The second takes up “differences in theological style” regarding (4) Augustinian and Palamite approaches to created and uncreated light, and (5) Augustinian and Maximian approaches to will and grace.

I would like to draw particular attention to the two chapters I found most intriguing (Chaps. 1 and 3), while only briefly commenting on the others. My aim is to spark the curiosity and whet the appetite of Orthodox or Catholic readers who, like Manoussakis, genuinely ponder whether these differences are real or perhaps only apparent. I will not assert whether Manoussakis is correct in what follows, but neither will I refrain from allowing even his most provocative assertions to speak for themselves.



John Panteleimon Manoussakis. *For the Unity of All: Contributions to the Theological Dialogue between East and West*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015.

<sup>1</sup> Bartholomew (Arhondonis), foreword to John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *For the Unity of All: Contributions to the Theological Dialogue between East and West* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), ix.

<sup>2</sup> John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *For the Unity of All: Contributions to the Theological Dialogue between East and West* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 2. Emphasis here and elsewhere in original.

In Chapter 1, “Mary’s Exception,”<sup>3</sup> Manoussakis begins by suggesting that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary ought to be reoriented away from an approach fixated on historical theology, and instead directed toward the actual theological question at hand: *Is the Virgin Mary without sin or not?*<sup>4</sup> He proceeds in his reflection from this simple and direct theological question, in contrast to problems of historical theology that rapidly become bogged down by an ever-increasing multiplication of concerns that are neither simple nor direct. Since historical theology employed for confessional purposes is inevitably tied to a constructed narrative of identity (and is thus the quintessential ground for East-West polemics), he directs his attention to the doctrine itself, rather than the story of how the Immaculate Conception was debated, liturgically celebrated, and ultimately dogmatically defined by the Catholic Church in 1854.

The importance of asking whether a doctrine *is or is not* true, rather than parsing the particulars of a doctrine’s unique history in the East or the West, is emphasized throughout the book. Historical theology can easily be deployed to demonstrate that the East and the West experienced different histories. When the differences in those historical narratives—in whatever way they are fashioned—are elevated to the level of constituting fundamental differences in dogmatic confession, the results are predictably polarizing inasmuch as they are virtually predetermined by the methodology adopted at the outset. The result may be summarized in this way: The East and the West have different historical narratives, and therefore hold to differing dogmatic confessions. However, by using history to contextualize<sup>5</sup> the ways in which doctrines were expressed in the East and the

West (rather than to construct competing identity narratives), Manoussakis is able to get at what he calls the actual theological question at hand: whether a given doctrine *is or is not* true, even if its expression varies in the East and the West owing to their varied histories. Identity narratives predictably tend toward emphasizing difference. Manoussakis, however, is interested in reflecting on the nature of those differences.

Proceeding, then, from the simple question about theological truth posed in Chapter 1, he offers an equally simple and direct response:

*The doctrine that proclaims the Mother of God was sanctified at her conception comes to declare simply what every Christian, Orthodox or Catholic, has always believed about the person of the Theotokos, namely, that in her we find the most perfect human being—better yet, in her we see the true nature of a human person, a nature unafflicted by any sin, including the original sin.*<sup>6</sup>

In a refutation of certain Orthodox theologians, Manoussakis insists that the Immaculate Conception of Mary has always been generally held and confessed by Orthodox Christians, even if this confession in the East enjoys a different historical narrative than the West. For example, he asserts that the efforts of some Orthodox theologians are comparable to “Protestant apologetics” in their assertions that the Immaculate Conception makes of Mary something “more than human,” or quasi-divine, separating her from the rest of humanity.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, he insists that being free from sin is not contrary to being human, but rather an expression of what it means to be truly and authentically human. Mary, in being completely immaculate, is not more than human, but simply and merely human without qualification

<sup>3</sup> This chapter is available online at [https://www.academia.edu/10198866/For\\_the\\_Unity\\_of\\_All\\_Contributions\\_to\\_the\\_Theological\\_Dialogue\\_Between\\_East\\_and\\_West\\_excerpt\\_](https://www.academia.edu/10198866/For_the_Unity_of_All_Contributions_to_the_Theological_Dialogue_Between_East_and_West_excerpt_).

<sup>4</sup> John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *For the Unity of All: Contributions to the Theological Dialogue between East and West* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 5.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that such an approach was at one time advocated by Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev in an article available online at <http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/11/1/2.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> Manoussakis, 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

or distortion. Lest Christians forget, Manoussakis reminds us that having sin is what is alien to humanity, not the other way around.

Inasmuch as Mary is truly human, she is all the nearer to humanity, not farther away, much less qualitatively different. Nonetheless, the Immaculate Conception of Mary emphatically demonstrates the *difference* between Christ and his mother: although Christ was virginally conceived as sinless by his very nature as God incarnate, Mary was conceived free from the corruption of sin only by the grace of her Son.<sup>8</sup> Christ alone is free from sin by nature as God, and Christ alone can save from sin as God—indeed, Christ alone could save Mary from sin, even from the moment of her conception. “Eschatologically speaking,” Manoussakis writes, “an event of the past can be caused by what happens in the present, or even by what has not yet taken place.” Both Catholics and Orthodox, then, confess that Mary was immaculate, sinless, and saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ; thus the “apparent” difference between East and West has never been a question of *what*, but only a question of *when*. Manoussakis insists that the Orthodox East has historically and generally answered the “when” question in the same way as Catholics (modern and polemically driven exceptions notwithstanding), and the curious ought to be encouraged to read his book for the perhaps surprising answer he says that the Orthodox must give to the question.

*Is the Virgin Mary without sin or not?* Manoussakis answers decisively: The *Panagia*, by the grace of God, is without sin. Draw from that all consequent conclusions, and do not be taken in by polemical identity narratives that lose sight of that basic confession of faith.

Chapter 2, “The Procession of the Holy Spirit,” forgoes a recounting of doctrinal history, yet nonetheless establishes that historical context, judiciously applied, can be helpful in answering the basic theological question at hand. Manoussakis tells us: “There is no need to refer here to the historical reasons that led to the addition of the now famously controversial *filioque* to the Creed.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, he contextualizes the difficulty of the *filioque* addition to the Creed by stating that the controversy was not so much the *cause* as it was the *result* of difficulties between the East and the West: “In other words, such a mystery as the procession of the Holy Spirit was dragged into the mud of the polemics between the two sides in order not to cause but to justify an estrangement already underway.”<sup>10</sup> He explores issues related to the differences between Greek and Latin languages, as well as differences in theological styles, including the multiple senses in which the Latin term for “procession” can itself be understood, even as explicitly explained in Augustine’s *Trinity*. In the end, he also points to the Orthodox understanding of *perichoresis* as a potential key that can unlock a reconcilable understanding.

The richest and most important—if also the most provocative—chapter in the book is, “The Petrine Primacy,” where Manoussakis dares to tackle not only the Orthodox objections to it, but indeed the difficulty of trying to live without it: “the Orthodox churches... in the absence of a unity concretely manifested by a *primus*, face the dire consequences of inter-Orthodox disagreements, conflicts, and even schisms.”<sup>11</sup> This chapter is in large part based on a paper he delivered for the 2010 Orthodox Constructions of the West conference at Fordham University.<sup>12</sup> For him, the matter is clearly at the heart of the

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>12</sup> Manoussakis’s paper was subsequently published as a chapter in *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). This chapter, in a version that is “unedited and without notes,” can be read online at [https://www.academia.edu/3816806/Primacy\\_and\\_Ecclesiology\\_The\\_State\\_of\\_the\\_Question\\_Unedited\\_and\\_without\\_notes\\_](https://www.academia.edu/3816806/Primacy_and_Ecclesiology_The_State_of_the_Question_Unedited_and_without_notes_).

present needs and future development of the Orthodox Church.

In one of his most notable declarations in the entire book, Manoussakis flatly asserts: "The phenomenon of anti-papism, understood as the denial of a *primus* for the universal Church and the elevation of such a denial to a trait that allegedly identifies the whole Orthodox Church, is, properly speaking, heretical."<sup>13</sup> On what grounds does he use the strongest negative description available in the Christian vocabulary to decry this "phenomenon"—calling it nothing less than heretical? He insists that, theologically, any *unity* worthy of the name—be it the unity of the Church, the divine and human natures of Christ, or the unity of the Trinity from all eternity—must be grounded in a *person*. The unity of the Trinity is grounded in the divine *person* of the Father; the unity of the divine and human natures of Christ is grounded in the divine *person* of the Son; and the unity of the Church is grounded in the *person* of the bishop of Rome.<sup>15</sup> From there, Manoussakis contends that the absence of a "Rome-like primacy"<sup>16</sup> is an insoluble problem for Orthodox. In another of his more memorable phrases, he avers "that the Orthodox churches cannot unite with Rome as long as they are not united with Rome." He clearly intends this as an example of the intractable paralysis that inevitably results from a lack of universal primacy within the Orthodox Church. Understanding the grave consequences of this ecclesiastical handicap, which at times manifests itself in truly tragic and catastrophic ways, helps explain why Manoussakis deploys the severest term *heretical* in condemning the "phenomenon of anti-papism." To deny that a *personal primus* is indeed a trait of the Orthodox Church is devastating to the Church

herself, and therefore this denial warrants the label heretical.

Manoussakis anticipates and preemptively refutes common Orthodox objections to his assertion that the primacy of a single *person* is absolutely essential for the full and healthy life and unity of the universal church. He recalls that he was taught at Athens that "the highest authority in the Orthodox Church... is an interpersonal (and thus impersonal) body: the ecumenical council."<sup>17</sup> For Manoussakis, on the other hand, "no council is conceivable without a *primus*."<sup>18</sup> He also points out that an ecumenical council is an extraordinary event, not an enduring and ever-present personal embodiment of unity in and for the universal church. He similarly dispenses with the claim "that the Church needs no *primus* because Christ himself is the head of the Church."<sup>19</sup> That this is untenably "naïve" becomes apparent, he says, when a similar formula is applied to the diocesan bishop, or for that matter any "ecclesiastical structure" whatsoever. The moment "Christ himself" is invoked over and against any organ of authority in the Church on earth, the process of "degenerating into some individualistic, private piety" immediately appears as a clear and present danger. Without question, that sort of "individualistic, private piety" exists among Christians of other traditions, but this, Manoussakis implicitly insists, is not the Faith of the Apostles, the Faith of the Fathers, the Faith of the Orthodox, the Faith which has established the universe.<sup>20</sup> Finally, he dismisses the claim that a "common rule of faith and ritual"<sup>21</sup> is sufficient to fill the lacuna. This, he points out, is manifestly obvious by even a casual recognition of the diversity held together in unity throughout the history of the Church right up to the present day. Lest Eastern Christians forget their own history, he recalls the

<sup>13</sup> Manoussakis, 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–23.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> From the service for the Triumph of Orthodoxy.

<sup>21</sup> Manoussakis, 32.

multiplicity of rites that were historically normative throughout the East, the multiplicity of Western rites that were constitutive of the Church before the schism, and the variety of uses (including Western rites) that perdure within the Orthodox Church today.

Ultimately, the principle at stake for Manoussakis is summed up in this sentence: "In Christian theology *the principle of unity is always a person.*"<sup>22</sup> He does not, however, argue that the papacy should be accepted by Orthodox precisely as it is presently understood and exercised among Catholics (or even among Eastern Rite churches *sui juris* in communion with Rome). The devil, as always, is in the details. In an expression that is perhaps a bit reticent when compared with his other statements, he says: "We have left the thorny question about the specific privileges and prerogatives into which this ministry translates untouched. This would be indeed another day's work."<sup>23</sup> In other words, the Orthodox can, and indeed must, recognize the place of a universal *primus* in their midst. "That person, in principle, is the bishop of Rome."<sup>24</sup> However, it remains to be sorted out exactly how such a primacy would concretely function in a Church holding together those who today are separated as Orthodox and Catholics.

Therefore, what Manoussakis prescribes, until such time as unity with the bishop of Rome can be restored, is the emergence and recognition of a func-

tioning Orthodox *primus* in the *person* of the Ecumenical Patriarch. The cynical reader will here be reminded of the foreword, but judicious readers can judge for themselves whether Manoussakis's stated reasons for this are worthy of consideration on their own merits.

As for Chapters 4 and 5: to borrow our author's expression, an epitome of the entire book would be indeed another day's work. But those who are interested in the topics that Manoussakis tackles there may well find that he plays the apothecary in reconciling what are apparent, rather than real, differences between the two traditions and their unique "theological styles," addressing himself always to the concrete theological question at hand rather than to endless hostile narratives of identity.

I would conclude this review by returning to the beginning of *For the Unity of All*. The third petition of the Fervent Supplication, that ancient sung prayer that begins every major liturgical service of the Orthodox Church, cries to the Lord for mercy in these words: "For the peace of the whole world, for the stability of the holy churches of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord." Manoussakis bids every Christian, Orthodox or Catholic, to ponder whether this is a *prayer worth reviewing*, a prayer that the faithful truly desire to see answered, a prayer that does not merely echo throughout empty halls of rhetoric but resonates within hearts full of Christian love. ✽

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. For the interested reader, Manoussakis footnotes Adam DeVille's recent and noteworthy book, *Orthodoxy and the Roman Papacy: Ut Unum Sint and the Prospects of East-West Unity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.



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