

# Introduction

The idea of purification of memory is that the church admits the wrongs and atrocities it has committed in the past and seeks forgiveness. It suggests that the church must be purified not only of the wrongs it has inflicted on others, but also of the memory of the violence and persecutions it has suffered in the past. This healing of memory is needed not only for the church's integrity of mission, but also as part of the ecumenical effort to encourage dialogue. Dialogue is important because through it we try not to allow our memories to dwell on the sins and wrongs we have committed or suffered, but to focus on and share what we have in common. This work attempts to demonstrate that, in spite of the mistrust and conflict between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, they actually share a common heritage that can serve as a basis for reunification.

Among the major Christian traditions, the Orthodox Church is the least known, and Orthodox theology is often shrouded in mysticism and misunderstanding. This is more serious in Asia, where the Orthodox Church is a minority faith and is perceived as an exotic branch of Christianity. Yet, in point of fact, the Eastern Church has been in China since the seventh century. The purpose of this work, therefore, is to acquaint the laity, theological students, and seminarians, with the teaching of Orthodoxy through a study of important modern Orthodox theologians. As the different ideologies are viewed from both Roman Catholic and ecumenical perspectives, it is my wish that readers will gain a deeper appreciation of church history in relation to the split between the Eastern and Western Churches.

As a Roman Catholic priest, I am very much inspired by the example of the late Pope John Paul II in his efforts to reach out to our Orthodox brothers and sisters. In an ecumenical gathering in Paris on 31 May 1980, John Paul II, now a saint, spoke of the 'healing and purification of memories'. This phrase was an

important principle in his efforts to reach out to members of other Christian communities, especially to the Orthodox Church. In his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, a landmark document on Christian unity, he teaches that the ‘commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the *necessary purification of past memories*’.<sup>1</sup> More importantly for us here, in the context of this work, John Paul II, referring to the 1965 lifting of Orthodox-Roman Catholic excommunications, notes that such effort removed from our memory and from the church the painful events of the past through ‘a solemn act which was at once a healing of historical memories, a mutual forgiveness, and a firm commitment to strive for communion’.<sup>2</sup> The concept of purification of memory therefore refers to historical memory.

Further, in 2001, in his address to Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens, the primate of the Orthodox Church in Greece, Pope John Paul II said, ‘certainly we are burdened by past and present controversies and by enduring misunderstandings. But in a spirit of mutual charity these can and must be overcome, for that is what the Lord asks of us. Clearly there is a need for a liberating process of purification of memory.’<sup>3</sup> He admitted that the Roman Catholic Church had sinned against their Orthodox brothers and sisters by their actions and omissions, and he asked the Lord for pardon.

Referring to the ‘disastrous sack of the imperial city of Constantinople, which was for so long the bastion of Christianity in the East’, John Paul II said, ‘it is tragic that the assailants, who

1. Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 25 May 1995, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html), no. 2. The focus in this book is on the schism between Rome and the Chalcedonian Orthodox. For a good description of the other Eastern Churches (anti-Chalcedonian), the Church of Assyrian Christians, and the Churches of Oriental Orthodoxy, see Aidan Nichols OP (2010), *Rome and the Eastern Churches*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, pp. 52–170.
2. *Ut Unum Sint*, 52. See also Adam A.J. DeVille, ‘On the Healing of Memories: An Analysis of the Concept in Papal Documents’, <http://www.koed.hu/sw249/adam.pdf>. ‘Patient listening can uncover deep and wide agreement concealed by the polemics of the past,’ Henry Chadwick (2003), *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church: From Apostolic Times until the Council of Florence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 275.
3. Pope John Paul II (n.d.), ‘John Paul II, Pope (2001-05-04), “A liberating process of purification of memory”’, *Origins* 31, no. 1, 3.

had set out to secure free access for Christians to the Holy Land, turned against their own brothers in the faith. The fact that they were Latin Christians fills Catholics with deep regret. . . . Together we must work for this healing if Europe now emerging is to be true to its identity, which is inseparable from the Christian humanism shared by East and West.<sup>1</sup> He also acknowledged that from apostolic times to the present day, the Orthodox Church of Greece has influenced the Latin Church in its liturgy, spirituality, and jurisprudence. Hence the universal church acknowledges the debt it owes to Greek Christianity, especially for the teachings of the Fathers in the East.

The Roman Catholic Church continues to look towards the Eastern Church for theological enlightenment, as Pope John Paul II put it so clearly in his letter *Oriente Lumen*:

Since, in fact, we believe that the venerable and ancient tradition of the Eastern Churches is an integral part of the heritage of Christ's Church, the first need for Catholics is to be familiar with that tradition, so as to be nourished by it and to encourage the process of unity in the best way possible for each. Our Eastern Catholic brothers and sisters are very conscious of being the living bearers of this tradition, together with our Orthodox brothers and sisters. The members of the Catholic Church of the Latin tradition must also be fully acquainted with this treasure and thus feel, with the Pope, a passionate longing that the full manifestation of the Church's catholicity be restored to the Church and to the world, expressed not by a single tradition, and still less by one community in opposition to the other; and that we too may be granted a full taste of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church which is preserved and grows in the life of the Churches of the East as in those of the West.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his pontificate, John Paul II always insisted that true ecumenism could not take place without inner conversion and the purification of memory, without holiness and fidelity to the Gospel message, and without assiduous prayer that reflects the prayer of Jesus. Inner conversion implies that the church admits the wrongs

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1. Ibid.

2. Pope John Paul II (1995), *Oriente Lumen* (Apostolic Letter), 2 May, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_02051995\\_orientale-lumen\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_02051995_orientale-lumen_en.html), no. 3.

and atrocities it has committed in the past and seeks forgiveness from God and also from the victims. Swiss Cardinal Georges Cottier says, ‘The forgiveness of God is precisely the highest and most eminent form of the purification of memory. This is because the divine forgiveness really erases and destroys the sin, so that its weight does not burden the conscience anymore.’<sup>1</sup> Further, the churches, both Latin and Orthodox, must be purified of the memory not only of the wrong each has done to the other, but also of the cruelty and injustice each has suffered from the other.

A report by the Roman Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue states, ‘although we are not in full unity with one another, the substantial amount of the Apostolic faith that we realize today that we share, allows us as members of the Catholic and Mennonite delegations to see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.’<sup>2</sup> This statement can also be applied to members of other Christian churches. In this report, John Paul II also stressed the need for theological dialogue. This would assist in the healing of memories by helping the dialogue partners to discover to what extent they continue to share the Christian faith in spite of centuries of division. Explaining their traditions to one another would lead to a deeper mutual understanding and a deeper realization that they hold in common many aspects of their Christian heritage.<sup>3</sup> It is in light of the call for theological dialogue as a process of healing memory that I write the following chapters.

### *Outline and Sequence of the Work*

Chapter I will study the writings of John Meyendorff as he deals with issues that are fundamental to the understanding of the separation between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches. Besides his sincere search for unity, Meyendorff’s work also handles the topics of catholicity, the history of the schism, the Petrine office, and others, with great insight and objectivity.

1. Georges Cottier (2004), ‘The purification of memory’. *Nova Et Vetera* 2, no. 2 (September), 259.
2. ‘Called Together to Be Peacemakers’, Report of the International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and Mennonite World Conference (1998–2003), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/mennonite-conference-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20110324\\_mennonite\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/mennonite-conference-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20110324_mennonite_en.html), no. 210.
3. *Ibid.*, 207.

Chapter 2 will examine the eucharistic ecclesiology of Nicholas Afanasiev in comparison with the ecclesiology of Joseph Ratzinger. Both theologians share the belief that in spite of the difficulties encountered in the dialogue between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches, the love that is rooted in the Eucharist can help them overcome this impasse.

Chapter 3 will discuss the ecclesiology of John Zizioulas and his critique of Afanasiev, among other issues. This chapter also examines the debate between Walter Kasper and Joseph Ratzinger regarding the priority of the universal church over the local churches. Since John Zizioulas' writings were influenced by Georges Florovsky, Chapter 4 will discuss Florovsky's neo-patristic synthesis, which has had a great impact on Orthodoxy. Florovsky's support of Hellenistic Christianity reveals a striking similarity with Ratzinger's Eurocentric theology. This fascination with Greek thought brings us to the writings of Sergius Bulgakov. Chapter 5 explores Sergius Bulgakov's theory of Sophiology, which is key to the understanding of his works on ecclesiology, Christology, and Mariology. In many ways, his ecclesiology reflects the teachings of *Lumen Gentium*, a Vatican II document.

Chapter 6 will focus on Bulgakov's critic, Vladimir Lossky, who emphasized the apophatic character of Orthodox theology. Influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas, Lossky's writings on the Trinity will be explored. As Lossky was deeply influenced by the negative theology of Orthodoxy, he was critical of social activism and worldly involvement, which he feared would hinder our spiritual growth. However, there is an Orthodox theologian who thought otherwise and who in many ways foreshadowed the liberation theology of Latin America. In view of this, Chapter 7 will study the contextual theology of Nicolas Berdyaev.

Finally, in Chapter 8 we will accompany Jaroslav Pelikan on his return to Orthodoxy after being a Lutheran scholar for most of his life. This chapter includes his writings on Christian doctrinal development, which present a critical yet sympathetic view of Roman Catholicism. However, it was his love of Hellenism that eventually led him to the bosom of the Orthodox Church.

In these eight chapters, we will explore interpretations of key theological issues that have kept the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches apart as well as together. More often than not, it has been misunderstanding, suspicion, and mistrust due to ignorance and unfamiliarity that has kept the churches apart. Besides, as we

shall see, divergent theological views can co-exist within the same church. For example, Walter Kasper's ecclesiology is more in accord with the Orthodox tradition than Joseph Ratzinger's emphasis on the priority of the universal church. At the same time, we find striking similarities between Ratzinger and Florovsky in their approach to Hellenization in the church. Within the Orthodox Church, John Zizioulas' ecclesiology is closer to Henri de Lubac's than to that of his fellow Orthodox theologian, Nicholas Afanasiev. Thus, such differences and divergent theological views need not be obstacles to reunification. Churches are like gardens, in which different kinds of flower must be allowed to bloom.

Most of the recently published books on Orthodox theology are meant as general introductions. Only a few examine to a deeper extent topics such as trinitarian theology, deification, and Christology, and these are meant for specialists. I hope that this book on Orthodox theologians, seen from both Roman Catholic and ecumenical perspectives, will satisfy the need of those seeking more than just a cursory introduction to Orthodox theology. This work explores the ideologies of Orthodox theologians from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so the theological issues they deal with are relevant to our present-day search for unity.