Foreword

Over most of the last century, Orthodox reflection on ecclesiology has revolved around what has been called 'Eucharistic ecclesiology'. The origins of this are not difficult to divine: the theologians of the Russian diaspora, rudely expelled from the territory that had been 'Holy Russia', were forced by circumstances to reconsider what was meant by the Church. For nearly a millennium and a half, the Church had been conceived on an analogy with human imperial structures, initially the Roman Empire, and then analogously with the Russian Empire and the Orthodox nations that emerged from the fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire. Reaching back behind the conversion of Constantine, the Russian theologians in Paris, notably Fr Nikolai Afanasiev, rethought an ecclesiology focused on the Eucharistic community, presided over by the bishop, which they found in the letters of St Ignatius of Antioch. Such an ecclesiology has been widely influential outside Orthodox circles: it profoundly informed the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council and lies behind much ecumenical ecclesiological reflection found, for instance, in the reports of the World Council of Churches.

In Orthodox circles, a widely influential proponent of Eucharistic ecclesiology, inspired by, though critical of, the ideas of Fr Afanasiev, is Professor John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon. With Zizioulas, the foundations of Eucharistic ecclesiology are extended from the pre-Nicene theology of St Ignatius to the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers, who, it is alleged by Zizioulas, developed a profound notion of the person, that lies at the heart of both their understanding of the mystery of the Trinity and of Zizioulas' own development of Eucharistic ecclesiology. Zizioulas' ideas have been received with a mixture of enthusiastic agreement and critical questioning, and debate has revolved around interpretation of passages from the Cappadocian Fathers, a debate that has become increasingly narrow and sterile. Zizioulas' linking of Eucharistic ecclesiology with his Trinitarian personalism has led to what one might call 'episcopocentrism' (or even episcopomonism), with ecclesial structures of authority focused on the bishop as guarantor

of ecclesial unity. More recently still, this episcopocentrism has led to an appreciation of the notion of primacy in Orthodox theology, which has provoked alarm in some quarters.

Fr Chrysostom shares much of the alarm of those who see episcopomonism as distorting ecclesial experience. His book is, however, far more than a tract for the times. In this book, the fruit of long and considered meditation, Fr Chrysostom explores the motives behind recourse to personalist ontology, and revisits the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers from whom Metropolitan John draws his personalism. He draws attention to the dangers of the polarisation between person and nature, taken for granted by Zizioulas' personalist ontology, a polarisation that distorts the balance between person and communion he finds in the Fathers and, even more dangerously, with its negative assessment of nature, seems to call in question the Christian doctrine of creation, according to which God created nature that was 'exceedingly good'. There is, however, much more to this book. In an earlier work in two volumes (*God of Mysteries: The Theology of the Celts in the Light of the Greek East* (2008) and *Lovers of the Kingdom: The Encounter of Celtic and Byzantine Monasticism* (2009), available, alas, only in Greek), Fr Chrysostom had explored parallels between Celtic and Byzantine monastic theology, finding in both cases a theology founded on ascetic experience and markedly Trinitarian in its concerns. He draws on this extensively in the central part of the book, in a way that draws attention to the common fund of ecclesial experience of the mysteries of the Trinity and the incarnation to be found in the Byzantine East and the Celtic West. In contrast to the one-sidedness that all too easily characterises Eucharistic ecclesiology and personalist ontology, we find an embracing of contrasts that is deeply enriching. Pages on the complementarity of eremiticism and communal monasticism in the monastic traditions highlight the balance found in Cappadocian theology (and Dionysius the Areopagite and St Maximus) between the monad and the triad in their understanding of the Triune God. A theology of obedience that flows all too easily from episcopocentric Eucharist ecclesiology is balanced by an emphasis on mutuality, personal responsibility and spiritual freedom. A failure of much Eucharistic ecclesiology has been an inability to accommodate the rich ascetic theology that marks both the Celtic and Byzantine traditions: this is counterbalanced by Fr Chrysostom's reflections in this book.

Furthermore, Fr Chrysostom's reflections are marked by a humane appreciation of the breadth of human experience: he draws on poets as well as theologians; he embraces the richness of human experience of the created order that is such a marked feature of the ascetics,

both Celtic and Byzantine, for all the apparent harshness of much of their ascetic practice. It is a book that transcends the pastoral concern for the dangerous consequences, as he sees it, of the academic and institutional bias of much Eucharistic ecclesiology, and becomes a profound meditation on the riches of the ascetic and theological tradition shared by East and West in the first millennium.

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