

Vladimir Latinovic and Anastacia K. Wooden, *Stolen Churches or Bridges to Orthodoxy?, Volume 1: Historical and Theological Perspectives on the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Dialogue, Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue, Palgrave Macmillan 2021, 386 p., ISBN: 978-3-030-55441-5*

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The present volume brings into discussion many important theological and ecumenical questions very often avoided by Church officials or theologians. Orthodox – Greek Catholic¹ dialogue is definitely not the easiest or most convenient ground for ecumenical dialogue. Yet, the volume *Stolen Churches or Bridges to Orthodoxy*:² edited by Vladimir Latinovic and Anastacia K. Wooden dares to approach the very complex issue of the Orthodox – Greek Catholic dialogue and relations.

The volume is the result of an international conference held in 2019 in Stuttgart between the 19th and 21st of July having a slightly different title: “Stolen Churches or Bridges to Orthodoxy: Impulses for the Dialogue between the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches.”³ The genesis of the idea and the story of this conference is detailed in the opening text signed by one of the Editors, Vladimir Latinovic and entitled *A First Step Toward the Dialogue Between Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches*. This introductory text, even if written mostly in a colloquial style, manages to raise important issues surrounding the attempt of an Orthodox – Greek Catholic meeting: who speaks for these Churches, the nature and the identity of the Oriental Catholic Churches and their perception of this identity, the visibility of the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches in the West, the status of a unof-

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¹ Greek Catholic Churches refer to the Eastern Churches in communion with Rome and using the Byzantine rite. The most well-known are: the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, the Melkite Church and the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church (officially the Romanian Church United with Rome, Greek Catholic).

² Regarding the expression “Bridges to Orthodoxy,” one of the authors who contributed to this volume made a constructive critique. See below: the lines dedicated to Dimitrios Keramidis’ article.

³ Despite this first volume, the 2019 Stuttgart Conference had another important achievement: the founding of the “Orthodox – Eastern Catholic Dialogue Group meant to continue this vital dialogue into the future by organizing further events that will provide additional opportunities for encounters between members of these churches” (p. 16). Another merit of the organizers of the conference is the offering of bursaries to facilitate the attendance in the auditorium of junior researchers and PhD students. I was among the junior researchers who participated in this conference.

ficial ecumenical dialogue and, in the end, the possibility of an ecumenism of the laity which does not necessarily oppose the official one; the text articulates the fact that very often all these difficult themes are avoided by the official representatives during ecumenical dialogue, etc.

When it comes to the identity of the Oriental Catholic Churches, the two expressions from the title (*Stolen Churches vs Bridges to Unity*) open the way of defining their identity somewhere in between one of the most serious accusations (obviously from an Orthodox point of view: *Stolen Churches*) and what could be considered one of the most idealistic Greek Catholic perception on itself (*Bridges to Unity*). In the past, before the Second Vatican Council, the biggest challenge for the Oriental Catholic Churches was to underline that they are truly Catholic though non-Roman; today, the main challenge for these Churches is to show they have something intimate in common with the Orthodox Churches, though being Catholic, avoiding to be just another church-jurisdiction of a Byzantine or any other Oriental Church. When speaking about the identity of the Oriental Catholic Churches another important question arises: who is able to speak for these Churches? Vladimir Latinovic underlines this issue by quoting some lines from his correspondence with Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev that are worth discussion: “The Eastern Churches that are in union with Rome adhere to the Catholic doctrine of faith and therefore there is no sense in a separate theological dialogue with these Churches” (p. 12-13). These lines reflect in an excellent manner “the core of the problem between Orthodox and Greek-Catholic” (p. 13): what are these Churches from their own point of view *vs* from an Orthodox one, and who is able to speak in their name? The introduction draws the redline of this volume: defining a functional identity for the Eastern Catholic Churches. We shall look at the articles from this point of view.

The volume is divided into two large chapters entitled *Historical Impulses* and *Theological Impulses*, each containing nine relevant studies, preceded by a descriptive-summarizing *Preface* signed by both the Editors.

Opening the first historical part of the volume is the text written by Yury P. Avvakomov entitled “Caught in the Crossfire: Toward Understanding Medieval and Early Modern Advocates of Church Union.” This material fits as an opening introductory text since it deals with the matter of the unionist ecclesial movement in general towards different periods of history: from late Byzantium until nowadays, trying almost to track “a unionist tradition as a religious movement spanning centuries and geographic regions” (p. 19). The text tries to identify reasons for the growth of unionist interest or misconceptions which nurtured Latin loathing among Byzantines and approaches different key historical moments or historical figures from differ-

ent eras, offering a kind of general view of the omnibus about what can be called “unionist identity.” An interesting trace that the author tries to track inside the pro/anti unionist conflicts and relations is the question of ecclesial confessionalization. Loading the terms *orthodoxus*/ὀρθόδοξος and *catholicus*/καθολικός with a confessional weight is until today a truly “misleading” direction for East-West ecclesial and beyond relations (p. 37). The process of confessionalization (*Konfessionalisierung*) of the Latin and Greek Churches played a key role in defining the Eastern Catholic identity, “caught in the crossfire.” Much of it is still inherited in contemporary Orthodox–Eastern Catholic relations. Even more complicated is when the Christian history of the first centuries is understood through our contemporary confessional categories. Reading between the lines, a deconfessionalization between Catholic and Orthodox Churches would ensure the rediscovery of a genuine identity for *unionists*/*henotics*/*uniates* who are, according to Avvakomov, “by no means converts from Eastern Orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism” (p. 39).

The key issue of confessionalization is addressed in other studies of the present volume as well. The third study of this historical part, entitled “Union of Brest: Saints or Villains” and belonging Anastacia Wooden and Natalia Vasilevich brings into discussion an important factor of the spiritual life and confessional/national identity of both Orthodox and Catholic Churches: the saints. Original insights related to confessional symbolic saints (Joseph Siamaška and Josaphat Kuncevic) are offered by the authors of this paper. The issue of the so-called “dividing Saints” is very important since they are a key element of the already mentioned *Konfessionalisierung*. Not only the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches find themselves in this situation, but Roman Catholic as well; a good example in this sense could be the case of Cardinal Stepinac⁴. How can their holiness be understood in case of a deconfessionalization? Anastacia Wooden and Natalia Vasilevich suggest an answer which becomes more and more actual: the theology of martyrdom: “Ecumenism of Blood” (p. 80). Ivan Almes’ study is dedicated to the question of Ukraine and its spiritual identity but from a rather cultural point of view. The concept of *confessionalization* applied in this paper to Kyivan Christianity is considered to be: “one of the most widespread and conven-

⁴ Aloysius Stepinac (8 May 1898–10 February 1960), a Yugoslav Croat and Roman Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb. He was charged by the Yugoslav authorities for high treason and complicity in forced conversions of Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1998. This beatification is considered controversial, so much so that in 2016 Pope Francis postponed the canonization of Stepinac⁴ and invited representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church to take part in the investigation process that will determine whether to not to proceed with the canonization of this possible “divisive saint”.

ient tools for historical research, primarily concerning Latin Europe. In the paradigm of confessionalization, religion is taken as a cultural system and, consequently, ecclesial topics are investigated first of all as cultural activities (not as religious in themselves)” (p. 88).

Another important element to be underlined is the issue of the name used for the Oriental Catholic Churches. Anastacia K. Wooden’s text approaches the question of the Union of Brest (1595-1596) and its interpretations, a key event on the path of the searching for an Eastern Catholic identity. Wooden uses the expression *Uniate Church* and explains it as being used “just as historical designation” (p. 43) because of the negative connotation of this terminology. We have to mention though, that many times religious negative terminology became almost an official terminology, used by everyone. This happened, for example, with the words, *Lutheran* or *Jesuit*. In Orthodox circles, the word *uniat(e)s* is very much in use and does not necessarily have a negative connotation, or, at least, not anymore and not consciously. More papers of this volume use the word *uniat(e)* to refer to the Greek-Catholic identity. For example, the very next one, written by Laura Stanciu, is actually a historical survey of the Romanian Uniate Church during the first two centuries of existence entitled “Identity and Institutional Alliance in Romanian Uniate Church History (1700-1900).”

The issue of latinization is another key-element of the Greek-Catholic identity mentioned in several papers of the volume’s historical studies. The study of Laura Stanciu is relevant in this sense because it underlines the struggle of the Romanian *Uniate* Bishops to maintain unaltered the Institutional structure of the Romanian Church (p. 104) against the objective of Rome and Esztergom to strengthen the post-Tridentine confessional identity. The contribution of Paul Bruszanowski entitled “The Judicial and Canonical Situation of the Romanian Byzantine Catholics in Hungary Around 1900” is almost a perfect continuation of the historical investigation performed in the previous studies. We observe that the author tries as well to describe the struggle for maintaining the Oriental tradition against the Latinizing tendency of the Hungarian milieus. The paper offers valuable historical and sociological information on the Orthodox-Greek Catholic situation in Transylvania during the beginning of the twentieth century. It must be underlined that Laura Stanciu, as a Romanian historian, uses the word *uniat(e)* without any kind of reserves or further explanation. It is very probable that she considers the word as being empty of every kind of negative connotation using this terminology as a simple confessional and denominational term.

The paper belonging to Vladislav Atanassov, on the “The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Its Perception of the Bulgarian *Uniates*” manages to

underline both the self and Orthodox perception on the Bulgarian Greek-Catholic identity. Regarding this self-perception, we must mention the two concepts brought into the discussion by the author⁵ in defining the Greek-Catholic identity: the *vertical* and the *horizontal* integration. The vertical⁶ integration refers to the identity oriented toward Rome, meanwhile the horizontal one “manifested itself in an approach to the other layers of Bulgarian society, which took place above all on the basis of a common national consciousness (p. 152). The dynamics born from these two integration models are applicable to all Greek Catholic reality, so we could consider it as an important part of the Byzantine Catholic identity. The paper’s last part offers a mature analysis of the current and future possible ecumenical relations between Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches in Bulgaria.

When referring to the Union of Brest, Anastacia Wooden formulates actually the most optimistic definition of the Eastern Catholic reality: “In general terms, the Union of Brest of 1595–1596 denotes a decision of the Orthodox Metropolitanate of Kyiv to switch its jurisdiction from the Patriarchate of Constantinople to the Bishop of Rome under the condition of preservation of its ecclesial autonomy and byzantine liturgical practices” (p. 43-44). The great merit of this historical survey is that the reader can acknowledge the existence of different traditions regarding the ecclesiastical union with Rome suddenly after the Council of Florence (1439) and deal with some misconceptions found in the subtitles-questions of this article: “Was Union a Break with Tradition?” (p. 47), “Was Union a Plot by Rome and the Jesuits” (p. 49), “Were Pro-union Bishops Dogmatically Motivated?” (p. 51).

The theological part of the volume contains other studies focused mainly on Ecclesiological issues. The only exception is Theodoros Alexopoulos’s study which deals with the question of *Filioque* in the context of the Ukrainian Church.

Three papers aim to explore the ecclesiology of three well-known Orthodox theologians with regards to ecumenical unity: Vladimir Soloviov (the study of Nathaniel Wood), Paul Evdokimov (the paper of Peter Phan) and John Zizioulas (the study of Tihomir Lazić). Approaching Soloviov from an Orthodox-Greek Catholic perspective could seem artificial since, as the paper’s author admits himself, Soloviov “does not focus much on the question of the Orthodox Church’s relationship to *Eastern Catholicism* spe-

⁵ Concepts taken from Ivan Elenkov, see footnote no. 29, p. 152.

⁶ I assume the text has an editing error here since the text describes horizontal *integration* as the one referring to Rome, making no sense with the rest of the explanation.

cifically” (p. 221). The part referring to Soloviov ecclesiastical affiliation is written in a very objective way. The article of Tihomir Lazic contains a good theological analysis of Zizioulas’ ecclesiological concept of *koinonia*, having but vague and not entirely obvious references to Orthodox-Greek-Catholic relations. Dimitrios Keramidas’ article offers a theological and historical survey of the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue. His remarks on the volume’s title are very interesting. Keramidas suggests rather *Bridges between Orthodox and Catholics* than *Bridges to Orthodoxy* (p. 374). His final remarks could easily be considered a conclusion for the whole volume itself, even if finding a definitive identity for the Eastern Catholic Churches is impossible, at least at the moment.

These Churches, born as a consequence of different political contexts, surviving in Orthodox, Roman Catholic or even Muslim majorities, suppressed in the 20th century by dictatorial systems should be sustained on their way in finding (again) a genuine role inside the Christian world, avoiding, in Keramidas’ words, “ritual assimilation by Catholicism, or canonical absorption by Orthodoxy” (p. 374). The papers found in this volume do not give a final and precise definition to Eastern Catholic Churches but do represent a huge step on the way of a natural internal and external questioning. A purification of memory, unfortunately still avoided nowadays, is also necessary in order to normalise the relations between Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches and in order to find a true identity for each of us, no matter which side of the “bridge” we find ourselves.