

# Zizioulas's Criticism of Afanasiev<sup>1</sup>

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## *I. History of the Appearance of the Present Article*

### *1. Established Consensus*

In the 1980–90s, a number of prominent Orthodox theologians mentioned with approval the criticism of Fr Nicholas Afanasiev's eucharistic ecclesiology by John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon.

The first one to support that criticism was probably Fr John Meyendorff. In the Foreword to Zizioulas's book *Being as Communion* published by St Vladimir's Seminary Press in 1985, he, on the one hand, pointed out that the ideas of Metropolitan John were close to those of Afanasiev but, on the other hand, emphasized the sharp criticism of the latter by the former. In Meyendorff's opinion, the criticism was "justified". Showing solidarity with the criticism of Zizioulas, Fr John

1 I am thankful to Fr Michael Plekon for proof-reading my English text.

formulated the following rhetorical question:

Was not Afanasiev somewhat overlooking the Trinitarian and anthropological dimension of ecclesiology, focusing his thought on the “local” nature of the eucharistic community and, somewhat, excluding the problems of truth and of the universal presuppositions of unity?<sup>2</sup>

It was not the first time Meyendorff conducted polemics with Afanasiev: in the mid-1950s, being a young theologian residing in Paris, he argued against some opinions Afanasiev expressed in his book on the ministry of laity in the Church.<sup>3</sup> However, in the present article I would like to explore a different topic.

*Being as Communion* was recommended as the work containing “important correctives” to Afanasiev’s eucharistic ecclesiology by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware.<sup>4</sup> Fr John Ericson claimed that, “once identified chiefly with the late Fr Afanasiev and émigré Russian theologians, ‘eucharistic ecclesiology’ has been given both balance and scholarly precision quite independently by John Zizioulas”.<sup>5</sup>

- 2 John Meyendorff, foreword to John D Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, St Vladimir’ Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY 1997, 12. The book appeared in 1985. The text of 1997 which I am using seems to be an unchanged new printing of the edition of 1985.
- 3 Иоанн Мейендорф, “Иерархия и народ в Православной Церкви. По поводу книги прот. Н. Афанасьева ‘Служение мирян в Церкви’”, in *Вестник РСХД* 39 (1955), 36–41; Виктор Александров, *Николай Афанасьев и его евхаристическая экклезиология*, Свято-Филаретовский православно-христианский институт, Москва 2018, 195–196; Anastacia Wooden, *The Limits of the Church: Ecclesiological Project of Nicholas Afanasiev*. PhD Dissertation, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 2018, 366–367 (chapter 3, section a; as the work has not been published yet, page numbers may slightly differ in the word file).
- 4 Timothy Ware (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia), *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1997, 338.
- 5 John Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History*, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY 1991, 91.

(Looking ahead, the words about “scholarly precision” seem to be a strong exaggeration in the light of the arguments developed later in the present article). The idea of Zizioulas’ corrections to Afanasiev was accepted, in a very cautious manner though, even by Fr Boris Bobrinsky, who was a student—and later colleague—of Fr Nicholas in the Saint Sergius Theological Institute: “Correcting certain aspects of Afanasiev’s thought, he [Zizioulas], nevertheless, develops the basic ideas of Fr Nicholas’ ecclesiology”.<sup>6</sup>

The recommendations of the leading Orthodox scholars together with the reputation of Metropolitan John as one of the prominent and original Orthodox theologians of the present—the reputation which was established approximately in the same period of the 1980–1990s and which I would not like to question—contributed to the fact that the criticism of Afanasiev expressed in the writings of Zizioulas was widely received by theologians as correct and justified. In the scholarship, the opinion that Metropolitan John offered an “improved” and, so to speak, “advanced” version of eucharistic ecclesiology became widely-accepted. The passages and chapters viewing the ecclesiology of Zizioulas as a more developed stage of the modern Orthodox teaching about the Church became a common place in theological writings. Towards the end of the twentieth century, a scholarly consensus on the correlation of the theological achievement of Afanasiev and Zizioulas was firmly established.

That consensus, however, came as a surprise for those theologians who, for whatever reasons, studied Afanasiev. It is probably Fr Michael Plekon who was the first to draw attention to the fact that critics, of whom Zizioulas was the most persistent, attributed to Fr Nicholas the opinions he never held.<sup>7</sup> Since then, several more

6 Boris Bobrinsky, *Le mystère de l'Église: Cours de théologie dogmatique*, Cerf, Paris 2003, 123.

7 Michael Plekon, “‘Always Everywhere and Always Together’: The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicholas Afanasiev’s *The Lord’s Supper Revisited*”, in *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 41/1-2 (1997), 143, 147.

scholars including the author of the present article have examined the criticism of Zizioulas and have come to the conclusion that in general it is not justified and that Metropolitan John's knowledge of the ecclesiology of Afanasiev is only scarce and often distorted.<sup>8</sup> This conclusion should not be viewed only as usual polemics between different generations of theologians—the criticism of Zizioulas itself included an element of such polemics<sup>9</sup>—but as a fact established by research into texts and ideas.

## 2. *My Previous Study*

My previous study of the criticism of Afanasiev by Zizioulas was written because of my disagreement with the consensus that I mentioned above. I will repeat what I consider the two main findings of the study immediately:

First, the familiarity of Zizioulas with the writing of Afanasiev is very fragmentary, he always criticizes Fr Nicholas in passing, his criticism abounds with inaccuracies, and it is quite often that he simply distorts Afanasiev's ideas.

Secondly, although Metropolitan John recognizes<sup>10</sup> he is not familiar with the works of Afanasiev written in Russian, the problem

8 Victor Alexandrov, "Nicholas Afanasiev's Ecclesiology and Some of its Orthodox Critics", in *Sobornost* 31/2 (2009), 45–68; Wooden, *The Limits of the Church*, 340–344 (chapter 3, section a), 479–487 (Appendix II); and Christophe D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, Presses universitaires de Louvain, Louvain 2020, 314–333.

9 J. Zizioulas, "L'apport de la théologie orthodoxe occidentale", in *Service orthodoxe de press* 326 (mars 2008), 25–26; quoted in Ch. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 333 (n. 85).

10 John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries*, Elizabeth Theokritoff (trans.), Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts 2001, 36 (n. 47).

is not merely linguistic. After a certain moment, which I would define now as the early- or mid-1970s—but I do not pretend to be very precise as regards such a chronology—Zizioulas does not demonstrate a greater familiarity with Afanasiev than the one he has gained by that moment. He does not show he is aware even of the works of Afanasiev available in French or English, including *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, Fr Nicholas's opus magnum published in French in 1975. Despite that, Zizioulas continues to make critical comments about Afanasiev (and sometimes about Fr Alexander Schmemmann, too) either in the new writings or in his old, reprinted, ones. I supposed that from a certain period Metropolitan John lost his interest in real Afanasiev and was satisfied „with the folkloric image of Afanasiev's ecclesiology that Zizioulas created for himself in the 1960s”.<sup>11</sup>

### *3. Need to Revisit the Issue*

There no use in excessive polemics. This time, nevertheless, after some hesitation I decided to revisit the issue and set the record of Zizioulas's "corrections" strait once again. First of all, because in the years which have passed since the moment my previous article on Zizioulas' criticism was published, I have come to better understanding of the ecclesiology of Zizioulas himself. However, the most important reason is that, despite there are signs that *the myth of Zizioulas' corrections to Afanasiev has slightly been shaken*,<sup>12</sup> *it is still very much alive and decreases interest towards Afanasiev*. It is not

11 V. Alexandrov, "Nicholas Afanasiev's Ecclesiology and Some of its Orthodox Critics", 63–65.

12 See the studies quoted above in n. 7 and 8. Also, consult Kallistos Ware, "Sobornost and Eucharistic Ecclesiology: Alexei Khomiakov and his successors", in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11/2–3 (2011), 216–235, where Metropolitan Kallistos presents a significantly more adequate view on the correlation of Afanasiev and Zizioulas as he is not talking about Metropolitan John's "corrections" to Fr Nicholas and does not view the

only Metropolitan John who has been engaged into polemics with Fr Nicholas,<sup>13</sup> but it is his criticism—not lengthy but persistent and being repeated for about four decades, the criticism of a prominent theologian with a good reputation—that influenced current attitude towards Afanasiev the most. Convinced by Zizioulas, theologians found the ecclesiology of Afanasiev superseded by the “emended” version of Metropolitan John. Whereas the matter of fact is that *the ecclesiology of Zizioulas is not an advanced version of eucharistic ecclesiology of Afanasiev with Fr Nicholas’s mistakes corrected, but Zizioulas’s own version of ecclesiology, the author of which has quite a vague idea of Afanasiev.*<sup>14</sup> Afanasiev, whose writings were quite popular in the years following the Second Vatican Council (in the last sessions of which he took part as an Orthodox observer) became a theologian read rarely by new generations. Meanwhile, he deserves attention in his own right not just a sacramental reference as an imperfect step to the “advanced” ecclesiology of Zizioulas. Moreover, he often raises the topics which Zizioulas was not really interested in and offers solutions which are better justified historically or dogmatically than those of Metropolitan John.

The following text is a new, hopefully more profound, variation on the same topic. Occasionally, I borrow sentences from my English text of 2009, but otherwise this is a completely new piece of writing. Besides, I do my best to avoid the extremes of polemical style.

I have not tried to take into account all critical remarks of Zizioulas about Afanasiev. It is not really necessary since the discussed ones

ecclesiology of the former as a nicer upper floor built on the slightly defective ground floor constructed by the latter.

13 For the analysis of the criticism of some other theologians, see: A. Wooden, *The Limits of the Church*, 335–339, 340–366; Ch. D’Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 334–342.

14 Cf. В. Александров, *Николай Афанасьев и его евхаристическая эkkлeзиология*, 72, 203–204.

give sufficient idea of the disagreement of the two theologians. I have attempted to present criticism of Zizioulas as systematically as possible. Naturally, this systematization reflects my own vision of the discussed issues and bears witness to my own views and preferences.

## *II. Issues Criticised by Zizioulas*

### *1. Ambiguity of Zizioulas's Attitude towards His Predicessors*

Zizioulas criticizes Afanasiev already in his earliest book *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, which was his dissertation that appeared in Greek back in 1965, but which became widely known after the publication of its English translation in 2001.<sup>15</sup> Further portions of criticism are found in his collections of articles *Being as Communion* (1985)<sup>16</sup> and *The One and the Many* (2010).<sup>17</sup> The attitude of Metropolitan John to the eucharistic ecclesiology of Afanasiev and Schmemmann—Zizioulas understands that Fr Alexander accepts and, in his own way, develops many basic ideas of Afanasiev—is ambiguous, not exclusively critical. Both in *Eucharist, Bishop, Church* and in *Being as Communion* he refers to eucharistic ecclesiology as an important and positive phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in *Being as Communion* he accepts that in this book “the reader will easily recognize the fundamental presuppositions of eucharistic ecclesiology”, pointing, thus, if not to his belonging to that current of theological thought, at least, to his relation to it. Nevertheless, criticism is absolutely predominant in the references of Metropolitan John to Afanasiev (his criticism of Schmemmann is less extensive and seems to fade over

15 For the full publication data, see n. 10 above.

16 See n. 2 above.

17 John D Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church and the World Today*, Fr Gregory Edwards (ed.), Sebastian Press, Alhambra, CA 2010.

18 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 17; Idem, *Being as Communion*, 23.

the years, being limited to one or two specific points). In *Being as Communion*, having accepted his connection with the eucharistic ecclesiology of Afanasiev, Zizioulas observes immediately that the attentive reader will also discover important differences from that ecclesiology. Zizioulas warns that he would like “to go further than Afanasiev or to dissociate his own opinions from the latter without either underestimating or minimizing the importance of this Russian theologian and those who have faithfully followed him.”<sup>19</sup> Zizioulas recognizes that he is not familiar with the works of Afanasiev written in Russian and is aware of eucharistic ecclesiology only on the basis of the French- and English-language publications of Fr Nicholas and his follower Alexander Schmemmann.<sup>20</sup>

In different books of Zizioulas, his criticism of Afanasiev varies as regards its length and decisiveness. In *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, the criticism is very cautious and its wording is somewhat vague. When writing the book published in 1965, Zizioulas was still a young theologian (he is born in 1931). It is a criticism addressed to a senior scholar, whose theology is recognised, by a junior one, whose views are still being shaped.<sup>21</sup> However, major elements of his subsequent criticism are already present in *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, although not in a developed form. By that moment, Metropolitan John has already internalized the idea of “corporate personality”, which became one of the “guiding stars” of his theological career.<sup>22</sup> In the book, the idea is present at the background, and a great part of the disagreement of Zizioulas with Afanasiev and Schmemmann is due to the conclusions he makes from that intuition.

19 Ibid., 23.

20 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 36 (n. 47).

21 Cf. A. Wooden, *The Limits of the Church*, 340.

22 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 55 (including n. 56). For this idea in Zizioulas, see Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1993, 166–186.



*Being as Communion* reflects the theology of Metropolitan John at a more advanced stage of its development. The criticism of Afanasiev—Schmemmann is replaced by “those who faithfully followed Afanasiev” in this book published by St Vladimir’s Seminary Press in 1985—is more developed and definite. However, *Being as Communion* also belongs to quite an early period of Zizioulas’s theological career: the book is based on *L’Être ecclésial*, a collection of his articles published in French in 1981. The English version is completed with one more text (chapter 3), and, thus, includes writings written in the period from 1969 to 1981, so to speak, „in the long 1970s”.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, the book *The One and the Many* comprises the articles published from 1969 to 2006, that is to say, first, the works of the same period as *Being as Communion* but, for some reason, not included in it, and, secondly, the articles written later. *The One and the Many* contains the most brave criticism addressed by Metropolitan John to Afanasiev.

Mostly, my discussion of Zizioulas’s criticism is based on these three volumes of Zizioulas although occasionally I refer to his other writings.

Despite the fact that criticism of Zizioulas is developing from his early works to mature ones, a significant continuity of topics is characteristic of it, and basic critical remarks are repeated by Metropolitan John.

## 2. “One-sidedness”

Several times Zizioulas criticized the eucharistic ecclesiology of Afanasiev for “one-sidedness”. He was not only one to make similar comments about Afanasiev. Fr Alexander Schmemmann, when he was a young theologian, reproached Afanasiev, his senior colleague at the

23 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 261 (the list of the sources of the chapters of the book).

St Sergius Theological Institute in Paris, for a narrow understanding of the Church.<sup>24</sup> It happened in the period when Schmemmann was looking at Florovsky as his teacher and at Florovsky's theology as a sample to follow. Even later, after the influence of Afanasiev on Schmemmann overshadowed that of Florovsky, he called Afanasiev—quite well-intendedly—a man of one idea, one vision, which was, to a great extent, true since Fr Nicholas worked in not a broad field and explored not a great number of topics. It was not due to Afanasiev's blindness or deafness to other topics, but because he had no taste or interest in them as he was preoccupied with his main vision, namely, the Church.<sup>25</sup>

Zizioulas' criticism is, however, of a different kind, and Metropolitan John drew different conclusions from it. What does he mean by Afanasiev's "one-sidedness"? This is not always formulated clearly. In *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, when the claim of the "one-sidedness" of the eucharistic ecclesiology of Afanasiev appears for the first time in Zizioulas, it happens after he states that his predecessors (Afanasiev and Schmemmann) had identified the Church with Eucharist "fully and exclusively". Metropolitan John warns that it is one-sided to study the Eucharist isolated from other phenomena of the Church, in particular, from faith, love, baptism, and sanctity of life. This warning is formulated, however, extremely carefully, even vaguely, and sounds rather as a general methodological principle that comes to the author's mind with regard to eucharistic ecclesiology. It remains unclear what it means exactly when applied to Afanasiev and Schmemmann.<sup>26</sup> A "full

24 Александр Шмеман, Георгий Флоровский, *Письма 1947–1955 годов*. Павел Гаврилюк (ed., intr.), ПСТГУ, Москва 2019, 262.

25 Александр Шмеман, "Памяти отца Николая Афанасьева", in Idem, *Собрание статей, 1947–1983*, Русский путь, Москва 2009, 838–839.

26 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 17–18. For a more detailed criticism of this passage, see: V. Alexandrov, "Nicholas Afanasiev's Ecclesiology and Some of its Orthodox Critics", 50–51

and exclusive" identification of the Church with Eucharist is in itself quite an alarming statement for the reader familiar with Afanasiev and Schmemmann as it appears to be an evident oversimplification.

Later Zizioulas attributed "one-sidedness" to the eucharistic ecclesiology of Afanasiev directly and related it to the principle "where the Eucharist is, there is the Church".<sup>27</sup> Thus, it would be correct to conclude that Zizioulas considers the ecclesiology of Afanasiev one-sided because it "identifies the concept of Church and Eucharist fully and exclusively" and because it follows the principle "where the Eucharist is, there is the Church". The two formulas are essentially identical in Zizioulas since the first formula is an earlier variant of the second one. I shall discuss the principle "where the Eucharist is, there is the Church" in section 4 below.

It is ironic that later the reproach of one-sidedness returned to Zizioulas as boomerang since he himself was accused of it, by the next generation of scholars, for excessive concentration on Eucharist and for giving little weight to Baptism.<sup>28</sup> It seems that in the Orthodox theology a concentration on a favourite topic is exposed to reproaches, and not to be viewed one-sided one has to write a book of the scope of *Summa Theologiae*.

### 3. "Enlarging the Horizon" to Avoid Sacramentalization of Theology

In the book *Being as Communion* (1985), which made Zizioulas widely-known among theologians and which has been the most quoted of his books so far, Metropolitan John, states that he would like "to

27 J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 66, 311 (the articles written in 1982 and 1985 respectively). The first of the quoted articles is also included in another book of Metropolitan John: John D. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, Luke ben Tallon (ed.), T&T Clark, London 2011, here at p. 104.

28 For more details, see Kallistos Ware, "Sobornost and Eucharistic Ecclesiology", 231–232.

enlarge, as much as possible, the horizon of ecclesiology in order to relate the theology of the Church to its philosophical and ontological implications as well as to the rest of theology”. One may suppose that this intention is related to the opinion of Metropolitan John that eucharistic ecclesiology of his predecessors is one-sided. Commenting on the aim of the first two chapters of his book, Zizioulas writes that he would like “to distance the present studies from the opinion that eucharistic ecclesiology is founded simply on the concept or on the celebration of a sacramental act”. Metropolitan John emphasizes that he is doing so because, on the basis of eucharistic ecclesiology, many people, both Western Christians and the Orthodox, believe that Orthodox ecclesiology is “only a projection of the mystery of the Church into the sacramental categories: a sacramentalization of theology”.<sup>29</sup> Up to this point, the wish of Zizioulas mostly corresponds to a short “defence” of Afanasiev’s ecclesiology by Schmemmann, who emphasizes that it is wrong to see this ecclesiology as a reduction of the Church to Eucharist and liturgy.<sup>30</sup> However, Zizioulas immediately makes a statement which suggests that, perhaps, he himself is one of those whom the “defence” of Schmemmann should be addressed:

Such an impression (that eucharistic ecclesiology is only a sacramentalization of theology – *V. A.*) is inevitable if we do not go beyond what eucharistic ecclesiology has said up until now, if we do not try to widen both the theological and philosophical horizons.<sup>31</sup>

In itself, an intention to relate ecclesiology to other fields of theology or even philosophy is intelligible and welcome. The success of such a project depends on what it involves and how it is completed. However, I would like to question whether the conclusion that the eucharistic ecclesiology of Zizioulas’ predecessors is *only* a sacramentalization

29 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 23.

30 А. Шмеман, “Памяти отца Николая Афанасьева”, 840.

31 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 24.

of theology is really inevitable. Metropolitan John does not explain what kind of danger that greater attention to sacraments which is characteristic of Afanasiev—and especially of Schmemmann (as this comment is even more pertinent to his theology)—leads to.

Ecclesiology cannot replace other fields of theology. It always will remain only a part of theology and should be connected to its other parts. Normally, ecclesiology does not pretend to substitute the whole of theology. Afanasiev and Schmemmann were feeling it was necessary to emphasize the importance of sacraments for theology since the theology of the preceding generations had been cut off from its sacramental roots. Such a “re-sacramentalization” was necessary not as a substitute for entire theology but as a source of it and as a new—in fact, the oldest—perspective of theology.

The ecclesiology of Zizioulas' predecessors does not exclude other areas of theology and does not pretend to do so. To use an expression of Fr Alexander Schmemmann, eucharistic ecclesiology makes an attempt to point to the eucharistic roots of theology.<sup>32</sup> The message of that ecclesiology is that theology should be re-connected to praising the Lord in the Eucharist within the local Church. She is the source and primary holder of that *theologia prima* about which Aidan Kavanaugh writes.<sup>33</sup> In his correspondence with Bernhardt Schulze, Afanasiev introduced an interesting division of theologians into “historians” and “dogmatic theologians” (where “dogmatic” is used in a healthy theological, not pejorative, sense).<sup>34</sup> Should we not see in Zizioulas' criticism of Afanasiev's eucharistic ecclesiology a resistance of a mainly “dogmatic theologian” against a “historian”

32 А. Шмеман, “Памяти отца Николая Афанасьева”, 840.

33 Aidan Kavanaugh, *On Liturgical Theology*, Pueblo, New York 1984, 73–121.

34 Bernhardt Schulze, “Ekklesiologischer Dialog mit Erzpriester Nikolaj Afanas'ev”, in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 33 (1967), 388. Cf. my discussion of differences between Afanasiev and Bulgakov: В. Александров, *Николай Афанасьев и его евхаристическая экклезиология*, 32.

within eucharistic ecclesiology, a resistance of speculative thought (again in a theological sense of the word) against the eucharistic historicism of Afanasiev? It is true that in his first book Zizioulas made a serious, although by no means impeccable, attempt to harmonize his main—at that moment—dogmatic idea of “corporate personality” with contemporaneous historical data about the Early Church. However, he never went significantly further as regards his historical knowledge, and his theology was becoming increasingly speculative.

4. “Where the Eucharist Is, There Is the Church”

The formula “where the Eucharist is, there is the Church”, which Zizioulas considers the basic principle of eucharistic ecclesiology, turns out to be the key to understanding the criticism of that ecclesiology by Zizioulas himself.

The criticism of the formula appears already in the book *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*. At the end of the book, summarizing the results of his study, Zizioulas objects to that formula, which is found in Afanasiev’s article *Una sancta*.<sup>35</sup> Zizioulas believes that

Emphasized to the extreme, the axiom “where the Eucharist is, there is the Church”, destroys in the final analysis any notion of *canonical* unity in the Church, leading in essence to the antithesis introduced by R. Sohm of Religion and Law.<sup>36</sup>

(It is to be observed that, according to Sohm, it is the Christian Church not religion in general which is incompatible with law.<sup>37</sup>)

35 Nicholas Afanasiev, *Una sancta*, in Michael Plekon (ed.), *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in Our Time / Readings from the Eastern Church*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham 2003, 14.

36 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 258.

37 Rudolph Sohm, *Kirchenrecht*, Duncker und Humblot, Leipzig 1898, 22–28.

Such an absolute view of the eucharistic character of the Church to the exclusion of canonical preconditions leads Fr A. Schmemmann, too, to the view that we have ecclesiological fullness even in the parish, inasmuch as the Eucharist is celebrated there, which conflicts with the conclusions of this study in which the eucharistic element is interwoven with the canonical, which is to say, the Eucharist with the Bishop.<sup>38</sup>

In this quotation, the three mutually related elements emerge, although not in a fully-articulated form, the elements which Zizioulas will repeatedly criticize later. The first one is the formula “where the Eucharist is, there is the Church”, the second is Afanasiev’s attitude to law, and the third is the issue of a parish as a catholic Church. In this section, I will discuss the first element while the second and third ones will be analysed later.

In this passage quoted from the early book of Zizioulas, it is not clear who actually emphasizes the formula “where the Eucharist is, there is the Church” to the extreme. Is this Afanasiev himself? Or is it only general, methodological, warning made by Zizioulas. However, in later works of Metropolitan John, this formula is presented as the main, “well-known”, principle or even axiom of the eucharistic ecclesiology of Afanasiev.<sup>39</sup> In *Being as Communion*, Zizioulas claims:

Eucharistic ecclesiology such as has been developed by Fr Afanasiev and his followers raises serious problems, and because of this it is in need of fundamental correction. The principle “where the Eucharist is, there is the Church” on which this ecclesiology is built, tends to lead to two basic errors that Fr Afanasiev did not avoid, any more than those who have faithfully followed him.<sup>40</sup>

38 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 259.

39 Idem, *Being as Communion*, 24 (Introduction written in 1981); Idem, *The One and the Many*, 66, 280, 311 (the articles published in 1982, 2004, and 1985 respectively).

40 Idem, *Being as Communion*, 24.

Let us have a more attentive look at the “well-known” principle of Afanasiev’s ecclesiology. The expression “where the Eucharist is, there is the Church” is a verbal formula. It is one of the *several* expressions which Fr Nicholas uses to demonstrate the interdependence—or even identity—of the Eucharist and the Church. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, this phrase emerges in his works only *once*, namely, in the article *Una sancta*. As any theological formula, whatever aphoristic and aptly-phrased might it be, it cannot be exhaustive and understood without its context. This is neither a slogan, nor a template one uses to ascertain if there is the Church or there is not.

Afanasiev actually offers quite a developed, dialectical theology of the Eucharist and the Church. The passage, from which Zizioulas takes the phrase, testifies to this as well. In that passage, Afanasiev is looking for an appropriate wording to express the relation of the Church and Eucharist: “As the Body of Christ the Church in her fullness is manifested in the eucharistic assembly of each local Church”, “the Church abides where a eucharistic assembly is”, “a distinctive empirical feature of the Church is a eucharistic assembly”, “by claiming that a eucharistic assembly is the principle of the unity of the Church, we do not exclude the thesis [...] that a distinctive empirical feature of the local church is a bishop because he is included in the concept of Eucharist”. (By the way, the last phrase quoted addresses the question Zizioulas raises about the lack of the canonical element in Afanasiev. See the quotation from *Being as Communion* above. For Afanasiev, the Eucharist and Bishop are two interwoven elements. It is true that this norm is derived from the Early Church history, namely, from the period when the local Church has not split into parishes yet. I cannot dwell into the topic at this point). If one turns to other works of Afanasiev, it would be not difficult to find more statements by which Fr Nicholas attempts to express the identity of the Eucharist and the Church.

By limiting this idea of Afanasiev to a template-like principle “where the Eucharist is, there is the Church”, Metropolitan John makes the



thought of his opponent more schematic—even primitive—than it is. Moreover, in one of his works *he definitely pushes his readers towards a mechanistic interpretation of Afanasiev*:

The Church is not simply this convocation for celebration of the Eucharist; it also involves the people of God dispersed all over the world every day, and not simply when they meet for the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>41</sup>

Would it be, however, correct to interpret Afanasiev in the sense that the Church exists only when a Sunday or other festive Eucharist is being celebrated and disappears as soon as the people of God leave for home? Such a reading of Afanasiev, inspired by Zizioulas consciously or unconsciously, is an evident vulgarization of Fr Nicholas's thought. Afanasiev's idea of identity of the Church and Eucharist, which is shared by Schmemmann—and, as we shall immediately see, by Zizioulas himself!—is definitely more subtle.

It is worth noting that in the article quoted above, even in the same paragraph quoted, Metropolitan John expresses the very same idea as Afanasiev or Schmemmann and uses the wording not radically different from theirs:

If we ask what is the nature of the Church in the Orthodox understanding, what expresses the nature of the Church in its fullness, the answer, if anything, is certainly the Eucharist.<sup>42</sup>

In his late-period writings, Zizioulas often talks about the Eucharist as the identity of the Church.<sup>43</sup> In one of his relatively recent articles,

41 *Idem*, *The One and the Many*, 311 (an article of 1985).

42 *Ibid.*

43 Иоанн Зизиулас, митрополит Пергамский, *Церковь и Евхаристия. Сборник статей по православной экклезиологии*, Богородице-Сергиева Пустынь 2009, 34–40 (an article of 1997); John D. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, T&T Clark, London 2008, 123 f. (on p. 123–124, see in particular a sympathetic reference to Maximus the Confessor who, according to Zizioulas, maintains that the Eucharist expresses the identity of the Church in the best manner).

Metropolitan John distances himself from those who warn against an excessive identification of the Eucharist and the Church (which is again a sort of a boomerang since it was he himself who warned against the extreme emphasis on the Eucharist in his earliest book!). He believes that the fears of this sort are based on that erroneous concept of the Eucharist as one of the seven sacraments which was developed in medieval scholasticism.<sup>44</sup> In a word, for Zizioulas it is not a problem to talk about *the identity of the Eucharist and the Church and to describe this identity with his own terms*. When, however, the same idea is articulated by Afanasiev, Metropolitan John chooses one of Afanasiev's expressions, reduces Fr Nicholas' ecclesiology to a schematic, almost mechanistic, principle, and attributes to his opponent "one-sidedness" leading to serious mistakes. In this manner, *Zizioulas conducts polemic not with real Afanasiev but his shade pale, distorted and created by Zizioulas himself*. Whatever reasons for such an attitude are, such a polemic is, at least, scholarly inaccurate. The reduction of Afanasiev's theology to the formula "where the Eucharist is, there is the Church", which is presented as a template and lacks nuances and context, is the basis of Zizioulas' criticism. This basis could easily have been modified and completed with nuances and context if Metropolitan John were more interested in understanding Afanasiev than criticising him.

##### 5. *Parish as a "Catholic Church"*

According to Zizioulas, the principle "where the Eucharist is, there is the Church" leads to two basic errors.

The first of these errors consists in considering even the *parish* where the Eucharist takes place as a complete and "catholic" Church. Several Orthodox, following Afanasiev, have come to this conclusion without

44 И. Зизиулас, *Церковь и Евхаристия*, 45 (an article originally published in 2004).

recognizing that they are raising in a very acute manner the entire problem of the structure of the Church.<sup>45</sup>

Who are these mysterious “several Orthodox” who followed Afanasiev? In the book *Eucharist, Bishop, Church* Zizioulas attributes that mistake directly to Schmemmann.<sup>46</sup> He also credits Afanasiev and Schmemmann with the same error later.<sup>47</sup> This means that in *Being as Communion* the main addressee of his criticism, along with Afanasiev, is Schmemmann. (I guess that to name him directly was somewhat uncomfortable because this book of Zizioulas was published by St Vladimir's Seminary Press and the reputation of Fr Schmemmann, who had only recently died, was extremely high at that moment.)

I have several times drawn the attention of the readership that neither Afanasiev, nor Schmemmann considered the parish as a catholic Church.<sup>48</sup> Zizioulas attributes them the position they never held. Afanasiev was looking for the “ecclesiastical norm” in the epoch when the local Church did not split into the parishes as we know them today. In the book *The Lord's Supper*, he proposed a discussion on what can appropriately be considered a local Church in modern circumstances.<sup>49</sup> In his writings, one could find two or three places which might be interpreted as leaning to considering the parish as the catholic Church, however, this position is nowhere expressed clearly

45 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 24.

46 Idem, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 259. Here Metropolitan John refers to the following article: Alexander Schmemmann, “Towards a Theology of Councils”, in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 6 (1962), 174–184.

47 И. Зизиулас, *Церковь и Евхаристия*, 68–69, 145, 148 (the referred articles were published in 2001 and 1987 respectively).

48 Most fully and precisely in: Victor Alexandrov, “Local Church in Eucharistic Ecclesiology”, in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 63 (2019), 384–389. Besides, see В. Александров, *Николай Афанасьев и его евхаристическая экклезиология*, 82–86.

49 Н. Афанасьев, *Трапеза Господня*, Религиозно-педагогический кабинет при Православном богословском институте, Paris 1952, 63–64.

or developed. At the same time, Afanasiev is fully aware that the modern parish significantly differs from the ancient local Church. Fr Christophe D'Aloisio remarks that Zizioulas never refers to the places where Afanasiev calls the parish the local Church.<sup>50</sup> It is not surprising since there is no such place in Afanasiev. The criticism of Zizioulas is based not on works of Afanasiev but on the abstract use of the formula “where the Eucharist is, there is the Church”. Applying this formula mechanistically, Zizioulas concludes that Fr Nicholas believes that anywhere the Eucharist is celebrated, including the parish, there is a local Church.

A good illustration to what I have just said provides Zizioulas' article *Orthodox Ecclesiology and the Ecumenical Movement* (1985). Here, Zizioulas briefly describes the structure of the local Church in Antiquity in the manner *quite similar* to how Afanasiev saw that structure in the pre-Nicaean and early-Nicaean period. Then Metropolitan John states suddenly that Afanasiev “did not take into account the structure of the eucharistic community as I have described it”;<sup>51</sup> This statement comes as a great surprise to any reader familiar with Afanasiev. In saying this, Zizioulas seems to be ignorant of the real views of Afanasiev. This and similar statements of Metropolitan John may be understood properly if one keeps in mind that Zizioulas is trapped by the illusion he created for himself—and, alas, for his readers, too—namely, by the illusion that Afanasiev's ecclesiology may be comfortably reduced to the formula “where the Eucharist is, there is the Church”. For this reason, Metropolitan John believes that for Afanasiev “simply the fact of the celebration of the Eucharist was enough [...] to speak of the Church”;<sup>52</sup> and, thus, the parish, where the Eucharist is celebrated, is, according to Zizioulas's interpretation of Afanasiev, the local Church.

50 Ch. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 324.

51 J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 313.

52 Ibid.

The position of Schmemmann regarding the parish and eparchy is actually close to the view of Zizioulas himself although, when comparing them, one can see interesting peculiarities of which the most important one is a different understanding of the role of a bishop, parish priest and “college of presbyters”.<sup>53</sup> However, in the present article, there is no need to come back to the comparison of the position of the three theologians as, first, it has already been done,<sup>54</sup> and, secondly, it will lead us far from the topic of the article.

It is again worth noting that Zizioulas is not actually interested in establishing the real position of Afanasiev and Schmemmann. He continues to repeat his criticism of their alleged view of a parish as a catholic Church in his later articles<sup>55</sup> whereas in *The Eucharist* (published in French in 1985 and in English in 1987) Schmemmann writes absolutely clearly that the parish is not a catholic Church but a part of a greater unity with a bishop at its head.<sup>56</sup> Zizioulas is familiar with *The Eucharist*: he quotes it in the articles published in 1995 and 1999 and included in two different volumes of his writings,<sup>57</sup> nevertheless, he did not pay attention to what Schmemmann wrote about the parish.

Once I observed that Afanasiev and Schmemmann, on the one hand, and Zizioulas, on the other hand, had different experience of parishes. The former two belonged to the Churches following the

53 For more details, see V. Alexandrov, “Local Church in Eucharistic Ecclesiology”, 389–390.

54 Ibid., 384–394.

55 И. Зизиулас, *Церковь и Евхаристия*, 68–69, 145, 148 (the articles of 2001 and 1987 respectively); John Zizioulas, *Eucharistic Ecclesiology in the Orthodox Tradition*, in J.-M. Van Cangh (ed.), *L'ecclésiologie eucharistique*, Academie internationale des sciences religieuses, Bruxelles 2009, 189, quoted in Ch. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 321.

56 Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, Paul Kachur (trans.), St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY 1987, 96.

57 J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 103, 112; Idem, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 39, 85, 93.

decrees of the Moscow Council of 1917–18. In those Churches, it was mandatory to have parish councils, a sort of a new *presbyterion* similar, to some extent, to that of the Early Church. Zizioulas is talking about a single-priest parish, which most probably did not have a parish council.<sup>58</sup> This is important to keep in mind when we are evaluating his arguments of why a parish cannot be a local Church. To be such, according to Metropolitan John, the following conditions should be met: it must be “a gathering of all the members of the Church of one place [...] in the presence of all the ministers, including the college of presbyters with the bishop at its head.”<sup>59</sup> This definition may be accepted if two issues are clarified: a territorial (what is „one place”?) and ministerial one (what kind of ministry is meant by the “presbyters” and “bishop”?).

For Zizioulas, an ideal “one place” would be a small eparchy,<sup>60</sup> which sounds quite reasonable. The precise borders of the “one place” may be debated. The principle “one city, one bishop”, which is derived from canon 8 of the First Ecumenical Council and is currently viewed as an ideal (although not followed in practice) norm of canonical organization of the Orthodox Church, is not a primordial rule of ecclesiology. It became a standard principle in the Church of the Roman Empire from the time of Constantine the Great. However, on the basis of what we currently know, in the pre-Nicaean period it was not followed in big Roman cities— in Rome and Alexandria for sure, but probably and some other cities, too. There was also the important exception of “rural bishops” (*chorepiskopoi*).<sup>61</sup> In addition, the borders of the “one place” could not be absolutely impenetrable in modern urbanized and mobile society. To clarify the issue of “one

58 V. Alexandrov, “Local Church in Eucharistic Ecclesiology”, 391–392.

59 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 24.

60 *Ibid.*, 251–252 (n. 6).

61 Cf. V. Alexandrov, “Local Church in Eucharistic Ecclesiology”, 380–383 and 394.

place” further is a creative task for modern practical—so to speak, “applied”—ecclesiology.

As regards the ministries of the presbyters and bishop, they—namely, their “content” or functions—have been fluid enough in the course of history. The historical ideal of Zizioulas is the Church before the appearance of parishes with the presbyters surrounding the bishop and not acting as heads of separate Eucharistic assemblies. His bishop of that period is a static figure that emerges in the very beginning of the history of the Church<sup>62</sup> and whose ministry remains basically unchanged until the parish appears as a common phenomenon. At this point, a bishop becomes the administrator of his diocese while the presbyters undertake the role of “mass-specialists”.<sup>63</sup> However, if one goes beyond the names of ministries and concentrates on their functions, parishes of several jurisdictions in the so-called “diaspora” appear to be a close analogy of the ancient local Church. Their parish council plays the role of the ancient *presbyterion* while their parish priest is essentially very close to the head of the ancient *presbyterion*, to its *proestos*, that is, to the bishop of the *monepiscopate* period. The definition of Zizioulas, quoted above, tries to fit the modern eparchy back into the ancient local Church pattern but does so rather solely on the basis of the very names of the ministries of “presbyters” and “bishop”. If we pay attention not to the names but real content of the ministries (in other words, to the services performed by their holders), in some jurisdictions of the “diaspora” parishes suit the pattern of the ancient, pre-parochial, local Church much better than modern eparchies. Should one ignore this fact and apply a terminologically

62 See a remark of Fr Andrew Louth who points out that, at the current stage of research, it is impossible to keep the main thesis of the early book of Zizioulas on monepiscopate as an original phenomenon of the Early Church: Andrew Louth, review of *Eucharist, Bishop, Church* by John Zizioulas, in *Ecumenical Review* 56.1 (2004), 147–148.

63 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 250–251.

uniform, “correct”, structure with the eparchy as the local Church to all regions of Christianity?<sup>64</sup>

All in all, Zizioulas’s criticism of Afanasiev’s and Schmemmann’s alleged idea of the parish as the local Church, first, distorts the real position of the two theologians, and secondly, reveals shortcomings of Zizioulas’s own position regarding what should be called the local Church in the present.

### *6. Localism: Priority of the Local Church over Universal*

Establishing the “well-known” main principle of the ecclesiology of Afanasiev leads Zizioulas to discover one more basic “error” of Fr Nicholas. It may be called localism. Metropolitan John claims:

The principle “where the Eucharist is, there is the Church” risks suggesting the idea that each Church could, *independently of other local Churches*, be the ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.’ Here there is a need for special attention and creative theological work to keep an adequate balance between the “local Church” and the “universal one”.

Zizioulas briefly discusses the changing balance between the two concepts in the Catholic theology and says:

In certain Protestant churches, the local Church [...] retains priority and almost exhausts the concept of Church. Several Orthodox theologians faithful to the doctrine of eucharistic ecclesiology—Afanasiev had already given such an interpretation—have an equal tendency to give priority to the local Church. Others, by contrast, [...] refuse to accept both catholicity of the local Church and eucharistic ecclesiology, which they regards as responsible for an inadmissible ‘localism’ in ecclesiology. It is clear that we must steer towards a third solution, which would justify eucharistic ecclesiology without carrying with it the risk of “localism”. And it is the Eucharist itself which will guide us in this, for, by its nature, it expresses simultaneously both the “localisation” and the “uni-

64 Cf. V. Alexandrov, “Local Church in Eucharistic Ecclesiology”, 392–394.



versalisation” of the mystery of the Church, that is, the transcending of both “localism” and “universalism”.<sup>65</sup>

Zizioulas comes back to the issue in another place of *Being as Communion*. Here, he writes about the role of local Church in ecclesiology and concludes:

The local Churches are as primary in ecclesiology as the universal Church. No priority of the universal over the local Church is conceivable in such an ecclesiology [eucharistic one – V.A.]. Ever since Afanasiev this idea has become current in Orthodox theology. But there is a danger in it which Afanasiev did not see and which many Orthodox theologians fail to see too. Because of the lack of a proper synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology in Orthodox ecclesiology, it is often too easily assumed that eucharistic ecclesiology leads to the priority of the local Church over the universal, to a kind of “congregationalism”. But as I have tried to argue in another study of mine,<sup>66</sup> Afanasiev was wrong in drawing *such conclusions* [italics added – V.A.], because the nature of the Eucharist points not in the direction of the priority of the local Church but in that of the *simultaneity* of both local and universal.<sup>67</sup>

At the end of this passage, Zizioulas attributes to Afanasiev the idea of *priority of the local Church over the universal one* although at the beginning of the passage he claimed only—and quite sympathetically—that Afanasiev *did not recognise the priority of the universal Church over the local*. Evidently, this is not the same!

Metropolitan John assures his readers that Afanasiev considered the local Church primary while the universal one secondary later, too. In a work written in 1997, he addresses the same reproach to Afanasiev

65 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 25 (the Introduction written in 1981).

66 Here, Metropolitan John makes a reference to chapter 4 of *Being as Communion*, which is an article published originally in 1969, thus, being quite an early writing of his.

67 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 132–133.

and this time, surprisingly, Meyendorff<sup>68</sup> in the following manner:

There have been theological voices in my own Church which tried to reverse the priority traditionally preferred by Roman Catholic ecclesiology (see e.g., Rahner and Ratzinger) according to which the Church first universal and only secondary local. Orthodox theologians such as late Afanassieff and Meyendorff put forth the view that the local Church comes first, both historically and theologically, and it is only in a secondary way, if at all (Afanassieff would not allow even for that until the time of Cyprian), that we can speak of the Church universal. My personal view has always been different, and it was so because I have always believed that the nature of the Eucharist points to the simultaneity of locality and universality in ecclesiology.<sup>69</sup>

It is needless to say that in none of the two places quoted above does Zizioulas inform his readers in what writings Afanasiev (or Meyendorff) develops the idea of the priority of the local Church.

Finally, in the article *Orthodox Ecclesiology and Ecumenical Movement* (1985), which I have already quoted and which contains several surprising statements about the ecclesiology of Afanasiev, Metropolitan John claims that Fr Nicholas's view

also fails to take into account the fact that the Eucharist involves a universal communion: there is only one Eucharist, even if it is celebrated in different places, just as there is one Body of Christ.<sup>70</sup>

Contrary to what Zizioulas states, the thesis of the universal Church unity based on identity of the Eucharist, which is the same despite the fact that it is celebrated in many local Church, is one of the basic ideas of Afanasiev. It follows directly from his basic intuition of the mysterious and sacramental identity of eucharistic gifts ("this is my body" Mf 26,26, Mk 14,22, Lk 22,19, and 1Cor 11,24) and the

68 Earlier Zizioulas never criticised localism of Meyendorff, who died in 1992.

69 J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 266.

70 *Ibid.*, 313.

Church ("you are the Body of Christ" 1Cor 13,27) or, otherwise, of the eucharistic and ecclesial body. This idea is developed in many places including, in particular, the Foreword to *The Church of the Holy Spirit*.<sup>71</sup> For the reason of the unity of the Eucharist, Afanasiev makes the conclusion about the extant unity between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches as they mutually recognise the validity of their Eucharist with the priestly ministry included in it<sup>72</sup> (which, however, does not mean that Afanasiev promoted *intercommunion*<sup>73</sup>).

Discussing the critical remarks of Zizioulas on the priority which is allegedly given by Afanasiev to the local Church over the universal one, I would like to draw attention to the two aspects of the problem. One may be conventionally called "essential" while another "institutional".

### *Essential Aspect*

The correlation between the local Church and the universal is undoubtedly one of the main problems of ecclesiology. However, it cannot be adequately solved in terms of primary or secondary nature of one of them. Neither Afanasiev nor Schmemmann try to solve the issue in this manner. Nowhere were they writing about the priority of the local Church and secondary nature of the universal one. Actually, it is Zizioulas who places the problem in this context. Such a way of posing the question was typical of that discussion which was going

71 Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, Vitaly Permiakov (trans.), Michael Plekon (ed., intr.), Rowan Williams (forward), University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 2007, 4–5. Also, see N. Afanassieff, "L'Église de Dieu dans le Christ", in *Pensée Orthodoxe* 13 (1968), 33–38.

72 Idem, "L'Eucharistie, principal lien entre les Catholiques et les Orthodoxes", in *Irénikon* 38 (1965), 337–339.

73 Contrary to Kallistos Ware, "Sobornost and Eucharistic Ecclesiology", 229, but in agreement with Ch. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 304 and 317.

on in the Catholic theology in the last two or three decades of the twentieth century, that is, after Afanasiev's death. In the late 1990s–early 2000s, the discussion culminated in the well-known debate between cardinals Ratzinger and Kasper, which, however, is irrelevant from the point of view of the present article. Nevertheless, the way of putting the question seems to be borrowed by Zizioulas from the theology contemporaneous to him.

Afanasiev insisted, indeed, on the catholicity of the local Church. Is not this the position Zizioulas defends, too? Afanasiev claimed, indeed, that in early Christianity each eucharistic assembly was the local Church and that the Church did not exist in the form of a universal structure. Is not this very close to what Zizioulas means when he claims that all ecclesiastical structures exceeding a bishop's diocese are not Churches in the proper sense of the word and that Church councils are not institutions to dominate and govern the local Churches?<sup>74</sup> It is quite ironic that, criticizing Afanasiev and claiming that in the Eucharist the local and the universal coincide, Zizioulas formulates—in somewhat different terms to be sure—the idea very similar to that of Afanasiev. For Afanasiev, in the early Christianity “the Church resided, lived, and was revealed in all the fullness of its unity and in all the unity of its fullness in each local Church.”<sup>75</sup> The approach of Afanasiev does not exclude the “simultaneity of locality and universality in ecclesiology” but implies it. The real, not fictional, position of Afanasiev—and Schmemmann, who shares the position of Fr Nicholas in this regard—on the correlation of the local and universal Church is not radically different from that of Zizioulas. We can rather talk about the peculiarities of their terms and about

74 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 252–253; Métropolitte Jean (Zizioulas) de Pergame, *L'Église et ses institutions* Cerf, Paris 2011, 190.

75 N. Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, 255. One can find several more similar places in Afanasiev. For example, see: N. Afanasiev, *Una sancta* 15, and Н. Афанасьев, *Трапеза Господня*, 27–28.

the difference of accents but hardly about any essential discrepancy. This is not the only case when Zizioulas does not notice the extent to which his views are close to the position of Afanasiev he criticises.<sup>76</sup> To confirm the closeness of the views of the three theologians, let us compare two more quotes: this time from Schmemmann and Zizioulas. In 1960 in the writing where the influence of Afanasiev on Schmemmann probably culminates, Fr Alexander wrote:

Universal unity is indeed unity of the church and not merely unity of churches. Its essence is not that all churches together constitute one vast, unique organism, but that each church—in the identity of order, faith, and gifts of the Holy Spirit—is the *same* Church, the same Body of Christ, indivisibly present wherever is the “ecclesia.” It is the same organic unity of the church herself, the churches being not complementary to each other, as parts or members, but each one and all of them together being nothing else, but the One, Holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church.<sup>77</sup>

And here is a quotation from Zizioulas’s article published in 1981:

Thanks to the eucharistic vision of the “catholic Church” the problem of the relationship between the “one catholic Church in the world” and the “catholic Churches” in various local places was resolved apart from any consideration of the local Church as being incomplete or any scheme of priority of the one over the other, and in the sense of *unity in identity*.<sup>78</sup>

What then is the point of the polemics which Zizioulas conducted, with such an enthusiasm and persistence, with Afanasiev,

76 Cf. A. Wooden, *The Limits of the Church*, 343, 479–487; Ch. D’Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 324.

77 Alexander Schmemmann, *The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology*, in John Meyendorff (ed.) *The Primacy of Peter: Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church*, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press Crestwood, NY 1992, 155. Following the Russian original, I made minor changes to the first two sentences of the English translation.

78 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 157–158.

Schmemmann and even Meyendorff? A fictional image of them as opponents emerged in Zizioulas' mind while in fact they are rather his allies. In itself, this is not tragic, nevertheless, quite surprising, given that Metropolitan John has been criticising Afanasiev and, to a lesser degree, Schmemmann without addressing their relevant texts *for decades*.

The positions of Afanasiev, Schmemmann, and Zizioulas on the correlation of the local and universal Church are, in fact, very close. They all believe that the unity of local Churches is due to their inner identity but not due to them being parts of the universal Church and that in each local Church the whole Church of God is present. There is no serious difference between their views on this matter, and the differences that may be found are terminological and those of nuances not essence.

### *Institutional Aspect*

The critique addressed to Afanasiev would be correct if it were properly formulated. However, to make such a properly-formulated critique, Zizioulas' familiarity with Afanasiev is far too fragmentary.

In the works of his mature period (after the World War II), Afanasiev concentrated on developing the theology of the local Church. He did not avoid the problems of the universal Church absolutely. In his works, you can find discussion of such issues as primacy, reception, ecclesiastical councils, and the limits of the Church. However, the core of his thought was definitely the theology of the local Church. Afanasiev's eucharistic ecclesiology *is not a completed system*. It is a pioneer attempt to see the Church from the perspective of the Eucharist. To make that attempt, Fr Nicholas had to start with the local Church and its ministries. It is worth noting that, being a historian of the Ancient Church by training, he was an expert in such universal institutions and phenomena as ecclesiastical councils and canon law. Nevertheless, in his mature years, developing

a coherent theology of the local Church, it is as if he lacked interest in many issues related to the supra-local structures of the Church. The universal Church pales, being perhaps a remote task, in the light of his repeated efforts to formulate his vision of the local Church precisely. It is due to that peculiarity of Afanasiev's thought which Schmemmann called him—with empathy—"a man of one idea".<sup>79</sup>

Since Afanasiev's eucharistic ecclesiology is not a finalized structure, it implies there must be additions and corrections. The criticism that could be appropriately addressed to Afanasiev is the lack of a clear idea of the place and role of supra-local institutions in his ecclesiology. There is no coherent theology of regional or universal (in the territorial sense of the word) institutions in Afanasiev. This is what can authentically be identified as his localism. In this field, there is an opportunity—or even necessity—for a creative development of the eucharistic ecclesiology of Fr Nicholas, and that opportunity is understood by both Schmemmann and Zizioulas.<sup>80</sup> However, Zizioulas's criticism of Afanasiev's localism is directed not against undeveloped theology of supra-local institutions in Afanasiev. Zizioulas claims Afanasiev allegedly gave priority to the local Church over the universal as if it were a major element of Afanasiev's vision. One cannot talk about Afanasiev's ecclesiology as a completed construction in which the correlation between the local and universal is established and the local was given an explicit priority.

### *7. Participation of Other Bishops in an Ordination of a Local Bishop*

There is one more remark of Zizioulas which is related to the problem of correlation between the local Church and the universal. Zizioulas claims,

79 А. Шмеман, "Памяти отца Николая Афанасьева", 838–839.

80 Cf. К. Х. Фелми, *Введение в современное православное богословие*, Свято-Филаретовский православно-христианский институт, Москва 2014, 231–232.

There is a fundamental point which Afanasiev has failed in his eucharistic ecclesiology to see and appreciate, as one may gather from the views expressed, for example, in his article *Una sancta* [...] and elsewhere.<sup>81</sup>

We are not told what Metropolitan John refers to as “elsewhere”. As Zizioulas believes, the fundamental point is “the fact that in each episcopal ordination at least two or three bishops from the neighbouring Churches ought to take part”. This fact ties “episcopal office and with it, the local eucharistic community in which the ordination took place with the rest of the eucharistic communities in the world in a fundamental way”.<sup>82</sup>

In *Una sancta*, Afanasiev did not mention, indeed, the presence of neighbouring bishops at the ordination of a new bishop. However, *Una sancta* is not a full exposition of Afanasiev’s ecclesiology and does not pretend to be such. Nevertheless, even in *Una sancta* Afanasiev develops the idea of the unity of local Churches due to identity of their nature, through their communication in love, and via the reception of what happens in each of them by other ones.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the idea of active relation between the local Churches is present in *Una sancta*, but the concrete manifestations of reception—one of which is, according to Afanasiev, the attendance of neighbouring bishops to the ordination of a local bishop—are not discussed in that article.

However, the reception of a bishop’s ordination by other local Churches is briefly but clearly discussed in *The Church of the Holy Spirit*<sup>84</sup> (published in 1971 in Russian and in 1975 in French). Most clearly, Afanasiev formulates the idea of the reception of an ordination through the attendance of neighbouring bishops in a published fragment of his course of canon law (1968):

81 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 155, n. 57.

82 Ibid., 155.

83 N. Afanasiev, *Una sancta*, 15–17.

84 Idem, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, 98–99.



In the pre-Nicaean period, the ordination of a bishop had to be accepted by other local Churches. Ideally, all local Churches should have accepted the ordination, but in practice it was done by the nearest ones including that local Church which had primacy. For that reason, the Church that needed to ordain her bishop tried to invite as many bishops as possible since their participation in the ordination of the new bishop was, to some extent, a guarantee that the local Churches represented by their bishops would accept the ordination.<sup>85</sup>

Let me draw attention to the dates. Chapter 4 of *Being as Communion*, where the critical remark of Zizioulas is found, is his early article published in French in 1969 and in English in 1970.<sup>86</sup> I cannot expect that Zizioulas must be familiar with the phantom emigré publication of 1968, which was printed in Russian. However, after 1975 *The Church of Saint Spirit* was available in French. By the moment the article of Zizioulas was reprinted in his books *L'Être ecclésial* (1981) and *Being as Communion* (1985), quite enough time passed to take into account the relevant passage in the *The Church of Saint Spirit* and either delete his comment or correct it. For the sake of comparison, I would mention that in 1989 Aidan Nichols grasped and presented the idea of Afanasiev in an absolutely adequate manner:

For Afanasiev it is important that, when the *proestos* of a local church is made such, the presidents of other local churches should take part. They bear witness to the fact that in its life and faith this local church now receiving its bishop is one with the whole Church of God.<sup>87</sup>

85 Николай Афанасьев, *Экклесиология. Вступление в клир*, Вода живая, Paris 1968, chapter 3, section 3. I am using the text placed on the web (<http://www.golubinski.ru/ecclesia/klircont.htm>) as neither original edition nor its reprint (Задруга, Киев 1997) is not available to me. The Paris edition of 1968 was a low-number one made on a Rotaprint machine as a textbook for students of the Saint Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute.

86 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 261.

87 Aidan Nichols, *Theology in the Russian Diaspora: Church, Fathers, Eucharist in Nikolai Afanas'ev (1893–1966)*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, 179.

Nichols does not share Afanasiev's opinion that the presence of the bishops is an act of testimony rather than ordination itself, but this is a different theological interpretation of the elements of ordination.

#### *8. Afanasiev's Attitude towards Law in the Church*

Already in the book *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, Zizioulas showed his disagreement with Afanasiev's understanding of ecclesiastical law but did so in passing. (See the beginning of section 4 above). He made more distinct and detailed comments on the topic significantly later. I am aware of two remarks of this sort.

In 2004, Zizioulas criticised the fact that Afanasiev' denied the juridical understanding of primacy, and Metropolitan John was also dissatisfied with the terminological difference introduced by Afanasiev to avoid that kind of understanding. Fr Nicholas differentiated between primacy (*primauté*), which he understood as juridical one, and priority (*priorité*), which he understood as non-juridical primacy of testimony. This difference was explained by Afanasiev in detail, and its conventional, even artificial, nature was emphasized by him.<sup>88</sup> For this reason, Zizioulas' objection concerning the lack of a natural difference between the two terms is resolved in that text of Afanasiev which Metropolitan John discusses. According to Zizioulas, the main problem of Afanasiev's denial to see the ties between local Churches as juridical ones is that it leads to isolationism of those Churches. Moreover, one of its possible interpretations—Metropolitan John refers with approval to N. Lossky—may result in strengthening autocephalism and infiltration of nationalism into Orthodoxy. The last warning is made in a conditional and vague mood, which may be due to the fact that Zizioulas realizes intuitively that to find any support of autocephalism in Afanasiev, who actually criticized

88 Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church Which Presides in Love*, in Meyendorff (ed.), *The Primacy of Peter*, 115–116.

autocephalism,<sup>89</sup> would not be an easy task.<sup>90</sup>

This criticism of Afanasiev's understanding of law is intelligible in the light of the position of Zizioulas himself who believes that primacy in the Church comes with real rights not abstract "honour." This means that primacy is a juridical phenomenon.<sup>91</sup> However, Zizioulas is not really familiar with the attitude of Afanasiev towards canon law. I have to accept that it is not only his fault but an absolutely common misconception about Afanasiev. Fr Nicholas issued a good number of invectives against law in the Church. The most famous of them are found in his lecture *Power of Love* (1949), which finally became the last chapter of *The Church of the Holy Spirit*. Nevertheless, he never clarified his concept of canon law enough for such an ordinary reader who is not a diligent student of his theology to grasp it. Afanasiev insists on the primacy of love which is, after all, the only genuine foundation of ecclesiastical life and structure. At the same time, he emphasizes that the very concept of the Church implies order<sup>92</sup> and canons belong to the nature of the Church.<sup>93</sup> This order and canons are not law in the sense attributed to law by Roman, later Byzantine, emperors, and Afanasiev does not consider them as law. However, from the perspective different from that of Afanasiev, they may also be called law but of another kind. Thus, by order and canons Afanasiev means law of a special sort, to which some phenomena inevitable in the other types of law (for example, enforcement using violence) do not apply and in which a legal decision becomes effective only after reception of it by all parties involved.<sup>94</sup> Zizioulas is generally unaware of all this.

89 Николай Афанасьев, *Вступление в церковь*, Паломник, Москва 1993, 17; В. Александров, *Николай Афанасьев и его евхаристическая эkkлезиология*, 74–77.

90 J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 281.

91 *Ibid.*, 272 (an article of 1999).

92 N. Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, 134.

93 Н. Афанасьев, *Вступление в церковь*, 8–9.

94 An extremely helpful discussion of Afanasiev's concept of law is found in A. Wooden, *The Limits of the Church*, 441–462.

In one more of his relatively recent writings (2009), Zizioulas claims that there is a link between Afanasiev's concept of law and the predominance of pneumatic element in his understanding of the Church: "Canon law for him incompatible with the essence of the Church as love. For him the Church is *L'Église du Saint Esprit* [the Church of the Holy Spirit] – not the Body of Christ".<sup>95</sup> As I have tried to demonstrate above, for Afanasiev it is not the canon law which is incompatible with the Church (canon law implying order and rules is inevitable in the Church) but that sort of law which was accepted by the Church with the conversion of the Roman Empire and have been dominating in ecclesiastical life until the present. The claim of Metropolitan John that for Afanasiev the Church is that of the Holy Spirit while not the Body of Christ contradicts to what is really found in the works of Afanasiev. First, the basic intuition of Afanasiev about the identity of eucharistic gifts ("this is my Body") and the Church ("you are the Body of Christ") is Christological. Secondly, according to Zizioulas himself, the institutional element of the Church belongs to its Christological dimension<sup>96</sup> (which, in my opinion, is correct), but the most of the works of mature Afanasiev, including *The Church of the Saint Spirit* and *The Lord's Supper*, are on ministries (inseparable of institutions) and sacraments (inseparable of ministries). In this case, Zizioulas criticizes Afanasiev without looking into the real content of his ecclesiology. Would not it be more appropriate to see in Afanasiev a kind of balance between Christology and Pneumatology about the lack of which in the Orthodox theology Zizioulas has complained so many times?<sup>97</sup>

95 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharistic Ecclesiology in the Orthodox Tradition*, 188, quoted in Ch. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 320.

96 J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 66.

97 For example, see Idem, *Being as Communion*, 133.

9. *Ministry: Functional or Ontological?*

One more critical remark of Zizioulas is related to the issue of ordination and ministry although this remark does not belong to his “fundamental corrections” to Afanasiev. In *Being as Communion*, Zizioulas offers his understanding of ordination and nature of ministry. According to Zizioulas, in the most widespread interpretation of ordination, it comes with a transmission of power (*potestas*), which is either accompanied or not with a transmission or bestowal of a charisma (or grace). This implies that grace is understood as an object that can be possessed and transmitted.<sup>98</sup> Metropolitan John develops his own understanding of ministry as a relation into which ordination puts an ordained person. This relates the ordained person to those who are inside the local Church and those who are outside it.<sup>99</sup> Zizioulas argues that, if ordination is perceived in such a way, it is impossible to put a traditional question whether it is ontological or functional. In a footnote, he mentions Afanasiev (along with Nissiotis) as one of those who understood ordination as functional while others (Trembelas is mentioned) perceived it as ontological.<sup>100</sup>

The chapter 6 of *Being as Communion*, which includes this remark, is a translation of a German article published in 1973.<sup>101</sup> Zizioulas makes the same remark but in a sharper, polemical, form in his slightly earlier article (1970):

Even Afanasiev, despite his eucharistic ecclesiology (and there is no need to reiterate its importance here), has not managed to escape the dilemma between “ontological” and “functional”. Thus, he attached a “functional” character to the diversity of ministries in the Church.<sup>102</sup>

98 Ibid., 214.

99 Ibid., 214–225.

100 Ibid., 226.

101 Ibid., 261.

102 J. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 22 (n.37). In both cases, he refers to N. Afanassieff, “L'Église de Dieu dans le Christ”, 19.

The problem is, however, that Afanasiev's theology of ministry is very different from that of Zizioulas. What might seem inappropriate in the theology of Metropolitan John is quite appropriate in the theology of Fr Nicholas, and, having compared the two theologies, one cannot claim that the approach of Zizioulas is undoubtedly more advantageous.

*a. Afanasiev's Theology of Ministry*

Afanasiev's theology of ministry is based on classical loci in the New Testament. He starts from the teaching of Paul on various gifts of the same Spirit and on the Church as one Body which consists of many members (1Cor 12 and Rom 12,1–8). By the way, *πρᾶξις* in Rom 12,4 may comfortably be translated to English as “function”. For example, in the translation of the Good News Bible of the United Bible Societies, which is found on my book-shelf, the place reads: “We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions.”

The opposition of the ontological and functional was usual for the theological vocabulary of Fr Nicholas' time.<sup>103</sup> In particular, it was widely used in the debates on the *character indelibilis* of the priestly ministry. In the article *L'Église de Dieu dans le Christ* (“The Church of God in Christ”), to which Zizioulas refers, and in Afanasiev's opus magnum *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, Fr Nicholas uses this opposition to emphasize that the Christians have the same nature, as they belong to one Body, but their ministries—functions in the Body—are different. At the same time, Afanasiev is disinterested in the discussion of *character indelibilis*.

Christians share the same Spirit, which gives different gifts. The significance of these gifts is different as are the ministries based on them, and this creates a hierarchy of ministries. The Church is unity

103 Cf. Ch. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 329.

in diversity. The variety of gifts generates the difference of ministries, which are functional, but this does not destroy the unity of the Body as it is ontological.<sup>104</sup> That is how Afanasiev's (actually, St Paul's) teaching on ministries may briefly be summarized. *The diversity of ministries is an indispensable characteristic of the Church: she is impossible without this diversity.* The functional could not be separated from the ontological as it does not exist separately: a function is not without that member of the Body who has it while the member necessarily has a function. The difference of ontological and functional serves for Afanasiev to express the interplay between the unity of the Church and the plurality of her ministries. It fulfils this function well.

Besides, Afanasiev underlines the fact that in primitive Christianity—and ideally in any epoch—ordination is, in fact, a sort of recognition by the local Church that the ordained person already possesses a special gift of the Spirit (received in baptism), which makes him or her capable of accepting an individual ministry in ordination. (It is unclear from Afanasiev if ordination comes with another special gift though this seems likely). Thus, this member of the Church to be ordained is pre-elected by God for a definite ministry.<sup>105</sup> The Church seeks members possessing necessary prerequisites for the ministry. In general, this is in line with the pathos of Zizioulas who opposes the idea of a mechanic transmission of grace in ordination.

### *b. Zizioulas's Theology of Ministry*

Metropolitan John, however, puts his emphasis quite differently. His logic could be better grasped not in *Being as Communion*, where the chapter on ministry was written in 1973, but in a later article

104 N. Afanassieff, "L'Église de Dieu dans le Christ", 15–20.

105 For more details on the Afanasiev's view on ordinations, see В. Александров, *Николай Афанасьев и его евхаристическая экклезиология*, 143–145.

(1980) included subsequently in the book *The One and the Many*.<sup>106</sup>

Zizioulas starts from 1Cor 12, too, and draws attention not to the content of that chapter of Paul's letter but to its structure. Regarding the content, he emphasizes only 1Cor 12,11 which states that the same Spirit gives a different gift to each person. Zizioulas points out that it is immediately after Paul's teaching on the gifts of the Spirit that his famous "hymn of love" follows (1Cor 13). Metropolitan John concludes that the hymn helps to interpret Paul's preceding teaching on gifts and members of the Body. All ministries are relational, and their holders are related either to other members of the Church or to those who are outside. This is a remarkable observation as usually theologians do not relate Paul's "hymn of love" to his teaching about ministries. However, the "hymn" is inserted between the two lengthy passages of the teaching and, hence, is an integral part of it. Zizioulas's observation is supported by the fact that Rom 12,1–8, which contain the same teaching on gifts, although in a shorter form, is followed by a verse on the importance of love in ministry.

In *Being as Communion*, Zizioulas also attempts to provide a patristic background to this relational understanding of ministry, but in my opinion with lesser success. His references to post-Nicaean and early-Byzantine fathers are patchwork efforts and do not convince that the quoted fragments reflect a coherent relational understanding of ministry by the fathers.<sup>107</sup>

Here, it is not my aim to give a detailed analysis of the theology of ministry in Zizioulas. It is evident, however, that, emphasising the relational character of ministry as the central aspect which gives meaning to the whole of ordination, Metropolitan John basically does not discuss St Paul's doctrine itself as expressed in 1Cor 12 and Rom 12,1–8 (except for 1Cor 12,11, which has a crucial importance

106 J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 181–189.

107 Idem, *Being as Communion*, 227–230.



for Zizioulas). If ordination is presented in such a manner, the issue of the ontological versus the functional does not emerge, indeed. Nevertheless, is this highly selective attitude towards the New Testament loci on ordination sufficient to present a coherent theology of ministry? Could Paul's teaching about the gifts of the Spirit and about the Body and its members be basically avoided? The relational aspect of ordination seems to be rather an opportune addition to a more traditional theology of ministry whereas this theology is hard to imagine without a greater use of Paul's teaching itself.

*c. Criticism of McPartlan*

Comparing Zizioulas and Afanasiev, Paul McPartlan also criticizes Afanasiev's theology of ministry together with his views on unity and diversity. McPartlan is probably inspired by Zizioulas's assertion that Afanasiev "attached a 'functional' character to the *diversity* (italics added – V. A.) of ministries in the Church" and is trying to develop this idea. He claims that Afanasiev's view of unity is atomistic. "The *unity* of the people depends on the *sameness* of their priesthood", "all are one because all are the same", "differentiation isolates and divides": this is what underlies Afanasiev's insistence on the common priesthood of believers and causes his criticism of the doctrine of consecration to ministerial priesthood. According to McPartlan, in Afanasiev the unity is primary since it is ontological while diversity is secondary because it is functional. "Differentiation harms unity whereas sameness secures it", that is the way McPartlan summarizes Afanasiev.<sup>108</sup>

Hardly can the thought of Afanasiev be presented in such a way. In his theology, the unity of the people of God is the consequence of their belonging to the same Body of Christ. The unity of the Church is the unity of the Body and the Spirit indwelling it. The common

108 P. McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church*, 227.

priestly ministry of the people of God is a result of their incorporation into this Body and of receiving a gift, common to each Christian, to participate in this priestly Body and serve God as His priests. This does not mean they do not receive other, individual, gifts. Thus, their unity does not depend on the sameness of their priesthood, as McPartlan claims, but on the belonging to the same Body while their priesthood is an attribute or manifestation of this belonging.

McPartlan insists on the primary nature of the ontological and on the secondary nature of the functional in Afanasiev. However, Afanasiev never presents these two categories exactly as *primary* and *secondary*. When using them, he rather emphasizes the common versus the specific. The use of Paul's imaginary of members of body by Fr Nicholas does not favour reading into his theology of ministry too much of the opposition of primary and secondary. An arm is a part of the body and has its specific functions. Is it secondary with regard to the whole body? Perhaps. Is the heart or head secondary when compared to the entire body? This is doubtful given a body with a stopped heart or dead brain is just a corpse. The attempt to present the unity of the Church and diversity of ministries in terms of primary and secondary is ambiguous, and it is not the path Afanasiev follows.

In addition—and that is probably the most important—there is an idea of necessity of the diversity of ministries in Afanasiev. “There is a hierarchy of ministries within the Church, but there is not hierarchy of her members. *This hierarchy is necessary for the life of the Church, but this is a hierarchy within the Church. To destroy the differences is to destroy the Body of the Church in its integrity.*”<sup>109</sup> That is to say, in Afanasiev's dialectic of the ontological and the functional *the diversity of ministries plays an important role as there is no Church without such a diversity*. This remains unnoticed by McPartlan although Fr Nicholas expresses this idea in the very same article on the page following the one

109 N. Afanassieff, “L'Église de Dieu dans le Christ”, 20.

to which Zizioulas and McPartlan refer.<sup>110</sup> In fact, Afanasiev's view on diversity does not differ greatly from Zizioulas' idea that the diversity of ministries is constitutive for the Church although one has to accept that in Zizioulas this idea is emphasized much stronger than in Afanasiev.

10. *Historical Theological Topics*

Zizioulas argues with Afanasiev regarding two concrete historical theological topics.

a. *St Cyprian of Carthage*

Metropolitan John disagrees with that image of the “father” of universalist ecclesiology which Afanasiev attributes to St Cyprian of Carthage. In his different writings, Zizioulas makes two critical remarks regarding Afanasiev's view of Cyprian. In the *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, he argues that since the title of the treatise *De catholica ecclesiae unitate* belongs to Cyprian himself and it is the Church of Carthage which is understood by the *catholica ecclesia*, Cyprian follows the preceding tradition and calls the local Church catholic.<sup>111</sup> For this reason—Zizioulas concludes—we cannot consider St Cyprian the first person to formulate the idea of the universal ecclesiastical structure similar to that of the Roman Empire as was claimed by Afanasiev.<sup>112</sup>

Zizioulas' argument is extremely shaky. First, as follows from Zizioulas himself, there is no unanimity on whether the title of

110 Both of them refer to *Ibid.*, 19.

111 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 126. Afanasiev devoted a special detailed study to the expression “catholic Church” in the most ancient Christian writings: Николай Афанасьев, “Кафолическая церковь”, in *Православная мысль* 11 (1957), 17–44. Zizioulas seems to be unaware of that work. In *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 124–126 he briefly writes about the “catholic Church” and arrives at the conclusions quite similar to those of Afanasiev.

112 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 126 (including n. 205). He refers to the article Nicolas Afanassieff, “La doctrine de la primauté à la lumière de l'ecclésiologie”, in *Istina* 2 (1957), 401–420.

the treatise belongs to Cyprian himself.<sup>113</sup> The other of Zizioulas's examples of the use of *catholica* or *catholica ecclesia* with regard to a local Church do not belong to Cyprian but are from a letter of Pope Cornelius.<sup>114</sup> The cases of such a use in the letters of Cyprian himself either cannot be interpreted equivocally (Letter 55, 1) or refer rather to the universal Church (Letter 55, 21 and 73, 1–2). In *Being as Communion*, Zizioulas quotes a passage from Letter 55, 21 where it is extremely difficult to see in *catholica ecclesia* a reference to a local Church, but he passes that place without making a comment on it (see this passage below in the next paragraph).<sup>115</sup> If one takes into account the content of the treatise *The Unity of the Church* (chapter 5), the images of the sun with its rays, of a tree with its branches, and of a source with the streams flowing from it imply the vision of the Church as a universal organism:

The Church is one which with increasing fecundity extends far and wide into the multitude, just as the rays of the sun are many but the light is one, and the branches of the tree are many but the strength is one founded in its tenacious root, and, when many streams flow from one source, although a multiplicity of waters seems to have been diffused from the abundance of the overflowing supply nevertheless unity is preserved in their origin.<sup>116</sup>

113 J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 126 (including n. 203 and 204).

114 Cyprian, Letter 49, 2. I use the numeration of letters in the edition of Hartel: Thasci Caecili Cypriani opera omnia. Vol. 3. Pars 1. Ex recensione G. Hartelii. Vindobonae, 1868. It is interesting to note that the difference of the use of *catholica* by Cyprian and Cornelius was noted by Afanasiev in the Russian original of *Una sancta*, but in the French version this passage was omitted. It is published as a variant in the first publication of the article in Russian in *Православная община* 34 (1996), no pagination, note 41 (<https://pravoslavnyaya-obshina.ru/1996/no34/article/protopresviter-nikolai-afanasev-una-sancta/>) (visited 6/1/2021).

115 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 156, n. 59.

116 Saint Cyprian, *Treatises*, Roy J. Deferrari (trans., ed.), Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC 1958, 99–100.

In *Being as Communion*, Zizioulas advances another argument against depicting Cyprian as the father of universalist ecclesiology. The chapter that contains this remark was initially published as an article in 1969 and, thus, is separated from his dissertation (*Eucharist, Bishop, Church*) by only a four-year interval. Metropolitan John believes that for Cyprian the authority of councils was moral and quotes a famous place concerning the direct accountability of a bishop to God:

While the bond of concord remains, and the undivided sacrament of the Catholic Church endures, every bishop disposes and directs his own acts, and will have to give an account of his purposes to the Lord. (Letter 55, 21)<sup>117</sup>

“This makes it difficult”, concludes Zizioulas, “to attribute to Cyprian the beginning of a ‘universalist ecclesiology’ as N. Afanassieff has done.”<sup>118</sup>

In chapter 5 of the same book, which is an article published originally in 1974, Zizioulas insists that for Cyprian each bishop's throne is that of Peter. “It is, therefore, wrong to read in universalistic ideas into ecclesiology of Cyprian”, concludes Zizioulas. “As it was done, for example, by N. Afanassieff”, remarks he in a footnote.<sup>119</sup>

Without discussing the essence of the claim that each bishop's throne is that of St Peter, I would observe that in *none* of the places Zizioulas refers to—namely, Cyprian's Letters 69, 5 and 43, 5 and the treatise *The Unity of the Church* 5—this idea is expressed directly. One can consider it only as an interpretation of the teaching of St Cyprian on bishops, an interpretation which should be supported

117 Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, Charles Scribner's Sons, NY 1919, 332. Here, it is Letter 51.

118 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 156–157 (including n. 59) with the reference to the same article as above: N. Afanassieff, “La doctrine de la primauté”, 401–420.

119 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 200–201 (including n. 107) with the reference, again, to N. Afanassieff, “La doctrine de la primauté”, 401–420.

with additional arguments. The emphasis of all the referred places is on the unity of the Church and bishops not on independence of their local Churches.

The basic problem is, however, that despite the reference to Afanasiev's article *La doctrine de la primauté à la lumière de l'ecclésiologie*, Metropolitan John ignores the arguments Fr Nicholas offers in this and other writings with which Zizioulas was familiar, namely, *Una sancta* and *The Church Which Presides in Love*. Nor does he discuss the texts Afanasiev quotes from Cyprian. Afanasiev provides two main arguments: first, the places in which Cyprian presents the Church as a universal organism (see a quotation from *The Unity of the Church* 5 above) and, second, Cyprian's teaching on collective nature of episcopate. Together these arguments point strongly to the emerging vision of the Church as a universal organisation. According to Cyprian, "there is one Church, divided by Christ throughout the whole world into many members, and also one episcopate diffused through a harmonious multitude of many bishops" (Letter 55, 24).<sup>120</sup> "The episcopate is one, the parts of which are held together by the individual bishops" (*The Unity of the Church* 5).<sup>121</sup>

Afanasiev presented his interpretation of the ecclesiology of Cyprian in several writings, most thoroughly in the article *The Church Which Presides in Love*.<sup>122</sup> According to Fr Nicholas, Cyprian's writing include only the first elements of universalist ecclesiology while the features of eucharistic ecclesiology are still strongly present in Cyprian's letters. These features include, first, Cyprian's commitment to consulting his clergy and laity prior to making decisions and, second, considering elections of bishops as a norm. These features, however, cannot overshadow emerging elements of universalist ecclesiology in his writings.

120 *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 333.

121 Cyprian, *Treatises*, 99.

122 N. Afanasiev, *The Church Which Presides in Love*, 93–99.

Critical comments of Zizioulas on Afanasiev's understanding of Cyprian as the father of universalist ecclesiology are always made in passing. Metropolitan John never dwells into the discussion of Cyprian's ecclesiology in detail, except probably for his earliest book. He has a significantly scarcer knowledge of Cyprian's texts compared to that of Afanasiev. Zizioulas is in no way an expert on Cyprian. His criticism is interesting for ascertaining his own position but is insufficient to refute the point of view of Fr Nicholas.

Afanasiev's view of the ecclesiology of Cyprian of Carthage, when that view became well-known among theologians, faced opposition both among Catholic and Orthodox scholars as a sort of attack on the theological reputation of that highly venerated saint in whose writings both the Catholic and Orthodox would find proofs of their doctrinal statements.<sup>123</sup> The teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the collegiality of bishops, to a great extent, builds on Cyprian. While in Orthodox theology (as well as in "classical" Protestantism), St Cyprian is traditionally considered as a churchman opposing the Roman primacy: see Zizioulas' argument that each bishop's throne is that of St Peter. I think that Zizioulas' criticism has something to do with the emotional confusion Afanasiev caused with his views on Cyprian. To evaluate Afanasiev's position on Cyprian, one should examine the theology of the Carthaginian father without attempting to defend any preconceived confessional or doctrinal thesis.

#### *b. Apostolic Succession*

In chapter 5 of *Being as Communion* (which is an article from 1974), Zizioulas attributes to Afanasiev the following vision of apostolic succession and then contests it:

123 Cf. Ch. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 68–69.

N. Afanasiev, in spite of his eucharistic ecclesiology, failed to appreciate the indivisibility of the apostolic college in succession and put forward the view which is incompatible with eschatological image of the Church that, through his Church, a bishop becomes a successor of this or that apostle and not of the apostles in general.<sup>124</sup>

This statement of Zizioulas distorts what Afanasiev really said. Fr Nicholas's article is devoted to the analysis of the idea of collegiality of bishops and specifically to the historical evidence supporting the idea. The doctrine of collegiality was developed in the Catholic theology before and during the Second Vatican Council and is set out in its dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*.<sup>125</sup> Afanasiev approached the idea of collegiality as a historian and in such a capacity failed to find in the earliest Church history any evidence that, after the emergence of the Church at Pentecost, the Twelve existed and acted as a college. For this reason, neither could they succeed Christ as a college. Nor could the college of bishops, provided any such ever existed since we have no evidence for that, succeed the non-existent college of the Twelve.<sup>126</sup> Returning to the remark of Zizioulas, it should be noticed that Afanasiev only claimed that the most usual form in which the idea of the apostolic succession appeared in early ecclesiastical history was the succession of a bishop, through his Church, to a concrete apostle.<sup>127</sup> The simplest way to refute his allegation would be to demonstrate that the historical evidence is different. Zizioulas does nothing of this sort but simply refers to the indivisibility of

124 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 194, n. 83 with reference to Nicolas Afanassieff, "Réflexions d'un Orthodoxe sur la collegialité des évêques", in *Le Messager Orthodoxe* 29-30 (1965), 7-15.

125 For a brief summary, see Jean-Pierre Torrel, *A Priestly People: Baptismal Priesthood and Priestly Ministry*, Paulinist Press, New York 2013, 164.

126 N. Afanassieff, "Réflexions d'un Orthodoxe sur la collegialité des évêques", 7-8.

127 *Ibid.*, 9.



apostolic college as to something evident, which Afanasiev “failed to appreciate”.

### *III. Conclusion*

#### *I. Evaluation of Zizioulas's Criticism*

In the end, *all* (!) critical comments of Zizioulas are problematic in one way or another. Metropolitan John conducts polemic not with the real Afanasiev but fictive one “invented” by Zizioulas himself. In his own theology, Metropolitan John may be perceptive of theological nuances and context, but when it comes to Afanasiev, this quality leaves him. At the same time, Afanasiev is a constant “companion” of Zizioulas: Metropolitan John has been referring to “errors” of Fr Nicholas for decades. The most of his comments about Afanasiev are critical: even if he mentions Fr Nicholas or his ecclesiology approvingly, it is rare that he does not add a critical remark.

The review of Zizioulas' criticism reveals his scant knowledge of the larger body of Afanasiev's writings. In the *Eucharist, Church, Bishop*, he mentions five of Afanasiev's articles while in *Being as Communion* he refers to four, of which two are the same as in his earliest book. One cannot find references to more writings of Afanasiev in other books of Zizioulas. Thus, in total he is familiar with *seven* articles of Fr Nicholas of which two, *Una sancta* and *The Church Which Presides in Love*, may be called programmatic. In addition, Zizioulas references to these articles leave doubts he read them in full and attentively. Metropolitan John does not demonstrate any familiarity whatsoever with either of Afanasiev's major works, *The Lord's Supper*<sup>128</sup> and *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, although some of his criticism would be unnecessary if he had read them.

128 Once he refers to page 3 of the Russian text of *The Lord's Supper* (J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 194, n. 91), but evidently he is not familiar with the rest of the book.

I would like again to draw attention to the fact that approximately *after the early- or mid-1970s* one finds no signs of Zizioulas' greater familiarity with the ideas of Afanasiev despite the continuing, even more extensive and sharp, criticism in the later writings of Metropolitan John.

The most surprising is in fact the consensus with the description of which I started this article. Claiming that he would like to go further than Afanasiev and make corrections to Afanasiev's ecclesiology, Zizioulas easily convinced theologians that he has managed to reach the both aims. The superfluous trust that theologians give to the claims of Metropolitan John is paradoxical. *To go further than Afanasiev Zizioulas does not really need Afanasiev himself.* It is not my intention to evaluate the scholarly precision that Zizioulas allegedly gave to eucharistic ecclesiology,<sup>129</sup> but his references to Afanasiev are quite far from such a precision. The major part of his criticism is either incompetent or inaccurate and may be ignored.

In theological writings, mentioning "errors" of Afanasiev corrected by Zizioulas serves as a demonstration of the knowledge of how eucharistic ecclesiology has so far developed. A rare work on Orthodox ecclesiology lacks a "ritual" passage, paragraph or chapter of the alleged corrections. This leads me to a sad conclusion on how the common opinion of theologians is formed and how we read (that is to say, not read) still relevant writings of recent fathers. The claim that Zizioulas "corrected" or "emended" eucharistic ecclesiology of Afanasiev is not based on any serious juxtaposing of their writings and should be rejected.

## 2. *Two Different Versions of Eucharistic Ecclesiology*

In 2008, receiving the title of a doctor *honoris causa* in the St Serge Theological Institute, Zizioulas said:

129 As claimed by J. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past*, 91.

Although I have never met either Vladimir Lossky or Afanasiev personally, the major part of my theological career has been a dialogue with the contribution they made. [...] Afanasiev drew our attention to the central role of the divine Eucharist in ecclesiology. It happened that I disagreed with one or another of these theologians regarding certain issues, which is natural in a dialogue. Almost everything my generation achieved in theology was built on the foundation laid by those great men. They are the pillars of the modern Orthodox theology to whom I turn my mind with a profound gratitude, and I pray for our Lord to accept them among His saints along with great teachers and shepherds of His Church.<sup>130</sup>

Despite these moving words, that analysis of Zizioulas' criticism which I have undertaken in the present article, leaves doubts on the extent Metropolitan John, being so fragmentary familiar with Afanasiev's writings, could build on Fr Nicholas's ecclesiology. It is certain that Zizioulas shares Afanasiev's and Schmemmann's idea of centrality of the Eucharist for ecclesiology (and probably for theology in general). This leads him to a great appreciation for the local Church, which is also a common feature he shares with his two predecessors. It is true, too, that his theology has numerous points of intersection with that of Afanasiev and Schmemmann, and it is probably correct that he was inspired by their writings. Nevertheless, Zizioulas builds rather a separate version of ecclesiology, which has its own theological roots different from those of Afanasiev and Schmemmann.

First, the main root of Metropolitan John's theology is, perhaps, the intuition of "corporate personality" which involves the dialectic of the one and the many.<sup>131</sup> This concept is not identical to Afanasiev's

130 J. Zizioulas, "L'apport de la théologie orthodoxe occidentale", 25–26; quoted in Ch. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 333, n. 85.

131 J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 145–149, 182–183, 230–231; P. McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church*, 166–186.

basic intuition of the unity of eucharistic and ecclesial body.<sup>132</sup> The idea of “corporate personality” has been underlying the ecclesiology of Zizioulas since his earliest writings, but he has never discussed it in detail, at least, with regard to ecclesiology. I can only agree with Metropolitan Kallistos Ware who finds the use of this idea by Zizioulas “unclear and confusing”.<sup>133</sup>

Secondly, it is to the idea of corporate personality that Zizioulas’ emphasis on the unity of the local Church and on the bishop as the embodiment of this unity is related (see the subtitle of his dissertation: *The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop*). In the bishop, Metropolitan John discerns not only the person who is on the place of Christ in the liturgy but also the one who is an icon of Christ<sup>134</sup> and sometimes even the one who “incarnates” his Church.<sup>135</sup> Hardly could the last idea be found in Afanasiev or Schmemmann. Zizioulas’ giving an excessive weight to this ministry of bishop is one of the most criticised—rightly!—elements of his ecclesiology.<sup>136</sup>

Thirdly, the aspect of a table fellowship in the Eucharist, so crucial for Afanasiev (see his *The Lord’s Supper*), is pale, almost non-present, in Zizioulas.

Fourthly, neither present in Zizioulas is the teaching on the people of God as the royal priesthood in the liturgy (not as a man as a priest of creation), from which Afanasiev’s theology of ministries starts (*The Church of the Holy Spirit*, chapter 1) and which is also important for Schmemmann (*Eucharist*, chapter 1). It is true that one can discern some reminiscences of it in either the idea of the ordained laity, or in

132 The intuition is extensively developed in N. Afanassieff, “L’Église de Dieu dans le Christ”, 1–38.

133 Kallistos Ware, “Sobornost and Eucharistic Ecclesiology”, 231.

134 J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 242–246 (an article of 1985).

135 Ibid., 318 (a writing of 1985); Metropolitan Jean, *L’Église et ses institutions*, 187–189 (an article of 1980).

136 Cf. Kallistos Ware, “Sobornost and Eucharistic Ecclesiology”, 232.

the insistence on the presence of all ministries in the local Church, or in the emphasis on the importance of “axios” and “amen” proclaimed by the whole of the local Church.

Fifthly, although in Afanasiev and Schmemmann one can find references to “communion” (*koinonia*), in neither of the two does it become a universal category of their theology.

The list of differences may be continued. I have mentioned only the most evident ones. All in all, *although the real Afanasiev influenced, to some extent, Zizioulas while the imagined one is a permanent point of reference and criticism for him, Metropolitan John does not really build his theology on Afanasiev.* The two versions of ecclesiology, those of Afanasiev and Zizioulas, are not on the same line of development. They have parallel, although not completely different, trajectories.<sup>137</sup> Zizioulas builds not a “corrected” version of Afanasiev’s eucharistic ecclesiology but a significantly different and rather alternative to that of Afanasiev.

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In the same speech which I mentioned at the beginning of this section and which was delivered at Saint Sergius Theological Institute in 2008, Zizioulas continued with criticism of Afanasiev and went so far as to judge Fr Nicholas’ type of ecclesiology potentially dangerous:

137 Cf. В. Александров, *Николай Афанасьев и его евхаристическая эkkлeзиология*, 203–204. This is contrary to the conclusion of Fr Christophe D’Aloisio, who believes that, “to an attentive reader [...] Zizioulas appears to be rather a faithful continuator of Afanasiev’s thought with those improvements which the writings of an outstanding disciple often include compared to the works of a teacher even though Zizioulas was not a disciple of Afanasiev but of the theologians who knew Afanasiev” (the author mentions Florovsky, Schmemmann and Meyendorff as Zizioulas’s “direct” teachers). Ch. D’Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 332.

That eucharistic ecclesiology which is not episcopocentric—this is one of the shortcomings of the ecclesiology of Afanasiev—makes a bishop a mere administrator and not a eucharistic *proestos*. This undermines the sacramental basis of the authority of the bishop in the Church and leads to a dichotomy between doctrine and canon law. If the Eucharist, bishop and local Church are not interdependent, in the future such eucharistic ecclesiology may be a real danger for the Orthodox Church.<sup>138</sup>

The list of the negative consequences which follow, according to Zizioulas, from the lack of *episcopocentrism* in Afanasiev confirms well that the image of Afanasiev which Metropolitan John bears in his mind has little to do with the writing of Fr Nicholas. One of Zizioulas' basic allegations is, nevertheless, correct. From the point of view of Metropolitan John, whose bishop is an icon of Christ and even incarnates the local Church, Afanasiev's ecclesiology is not *episcopocentric*, indeed. Afanasiev's *proestos* is a more modest figure. His main role, from which all other functions derive, is—contrary to what Zizioulas claims—presiding the Eucharist. He occupies the place of Christ in the Lord's Supper, but I doubt Afanasiev ever considered his *proestos* an icon of Christ—despite the fact it might have been a stable element of the Byzantine liturgical symbolism—and by no means claimed that the *proestos* incarnated his local Church. His *proestos* is rather the sacramental presider of the eucharistic assembly, and also a teacher who shares the ministry of the government of his Church with the presbytery surrounding him. Zizioulas considers this difference between him and Afanasiev a vital one and believes it is the major shortcoming of the ecclesiology of Fr Nicholas. Is this really so? The reality of the Church that we live in points rather to dangers of the excessive *episcopocentrism* which Zizioulas promotes than to its advantages.

138 J. Zizioulas, "L'apport de la théologie orthodoxe occidentale", 28; quoted in Ch. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères*, 321–322.

3. *Peculiarity and Necessity of Afanasiev*

As Fr Plekon once observed, the attitude to Afanasiev has often been neuralgic.<sup>139</sup> The reason is probably the theological radicalism of Fr Nicholas.<sup>140</sup> Avoiding polemics in his writings, “evasive”, as Fr Vasily Zenkovsky labelled him, in oral debates,<sup>141</sup> he was decisive and consistent in his theology. Afanasiev was looking for the “ecclesiastical norm”<sup>142</sup> and derived it from the ecclesiology of the Early Church. In his search of the norm and in his application of it, he hurt some very sensitive illusions of many of the Orthodox (and not only of them). There are scholars who believe his historical method is limited.<sup>143</sup> However, “back to sources” (*ressourcement*) was the mainstream of the theology in the twentieth century, and was a chief factor in theological renovation. We do not really have anything better to replace it. Zizioulas too, taking into account his earliest book, paid tribute to the historical method even though his theological development led him finally to a more dogmatic (in the theological sense) approach.

Afanasiev's ecclesiology deserves attention in its own right. Time will allot his writings the place they deserve.<sup>144</sup> After Fr Schmemmann, whose liturgical theology was to a great extent build on Afanasiev, there was no *direct* continuation of Afanasiev's line in theology. We

139 M. Plekon, “Always Everywhere and Always Together”, 145.

140 Cf. Александр Шмеман, “Русское богословие за рубежом”, in *Idem, Собрание статей*, 662. English version: <https://www.schmemann.org/byhim/russiantheology.html> (in *Ecclesiology* section).

141 В. В. Зеньковский, *Из моей жизни. Воспоминания*, Дом русского зарубежья, Москва 2014, 292.

142 Николай Афанасьев, “О церковном управлении и учительстве”, in *Idem, Церковь Божия во Христе*, А. А. Платонов – В.В. Александров (eds.), ПСТГУ, Москва 2015, 478.

143 Aidan Nichols, “The Appeal to the Fathers in the Ecclesiology of Nikolai Afanas'ev”, in *Heythrop Journal* 33 (1992), 263–264.

144 А. Шмеман, “Памяти отца Николая Афанасьева”, 838.

have to go further along the path he took, listening to a competent criticism and ignoring that which is incompetent and biased. This is the main conclusion of the study which I have undertaken and the results of which I have shared in the present writing.

## **Abstract**

### Критика Афанасьева Зизиуласом

В статье анализируется критика эkkлeзиологии известного православного богослова отца Николая Афанасьева (1893–1966) другим известным православным богословом Иоанном Зизиуласом (род. 1935), митрополитом Пергамским. В богословии до сих широко распространено мнение, что Зизиулас предложил исправленную версию евхаристической эkkлeзиологии Афанасьева. Автор статьи подробно рассматривает критические комментарии митрополита Иоанна по поводу богословия Афанасьева (а также Александра Шмемана, который во многом является продолжателем отца Николая), систематизирует их, и демонстрирует весьма ограниченное знание эkkлeзиологии Афанасьева Зизиуласом. Анализ критики Зизиуласса показывает также, что, несмотря на то, что его эkkлeзиология имеет многие точки соприкосновения с эkkлeзиологией Афанасьева, исходные интуиции двух богословов и целый ряд их ключевых идей существенно иные. По этой причине, эkkлeзиология Зизиуласса может рассматриваться только как другая версия евхаристической эkkлeзиологии, мало основанная на афанасьевской. Причем, по мнению автора, именно версия Афанасьева предлагает подходы и решения более оправданные как исторически, так и догматически.