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UNITY IN IDENTITY OR UNITY IN ENTITY? SHARING OR POSSESSING CHRIST?

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ABSTRACT. Without any question, ecclesiology along Christology remain the crucial issues for theologians in the modern Ecumenical dialogue. And while we take as granted that we, as Christians coming from different Churches, have reached a common place regarding the doctrines of Christology, at the same time we experience and we live within our various confessional bodies a *different Christ*. We are the receivers of the baptismal gift (*unum baptisma*) and of the calling to be workers of unity, but still, we are living in a "*not yet*" unity situation. We all witness the paradoxical phenomenon of accepting that baptism bring us in communion with God, but not with one another, exceptionally not with those who come from different Christian denomination. We are "already" in God's grace, but "not yet" in that same gracious acceptance of one another. We tend to want to correct each other before we encourage one another; to judge before we accept. Statements of faith tend to carry more value than acts of faith. This paper aims to answer the question of the ecclesial unity.

Keywords: unity, identity, entity, Christian Church, ecclesiology, Body of Christ

Introduction

Although it sounds simple that the Christian Churches *confess Lord Jesus as God and Saviour*, it is not; on the contrary it is quite complicated in the view of the living scandal of division among Christians. Jesus asked: "*Who do you say that I am*? *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*," Peter responded.[1] What does such a universal claim about Jesus Christ mean for the Christians and for the members of the other religions? It is a common principle among Christians that Jesus is the life of the world, a blessing to many and an offence to others.[2]

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[1] *Mark* 8:29.

[2] Ion Bria, *Jesus Christ – The Life of the World – An Orthodox Contribution to the Vancouver Theme* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), 32-33.

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How much the world needs such a blessing today, but how big is the failure of Christians to fulfill Jesus' commandment to be all one, following the prototype of unity of the Holy Trinity.[3] What then are the consequences and the responsibilities concerning the tragedy of Christian disunity and the pain of the contemporary world torn by oppression, starvation, violence, intolerance, hate and killing?

Without any question ecclesiology along Christology remain the crucial issues for theologians in the modern Ecumenical dialogue. And while we take as granted that we, as Christians coming from different Churches, have reached a common place regarding the doctrines of Christology, at the same time we experience and we live within our various confessional bodies a *different Christ*! We are the receivers of the baptismal gift (*unum baptisma*) and of the calling to be workers of unity, but still we are living in a "*not yet*" unity situation. We all witness the paradoxical phenomenon of accepting that baptism bring us in communion with God, but not with one another, exceptionally not with those who come from different Christian denomination.[4] We read in the Faith and Order study document called "The Nature and Purpose of the Church": "*In the One Baptism with water in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit…Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity*."[5] We are "already" in God's grace, but "not yet" in that same gracious acceptance of one another. We tend to want to correct each other before we encourage one another; to judge before we accept. Statements of faith tend to carry more value than acts of faith.[6]

Thus, what is the importance of the identity in the current situation of unity process? Am I a member of the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Anglican etc. Church, or am I primarily a member of the Body of Christ? And even more, can we speak of Churches (in plural) instead of Church? Is our identity a problem to this unity? Do we receive as identical the Body of Christ with our confessional ecclesial body? Who defines the limits of the Church? What sort of diversity can be accepted? Thus, what is it actually ecclesial unity? What does it mean diversity in the ecclesiastical life and how far can we speak

[3] Georges Florovsky, *La Sainte Église Universelle – Confrontation œcuménique* (Paris : Delachaux, 1948), 17: "*Est le seul modèle de l' unité parfaite, c'est la Trinité Très Sainte, où les Trois Personnes ne font ou plutôt ne sont qu'un seul Être unique. C'est sur cette example suprême que l'unité chrétienne doit être modelée*."

[4] Vlassios Phidas, "Baptism and Ecclesiology," *The Ecumenical Review* 54, no. 1 (2002): 43-46.

[5] *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*, Faith and Order Paper No. 181 (Geneva: WCC, 1998), 36.

[6] Thomas Best, *Faith and Order at the Crossroads Kuala Lumpur – The Plenary Commission Meeting 2004*, Faith and Order Paper No. 196 (Geneva: WCC, 2005): 129.

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about legitimate or not legitimate diversity? In other words is diversity against catholicity (*Una Sancta*)? Do we share Christ, or do we possess Christ like being a valuable object kept within our confessional boundaries and with no will to share to each other?

The issue of Unity elaborated within WCC

In 1963 in Montreal during the 4th World Conference of Faith and Order Commission the representatives of the Churches realised their failure to define the ecclesiological nature of the World Council of Churches (WCC). As a consequence of this failure and during the elaboration of Vancouver's general theme "*Jesus Christ – the Life of the World*," a clear and significant shift happened within the agenda and the framework of WCC from *theology* to *anthropology* in the basis of discovering the churchly meaning of unity in the light of God's plan for all creation. [7] For the first time in Vancouver it was mentioned the term "holistic theology" describing the Eucharistic vision along the renewal of the Church and the healing of humanity. We read in particular:

> "Church unity is vital to the health of the Church and to the future of the human family… Christ unites God and world, spiritual and secular… His body and blood given to us in the element of bread and wine, integrate liturgy and diaconate, proclamation and acts of healing… Our Eucharistic vision encompasses the whole reality of Christian worship, life and witness."[8]

In continuation of that plan the Faith and Order Commission proposed three schemes of unity within its members. The first one called "organic unity," which was the outcome of the 3rd General Assembly of WCC in New Delhi (1961) based on the notion of *corporate life*, which describes the link between the mission and diakonia of the whole Church which must go into the world to witness and service. The vision of the one Church and the proclamation of the one Gospel make the visible unity even more vivid. The Unity Statement of New Delhi opened new dimensions of understanding the work of the Holy Spirit within the ecumenical encounter. I quote mot a mot from the Statement:

[7] John Meyendorff, *Living Tradition – Orthodox Witness in the Contemporary World* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 129-135.

[8] *Towards A Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches – A Policy Statement* (Geneva: WCC, 1997), 10.

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> "We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as *all in each place* who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people."[9]

Seven years later in the 4th General Assembly of WCC in Uppsala (1968) Churches showed that the fellowship (*koinonia*) is at the same time universal and local. The final adopted statement in Uppsala was supplementary to the theological content of New Delhi statement which talked about *all people in each place*. On the other hand, Uppsala talked about *all people in all places* who shape a truly ecumenical conciliar form of common life (*universal fellowship*).[10] According to the Uppsala proposal Churches should work for the moment when a universal council will speak for all Christians and lead the way into the future. By *conciliarity* the Faith and Order Commission describes the process of the Churches coming together in local and in universal level, keeping their different traditions and their own authentic ecclesial identity and providing room for sincere dialogue, common prayer, counsel and decision making and believing that the Holy Spirit once more can lead Christians into a common future.[11] It was understood as a way of "re-reception" of the past councils in the form of a living dialogue. Thus, dialogue must be a process mutual empowerment, and not a negotiation between parties who have conflicting interests and claims. Furthermore, partners in dialogue should join in a common pursuit of justice, peace and constructive action for the good of all people, being able at the same time to hear and listen to the self-understanding of each other's faith.[12] Through that process it is achieved a mutual commitment at all levels.

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[9] https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/1961-new-delhi/new-delhi-statement-on-unity.

[10] Ibid., *Faith and Order Louvain 1971 – Study Report and Documents*, 226: "*…the Uppsala Assembly first calls for eventually actualizing a truly universal ecumenical conciliar form of life and then asks the Churches to work towards the time when a genuinely universal council may once more speak for all Christians and lead the way into the future*."

[11] Bernard Leeming, *Les Églises á la recherche d'une seule Église* (Paris: Saint Paul, 1964), 188.

[12] *Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of other Religions*, (Geneva: WCC 2003), 9-10.

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In the Meeting of Faith and Order Commission in Louvain (1971)[13] and in the Consultation of Faith and Order Commission in Salamanca (1973),[14] in both cases the issue of conciliar unity was stressed one more time under the theme "Concepts of Unity and Models of Union." In Accra's meeting in 1974 the members of Faith and Order pointed out clearly the nine requirements needed in order to be established the vision of the conciliar fellowship as a step towards the visible unity of the Churches. These conditions are the following:

1. Unity in the Gospel's truth.
2. Unity around the table.
3. Unity in each place.
4. Fellowship for the sake of human's life quality.
5. Fellowship in a universal level.
6. Mutual acceptance of members and ministries.
7. Appropriate authority of each level of the Church.
8. Faithful responsiveness to the presence of the Holy Spirit.
9. Co-operation in a faithful mission.[15]

The third model of unity it was presented in Nairobi (1975) during the 5th General Assembly of WCC under the notion of "conciliar fellowship."[16] This delicate issue of unity and diversity describes on the one hand the great difficulties existing towards the Christian unity and on the other hand it reveals the different reception and understanding of the term unity itself. In one sentence *conciliar fellowship* means the unity of the local churches witnessing the same apostolic faith, sharing the fullness of catholicity, recognising mutually the baptism, the Eucharist and the ministry, proclaiming the gospel of Christ in order to service the world.[17] "Each local Church must be the place, where two things are guaranteed: i) the safeguarding of unity and ii) the flourishing of a legitimate diversity." [18] Thus conciliarity describes the form and the structure

[13] Lukas Vischer, *Faith and Order Louvain 1971 – Study Report and Documents*, Faith and Order No. 59 (Geneva: WCC, 1971), 171-179.

[14] "The Unity of the Church – Next Steps: The Report of the Salamanca Consultation of Faith and Order, September 1973," *The Ecumenical Review* 26, no. 2 (1974): 294-295.

[15] *Commission Report Uniting in Hope: Commission on Faith and Order, Accra 1974, Faith and Order Paper No. 72* (Geneva: WCC, 1975), 110-123.

[16] David Paton, *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975, Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the WCC, Nairobi 1975* (London: SPCK, 1976), 60.

[17] Aram Keshishian, *Conciliar Fellowship – A common goal* (Geneva: WCC, 1992), 15.

[18] *The Nature and Mission of the Church – A stage on the way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (Geneva: WCC, 2005), 36.

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of Church's unity showing at the same time the way to this goal.[19] The councils have as a primary target to guard the unity, but also to restore any broken fellowship by healing an existing schism.[20]

Apart from these three models of unity a fourth one was proposed by the World Lutheran Federation under the name "*reconciled diversity*," which actually tries to find a way to reconcile the existing differences between the Christian traditions through the establishment of a new general Christian identity. Also, the reconciled diversity leaves room for the element of diversity and does not demand uniformity.[21] Additionally, it was proposed another model of unity called "unity in diversity," which is actually based on the sense and practice of *consensus*. It is a convergence process mainly of critical self-assessment and spiritual renewal and not something new.[22]

It is clear after all that there is an ambiguous relationship between diversity and unity, or between exclusivism and confessionalism. The Unity of the Catholic Church is in peril every time we restrict it in the limits of the confessional identity and denomination; trying to be honest to our confessional bounds, we are not honest to the bounds of the One Church, unless we identify our confessional Church with THE Church. Though Church is inherently One and every division, schism or separation contradicts the Church's witness to the world, but also it is a denial of its very sacramental nature. It is interesting to see how the Orthodox delegations of the 8th General Assembly of WCC in Harare (1998) responded:

> "We recognise that unity does not mean uniformity but at the same time we are concerned about the limits of diversity…In the ecumenical movement we discern a tendency to accept a certain relativity of Christian faith which seems to minimize the concept of heresy."[23]

Therefore, "*the existence of several churches in the same place divided along confessional lines is a denial of the nature and the calling of the local church*";[24] terms such as *Unity* and *Diversity*, *Body of Christ* and *Confessional*

[19] John Zizioulas, "Conciliarity and the Way to Unity – An Orthodox Point of view," *Churches in Conciliar Fellowship*, 20.

[20] Lukas Visher, "Drawn and Held together by the Reconciling Power of Christ: Reflections on the Unity of the Church – Towards the Fifth Assembly of the WCC," *The Ecumenical Review* 26, no. 2, (1974): 190.

[21] Oscar Culmann, *L'Unité par la diversité* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 16-17.

[22] Aram Keshishian, *Conciliar Fellowship*, 57.

[23] Thomas FitzGerald and Peter Bouteneff, *Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope. Orthodox Reflections on the Way to Harare* (Geneva: WCC, 1998), 57.

[24] *In Each Place: Towards a Fellowship of Local Churches Truly United* (Geneva: WCC, 1977), 10.

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Identity come in confrontation. It is very disturbing when it is realized that we, as Christians, are satisfied remaining in our divisions. It is quite obvious then that the Christian unity is prevented by the confessional plurality and by the confessional identity. According to the Statement of Canberra "*The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling*" in the 7th General Assembly of the WCC (1991), we read:

> "Diversities which are rooted in theological traditions, various cultural, ethnic or historical contexts are integral to the nature of communion; yet there are limits to diversity. Diversity is illegitimate when, for instance, it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8)."[25]

Furthermore, we read in the same official text of Canberra the following, regarding the essence of Church:

> "The purpose of God according to Holy Scripture is to gather the whole of creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit, all are brought into communion with God (Eph. 1). The Church is the foretaste of this communion with God and with one another. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit enable the one Church to live as sign of the reign of God and servant of the reconciliation with God, promised and provided for the whole creation. The purpose of the Church is to unite people with Christ in the power of the Spirit, to manifest communion in prayer and action and thus to point to the fullness of communion with God, humanity and the whole creation in the glory of the kingdom."[26]

For the Orthodox, the Church is both: catholic and local, invisible and visible, the one and the many; there is no either/or between the one and the many.[27]

a) The Church of God is always related to a specific local Church. In other terms there is a certain relation between the One Church and the many Churches, without observing a division or separation between the two entities. Such a way of thinking leads us to the thought that Church cannot be received in isolation but always in relation with Jesus Christ and with the local community. In that perspective diversity is legitimate.[28]

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[25] https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-unity-of-the-church-gift-and-calling-the-canberra-statement.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Georges Dragas, "Orthodox Ecclesiology in Outline," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 26-3 (1981).

[28] Ion Bria, *Go Forth in Peace – Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (Geneva: WCC, 1986), 69.

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b) The Universal Church is realized in the local Eucharistic gathering. Through the communion the Church is able to transcend the time liberating itself from formalistic and legalistic types. If it is seen through that theological perspective the apostolic succession would mean communion in time and in space. Such a type of unity based on "ecclesiology of koinonia" would give the appropriate dimension between the universal and the local Church. Also, in that perspective diversity is legitimate.
c) The Church is the very reality of Christ in us and us in Christ, a new mode of God's presence and action in His creation; it is union and unity, communion and transfiguration. It is the continuing presence of Pentecost.[29]

The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew during his last visit to the headquarters of WCC in Geneva (17 June 2018), he described probably with the most appropriate words the real essence of doing theological dialogue and the purpose of the Christian unity:

> "…we continue our dialogue in order to surmount these difficulties, overcome our misunderstandings, erase our prejudices, and bear witness more authentically to the Gospel message. Dialogue does not imply a renouncing of one's ecclesial tradition. Instead it signifies a change in our state of mind and attitude, what we call 'repentance' in the language of spirituality, in Greek métanoia, which means 'to see things from a different perspective.' In this sense, dialogue is the beginning of a long process of mutual understanding that requires much patience and openness. We are aware that the movement to restore the unity of Christians is taking new forms in order to respond to new situations and to deal with the current challenges of the world."[30]

The issue of *otherness* in the re-shaping identity process

We live in a time of global crises. Economic, ecological, socio-political and spiritual challenges confront us and Churches are called to solve the riddle of *identity* and of *otherness*. These two notions are the two different sides of the same coin. It is not possible to find our common traces and to set some basic, commonly accepted, principles of life without looking at both sides having an

[29] Gennadios of Sassima, "Called to be the One Church," in *Plenary Commission on Faith and Order* (6-14 October 2009), FO/2009:08, 3-4.
[30] https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2018/homily-of-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-on-the-70th-anniversary-of-the-wcc.

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opened mind. The so-called *other*, depicted on the persons of refugees and immigrants, who used to be outside of our walls (*extra muros*), now he/she is always present in our daily life everywhere in the public space, living among us, with us.

Because of the globalization, or else because of the McDonaldisation, the *other*, mainly not the European, is considered sometimes as the scapegoat or even worse as the representative of evil's power. Anything and everything which is not similar or even familiar to our civilization easily can be considered as enemy and as a foreigner. Unfortunately, we take part in a history where competition among peoples individually, ethnologically, or nationally, becomes day by day stronger, because of the sovereign neo-liberal economic system implemented in a worldwide level through the means of technology and communication.[31]

Though, according to the Faith and Order statement in Kuala Lumpur (2004),

> "We have to follow the prototype who is Christ, and not our confessional identity, since the source of our identity is Jesus himself. The welcome, or the accepting of one another, is spoken in Romans 15:7 as an imperative, a command. The verb implies an action both of giving and receiving acceptance. Scripture does not make it an optional activity. To 'accept one another, as Christ has accepted us' does not seem to allow room for years of debate and negotiation, but only for an on- going practice of giving and receiving that acceptance."[32]

Accepting the *other* is based on the notion of *koinonia*, a term which is much stronger than communion or fellowship. Koinonia has an internal dynamism, a vivid spirit and it expresses an on-going procedure, meaning that the human being in order to be united with God firstly must be united with his/her neighbor. Thus, koinonia it is valuable for two reasons: i) it deepens the quality of life in togetherness and ii) it helps us to overcome the divisiveness of dichotomies such as worship OR mission, local OR universal; through the notion of koinonia we obtain a holistic perspective of theology and of life.[33]

What is in a need now is an escape from the old way of thinking and of defining the other, by acquiring a new paradigm receiving otherness as a *relational reality*. Through that spectrum otherness and identity are not any

[31] Augustinos Bairactaris, "The Decalogue of the inter-religious dialogue and the paradigm of the religious pluralism," *Theologia review* 84, no. 4 (2013): 13-32. See here p. 15 (in Greek).

[32] Thomas Best, *Faith and Order at the Crossroads Kuala Lumpur – The Plenary Commission Meeting 2004*, 132.

[33] Michael Kinnamon, "Ecumenical Ecclesiology: One Church of Christ for the sake of the world," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44, no. 3 (2009): 342.

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more adversaries but collaborators in offering to society a true meaning of life. This relational reality is against the homogenization of cultures. An attitude of openness of mind and heart would seem to require that we try to have the same mind that was in Christ; Christ who emptied himself (*kenotic theology*), becoming the least, in order to be obedient to God's "yes" (*Phil. 2*).

Probably this attempt can be structured on the theology of *personhood*, where every human being is regarded as God's creation (*imago Dei*). This uniqueness of entity based on God's creative power and it is the fundamental source of diversity and of identity.[34]

Collective identity and religion

The notion of collective identity is also linked with the *mimetic behaviour* of the members of one community (religious, athletic, political group etc.). According to René Girard the *human desire* contributes in this dispute whether religion itself is violent or not, and consequently this human desire has an important significance on the development of human identity. Mimetic or imitative behavior have the members of a community which actually teaches them the social, economic, educational and religious "dos and don'ts" (what they should do, where to go, what to read, what to eat etc.). Thus, the mimetic behavior is something which sometimes is developed gradually since the childhood of a person. This set of rules and of practices actually tries to "produce a proper world inhabited by proper humans."[35] In other terms every member of a community, sharing the same beliefs with the other members, is not independent, in a sense that it carries within himself and within his identity values and desires of the community where he comes from. The community's desire becomes identical with the member's desire.

Additionally, if the community shares some prejudices, ideologies or preferences based on dogmas or on principles against some other communities or against some other ethnical groups, then all these pass very easily and in a passive way to its members. And this mass of behavior could lead to what we call *collective violence* based on the religious argument "we are innocent, they are guilty."[36] The religious dogmatism is caused by a wrong application of religious truth seen in the absolutizing of dogma, which implies at the same time a radical exclusiveness of other beliefs. For the sake of religious truth one

[34] Yiagazoglou Stauros, "Identity and otherness in a changing world," *Theologia review* 84, no. 4 (2013): 2-5 (in Greek).

[35] Lincoln Bruce, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religions after September 11* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 6.

[36] René Girard, *I see Satan fall like Lightning* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 15.

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is able to violate the most basic principles of life adopting a violent behaviour and a violent policy against people of other traditions, political parties, religions or even atheists. Then dogma becomes in the form of dogmatism a clear violent ideology fighting against the so-called *outsiders of truth* and/or *God's enemies*.[37] Researchers have proved that religion correlates with ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, dogmatism and prejudice. (The most easily example to bring forward to our memory is the German society of 40's against the Jewish community, which was received as the scapegoat).

Another key-element of understanding the formulation of the religious identity is the axiom that "the end justifies the means." For instance, some members of religious communities might have the "given role of the protector or defender" of their values. In order to perform that role within the community, and when the circumstances are the appropriate, either they neglect, or maltreat the different one, dehumanizing the human entity. Group identity is built on the difference between the *in-group* and the *out-group* people. Therefore, any religious group increases its own *internal identity* based on the principle of *conformity*, decreasing at the same time the similarity with the outsiders.

Also, another issue is the use by the religious groups of *boundaries* and the practice of *exclusivism*. This form is actually based on violence, because group's members either they have to sacrifice something material or to sacrifice even their intellectual capacity blocking the free development of their own identity. This happens due to the invoking of the divine powers and of God itself. Anyone who resist to that call and to this divine convocation is equal to evil. Thus, that encounter between the religious groups represents a conflict of truth claims and a conflict of Gods so to speak.[38] According to Kimball there is an *authentic religion identity* and a *corrupt religion identity*. The first one works for the peace to be established to the whole oikoumene, while the second one easily comes to include war and violence within its message in order to exercise power and governing.[39]

Time proved that ethics and religion are necessary in the building of the new order of world in order to avoid the consequences of the *fundamentalism* as a form of political religion. Sociology and anthropology have also proved during the last decades that peoples disappointed by the contradictions and the false hope of modernization have tried to find their collective identity through religion and local—cultural beliefs. Consequently, there is intensity between globalization and localization; a dialogue between these two sides is compulsory and not a luxury.

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[37] "Un regard Orthodoxe sur la Paix," *Etudes Theologiques* 7 (Chambesy: Centre Orthodoxe, 1986): 92.
[38] Ruar Ganzevoort, "Violence, Trauma and Religion," presentation in the International Association for the Psychology of Religion, (Leuven, 2006), 11-12.
[39] Charles Kimball, *When Religion becomes evil* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 72.

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This is what Jeff Haynes examines in his book *Religion in Global Politics* by pointing out the idea of "de-privatization of religion around the world."[40] Politics and Religions are distinct, but at the same time they are inter-related in the formulation of human's identity. Both exercise power over people and influence the structure of the society being responsible for the social order. Both of them claim for themselves to be the ultimate authority for social order having the right to take decisions for life and death, including the right to kill. Religions and politics must then co-operate translating their values into rules of coexistence.[41]

Is the *Golden Rule* model able to formulate human's identity?

The Golden Rule is a declaration made by the Parliament of the World's Religions where it is presented in four points the basis for the human coexistence.

1. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life.
2. Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.
3. Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness.
4. Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.[42]

It becomes evident that the *Golden Rule* is oriented towards the methodology of how can we overcome the dispute between "we/us" and "they/them"; in other terms we have to stop identifying ourselves always with the "powers of good" fighting the "powers of evil." Otherwise it is formulated a God, who creates an entire world of others, who have to be fought against, since they are different from us and from our culture. That gives birth to *absolutism*, which leaves no free space of existence of the different, is quite dangerous. However, according to Kofi Annan, "people can and should take pride in their particular faith or heritage. But we can cherish what we are, without hating what we are not."[43] We read in the Uppsala's statement: "All peoples have the right to self-determination. This is a basic essential of human dignity…The churches must defend minorities when they are oppressed or threatened."[44] Apart from the threat of absolutism, there is another principle which claims the *equality of all believers*, those who can equally claim that they experience their

[40] Jeff Haynes, *Religion in Global Politics* (New York: Pearson Education, 1998), 90.
[41] Konrad Raiser, *Religion, Power, Politics* (Geneva: WCC, 2013), 11.
[42] Parliament of the World's Religion, "Crossing the Divide: Dialogue among Civilizations," The International Conference, Vilnius – Lithuania, 2001, 116.
[43] Ibid., 12.
[44] Norman Goodall, *The Uppsala Report 1968* (Geneva: WCC, 1968), 64.

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own truth; truth has to do with hermeneutics. Where the norm is that all opinions must be given equal tolerance, how is the Church to sustain its claim to be the bearer of a special revelation? Does pluralism in society affect Christian understanding of unity?[45]

Final Thoughts—Conclusions

If total *acceptance* between different religions and cultures is something difficult to be achieved, *tolerance* and *solidarity* must be sine qua non conditions of the new identity. "In Europe today there are between fifteen and twenty million Muslims (before the refugees crisis): in Britain they constitute 2.7% of the population, in Germany is 4.9%, while in France is 8.3%. Surely, we should see this not as a threat but as an opportunity," stated the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomew.[46] Religious communities must always attempt the impossible for the sake of peace and justice. Especially we, the Christians coming from different denominations and historical backgrounds, must give together through our own paradigm the meaning of the living sacrifice choosing life instead of death.[47] We read in Faith and Order's Commission Statement in Accra (1974):

> "Christians have a mandate for critical, loyal participation in humanity's strivings for a more adequate human community…The Church is called to be a visible sign of the presence of Christ, who is both hidden and revealed to faith, reconciling and healing human alienation."[48]

Truth is not a subject, but rather it is a process, a long and demanding one. Therefore, we must act as "truth seekers and not as truth holders." During that process of searching and living the truth we realize the complexity of relations, the existing pluralism in life and the subjective conception of world's and human's nature. Living in and with God is making us more opened to other's perspective.[49]

I think the best example of understanding the Christian identity is given in the *Epistle of Disciples to Diognetus*, where we read from mot a mot:

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[45] Thomas Best, *Faith and Renewal – Commission on Faith and Order Stavanger 1985, Faith and Order Paper No. 131* (Geneva: WCC, 1986), 218.

[46] "The Role of Religion in a Changing Europe," speech of H.A.H. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomew at the London School of Economics, London (3-11-2005), 1.

[47] I *John*, 3:14: "*We know that we have passed from death to life.*"

[48] Thomas Best, *Faith and Order 1985-1989 The Commission Meeting in Budapest 1989, Faith and Order Paper No. 148* (Geneva: WCC, 1990), 135.

[49] Augustinos Bairactaris, *Theology and Religious Pluralism in the modern World* (Thessaloniki: Stamoulis, 2014), 118 (in Greek).

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> "They (Christians) dwell in their countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers… They are in flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives…They are insulted and repay the insult with honour…To sum up all in one word – what the soul is in the body Christians are in the world… The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body. And Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world."[50]

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[50] Henri Irénée Marrou, *A Diognete*, Sources Chrétiennes 33 (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 63-67.

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