


Essay

Fire, Beards, and Bread: Exploring Christian East–West Relations à Propos of Edward Siecienski’s (Latest) Work

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Abstract: The debate on Christian East–West relations usually centres on the “usual suspects”: papal primacy, the *filioque* and core doctrine in general, the interpretation of Scripture, ecclesiology, and so on. This review article of Edward Siecienski’s *Beards, Azymes, and Purgatory* explores *other* issues that divide East and West, particularly those that may be approached via material ecologies: Fire, Beards, and Bread. “Bread” as in the debate on the Azymes, following Siecienski’s 2023 book; “Beards” as in the beardfulness or beardlessness of clerics; and “Fire” as in *ignis purgatorius*, yet at an even wider scale, the very fire of Gehenna: the question of the hereafter and the location of the dividing line between doctrine and *theologoumena*. Thus, a wider spectrum of the debate emerges, with which the present review article aspires to familiarize its readers.

Keywords: purgatory; beards; azymes; Eucharist; Catholic Church; Eastern Orthodox Church; A. Edward Siecienski

1. Introduction

Which issues divide the Christian “East” from the Christian “West”, in this particular case meaning the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church? Received wisdom, as well as the practice in ecumenical dialogue, has it that the precise nature of primacy in the Church and the *filioque*, i.e., the question of the procession of the Paraclete, are the thorniest of issues—although a closer scrutiny would reveal that the two Churches have arrived at an astounding degree of mutual understanding on the latter, leaving only the former as the unresolved issue *par excellence*. However, it was not always so. It is indeed the case that the predominance of these two topics is also a testimony to the unprecedented degree of mutual theological understanding and knowledge between “East” and “West” in our era, as it demonstrates an agreement concerning the comparatively relative nature of other points of contention, even if these occupied centre stage in earlier times. Yet examining the history of “other issues” can be particularly educational—not only in surveying the past of the East–West schism, but also in view of the way forward—by properly understanding *how* certain issues come to the fore, or disappear from it, together with the role of historical contingency, the difference between doctrine and *theologoumena*, and the licitness of local traditions without normative universal claims.

Luckily for us, both in the academy and in the Church at large, now we have a master scholarly chronicler in our midst, covering both the “core” and the “other” issues. Edward Siecienski’s magisterial volumes on *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (Siecienski 2010b) and *The Papacy and the Orthodox: Sources and History of a Debate* (Siecienski 2017), as well as the recent *Beards, Azymes, and Purgatory: The Other Issues that Divided East and West* (Siecienski 2023), all published by Oxford University Press, meticulously chronicle the sources, theologies, and the *development* of the debates on a temporal horizon spanning from the early Church (or the Old Testament, where applicable) to the modern and contemporary eras, century by century. These are three truly indispensable *summae*; the importance of the fact that potent and as-concise-as-possible overviews of all these



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developments (otherwise spanning a vast archipelago of sources, documents, debates, and figures) are available and accessible to scholars/academics, the faithful at large, clergy and theologians, and—importantly!—members of the various dialogue committees, central and peripheral alike, cannot be overestimated. In a certain sense, this trilogy of Siecienski books can by itself, if widely read and studied, aid in “rebooting ecumenism”, as this special journal issue of *Religions* would have it.

This is more or less what we—i.e., Andrew T. J. Kaethler, Andreas Andreopoulos, and myself—were thinking back in 2019, when only *The Filioque* and *The Papacy and the Orthodox* were authored and published, à propos of which we convened the international conference *Mapping the Una Sancta: On Orthodox-Catholic Ecclesologies Today* on the island of Syros, Greece (an island inhabited by a population of roughly 50% Roman Catholics and 50% Eastern Orthodox believers, and thus unique for the purposes of that gathering). Now, a volume based on the conference and its editorial aftermath has been published in open access by Winchester University Press, titled *Mapping the Una Sancta: Eastern and Western Ecclesiology in the Twenty-First Century* (Mitralexis and Kaethler 2023), with chapters by Dimitrios Bathrellos, John Behr, Johannes Börjesson, George E. Demacopoulos, Adam A. J. DeVille, David W. Fagerberg, Jonathan Goodall, David Bentley Hart, Christos Karakolis, Norm Klassen, Marcello La Matina, Nikolaos Loudovikos, Andrew Louth, Giulio Maspero, John Milbank, Thomas O’Loughlin, Jared Schumacher, Edward Siecienski, Manuel Gonçalves Sumares, Vincent Twomey, and Anna Zhyrkova, together with the conveners’ chapters. One could be excused to say that this another attempt at “rebooting ecumenism”, and this time a bottom-up attempt, given that this was not in any way part of official Church dialogues.

However, all of this was before Siecienski’s recent *Beards, Azymes, and Purgatory: The Other Issues that Divided East and West* (Siecienski 2023), with the “other issues” of which I would like to engage in this discussion of the book, while noting that there are *yet further* issues to be resolved as well before healing the schism, such as the fate of matrimony and its dissolution across the Church(es). However, before embarking on those other issues, I would like to draw the reader’s attention to what is by far the most oft-discussed point of contention, the Papacy, for a very particular reason. We tend to think of the differences between the Churches as emerging at *some* particular point (or cultivated during a particular period), after which a bifurcation emerges: Church X goes that way, Church Y goes the other way, either instantly or gradually. However, a very brief summary of Siecienski’s treatment of the Papacy and the Orthodox shows that, more often than not, there are indeed zig-zags along the way; ebbs and flows, disappearances and reappearances of issues and differences, and so on. Understanding how this is the case in what is arguably *the* currently irreconcilable difference between the Orthodox and the Catholics—i.e., primacy and its nature—prepares us for understanding how easily a similar picture might emerge when surveying other differences as well.

2. Ebbs and Flows of the Papacy

The Papacy and the Orthodox: Sources and History of a Debate (Siecienski 2017) begins with an investigation into the historical person of Peter, followed by a careful analysis of Peter’s portrayal in Scripture, given that the invocation of New Testament events and material plays such a crucial role in the debates on Apostle Peter and the nature of the papacy that were to follow. Subsequently, Siecienski explores the references to Peter in patristic exegesis and the role of the church of Rome in the patristic period. He moves on to the following turning points in this discussion, including the Photian schism, the Great Schism of 1054, and the Gregorian reform (which appears to have been a considerably greater schism than the Great Schism itself).

The Fourth Crusade, the Lyons councils, and, of course, Ferrara-Florence, the union that did most to cement division and schism, are all events that come into focus as the centuries pass. Following the Fall of Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire, Siecienski examines the “silent centuries” before concentrating on Vatican I and the particularly challenging problem of the content that was attributed to the papacy by *Pastor Aeternus*. A much more optimistic picture of East–West relations and a degree of near convergence—or rather, serious discussion—on the subject of primacy, and by extension the papacy, is painted in the twentieth century, particularly after Vatican II, with advancements that were unthinkable just a few decades earlier. However, Siecienski warns that based on previous historical experience, an overabundance of enthusiasm and haste could end up producing the opposite effect from the one intended, an exercise in *discernment* being the key.

Aside from two givens—namely, that (i) the precise nature, power, and role of the papacy is the single most significant factor dividing East and West, even more so than important doctrinal issues like the *filioque*, and that (ii) the most maximalist of papal claims appear during the historical periods of their minimum enforceability—one can discern certain distinct key points of divergence, each of which leads to the next: (a) whether Matthew 16:18 refers to the *person of Peter* or to the faith/confession of Peter and, in other readings, by extension to the faith/confession of all disciples, Apostles, and Christians; (b) whether Peter’s exceptionalism is translated to the exceptionalism of his successor, i.e., to the bishop of “his see”, if we are to use this anachronism; (c) whether and how Rome, and Rome *only*, is this see; (d) cognately, whether Rome’s undisputed primacy is due to imperial/political or Petrine/Apostolic reasons; (e) what is the content and extent of the primacy of the bishop or Rome, particularly in the universal church; and finally, (f) how this primacy is or is not compatible with the Eastern system of the *Pentarchy* (and, by extension in the future, (g) exactly how this would work out in a hypothetical union or intercommunion of the churches in today’s utterly different landscape)—this is, at least, how I attempted to recapitulate it in a book review (Mitralexis 2018).

However, one of the most fascinating elements in this historical tour is again the fact that it negates the picture of the papacy’s development painted in the popular imagery: that of a linear and ever-growing claim to authority and power, while the Christian East resisted due to merely upholding an earlier arrangement and reality (after all, as remarked earlier, “the most maximalist of papal claims appear during the historical periods of their minimum enforceability”, yet one may discover many more “easter eggs” in the book itself). Today’s intra-Orthodox (or, as it should perhaps be called after the 2018/19 Moscow–Constantinople schism, inter-Orthodox) discussion on the nature of primacy adds another layer to this historical complexity. Point being, the history of controversies is complicated, non-linear, and often *messy*: everyone who aspires to have an educated opinion on the state of (dis)union today must have a thorough grasp of the differences’ historical itinerary. Let us now move to the “other issues”, following *Beards, Azymes, and Purgatory* (Siecienski 2023), for as Siecienski says concerning these other issues, “if ecumenical dialogue truly aims to heal the millennium-old schism between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, it will certainly be necessary to retrace the steps that separated them in the first place”. Yet apart from the standard themes discussed today, such as *filioque* and the papacy, “there is another level where one is forced to admit that the immediate cause of the schism was the simple fact that half the church used leavened bread and the other unleavened bread. One is forced to admit that beards (or their lack) among the clergy was seen as reason for breaking Eucharistic communion. One is forced to admit that divergent understandings of the soul’s fate after death helped poison the last attempt at repairing the breach at Ferrara-Florence. The ‘other issues’ cannot, and should not, be laughed off” (Siecienski 2023, pp. x–xi).

3. Of Bread

Let us now return to the review article of Siecienski's 2023 book. Although we tend to consider it a non-issue in contemporary official ecumenical dialogues and a matter of preference within each respective tradition, the question of whether leavened or unleavened bread should be used in the Eucharist was for centuries a core dividing issue between East and West, both before (from the tenth century onwards) and after the 1054 AD schism: "it is a historical fact that the debate over Eucharistic bread, and not the Filioque or the power of the pope, was the immediate cause of the schism that eventually split the Christian world" (Siecienski 2023, p. 116). However, this was primarily a dividing issue *sub specie Orientis*, as ("unleavened") Western Christians would mostly not regard the "Eastern" use of leavened bread in the Eucharist as scandalous, acknowledging the practice's antiquity and licitness, yet preferring unleavened bread themselves; in contrast, Eastern Christians would elevate the Western use of unleavened ("dead") bread into a major ecclesial deal breaker, indeed a heresy, considering the practice incompatible with Church tradition and theology, as well as a Judaizing tendency. Westerners were thus "azymites" (ἄζυμίται, from ἄζυμος, i.e., unleavened bread), which over the centuries became one of the main words used for "othering" Western Christianity. Of course, the crude summary above does not do justice to a nuanced subject, which Siecienski masterfully expounds. The issue itself is indeed rather complicated, as it is connected to questions concerning the status of leaven in Scriptures and in patristic authors, in the type of bread used in the Last Supper—which, in turn, depends on the dating of the Last Supper, itself differing in the Synoptic Gospels' consideration of it as a Passover celebration versus the Gospel of John, according to which it took place just before the Passover Festival, hence allowing for two contradictory Scripture-based positions on the matter—and in the practice of the early Church when Christians "came together and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

However, apart from these questions, it is indeed true that the use of azymes instead of "normal" leavened bread in the Eucharist by the West was a rather late development ("it seems that the use of leavened bread throughout the West was normative until the ninth to tenth centuries"—Siecienski 2023, p. 108). So it was that Byzantine Christians ("the Greeks") saw it as a departure from tradition and an innovation in nothing less than the core sacrament of the Church, and so it was that the Latins never demanded a change in Byzantine practice: rather than that, they only urged that the Greek attacks on the use of azymes cease and that the Byzantines acknowledge the legitimacy of Latin practice in the same way that the West recognised Greek practice as legitimate. The use of azymes by the Latins—which appeared on nearly every list of Latin errors from the eleventh century, when the dispute first started, through to the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438/39—was widely believed to be the primary cause of the schism until it was later superseded by the *filioque* and the papacy (Siecienski 2023, p. 8). Of course, polemics run both ways: in the eleventh century, Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida (of Great Schism fame) would *inter alia* frame the azymes as a *practical* choice with grave consequences for those that do not opt for them, given the "problem of crumbs falling indiscriminately during the breaking of the bread" (Siecienski 2023, p. 125) and charging the Greeks with carelessness and flippancy concerning this high sacrament, since normal, leavened bread for the Eucharist may be prepared by anybody, while the Greeks would sometimes "make use of bread that has been bought from the people's shops of trade . . . [and] handled by someone's unwashed and filthy hands" for the Eucharist (Siecienski 2023, p. 125), whereas a type of bread especially prepared for the Eucharist removes this obstacle. Later, in the 1252 *Tractatus contra Graecos*, azymes are listed as one of the five church-dividing issues, the others being the *filioque* and its addition to the creed, primacy, and purgatory (Siecienski 2023, p. 175).

It is important to note that the precedent of the Ebionites' and the Armenians' use of unleavened bread for the Eucharist had preconditioned the Byzantines to think of such a practice as an outright heresy, or at least think of it as concomitant of lapsing into heresy, when they encountered the new Latin practice; if somebody celebrates the Eucharist in the

way earlier heretics did, then they must too be heretics, and their use of azymes must be related to some greater heresy (Sicienski 2023, pp. 112, 117).

As with many of the seemingly lesser church-dividing issues, the ebb and flow of the pre-eminence of the azymite controversy was also correlated with historical contingency. The crusaders' sack of Constantinople in 1204 and the subsequent, albeit short-lived, establishment of the Latin empire naturally amplified enmity: the number of anti-Latin polemical works increased, although during this time, the main Orthodox grievances shifted from azymes to the papacy and the *filioque*. By the end of the thirteenth century, the Orthodox had written more than forty books on azymes, the majority of which were polemical critiques of Latin usage, which was considered alongside the two "great issues" to be the most obvious indication of the heretical nature of the Latins (including treating any altar on which an azymite Eucharist had been celebrated as defiled) (Sicienski 2023, p. 151). Today, as Sicienski observes, not only are azymes not on the official agenda of theological dialogues between the Orthodox and the Catholic Church, they are remarkably absent even from the rhetoric of online polemicists (Sicienski 2023, p. 186). The issue seems to be now considered ancient history.

Yet apart from the traditional, theological, patristic, and scriptural basis for the preference for leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist, one cannot help but ponder at the sheer *materiality* of this central dividing issue: rather than a highly theoretical theological question on the relations between the persons of the Trinity or on the hypostasis of Jesus Christ or on the nature of the Church, a *visible* and *material* difference—the type of bread used in the centralmost Christian sacrament—constituted the *visible* point of difference and potential invalidation of a Church; matter matters. And, going beyond the historical nature of the azymite controversy, it is crucial for us to devote attention to contemporary challenges for the material basis of the Eucharist and to their theological treatment. For example, while "bread"—leavened or otherwise—and "wine" are rather ubiquitous in the geographies where Christianity first flourished for two millennia, the context of global Christianity (Orthodox, Catholic, or otherwise), in parts of which wheat and bread or even wine are rather exotic and mainly imported rather than the epitome of local agrarian life, raises new questions and challenges for the precise nature of the unconsecrated Eucharistic elements.

4. Of Beards

While clerical beards, or the lack thereof, were indeed vested with theological, patristic, and traditional significance from some point in time onwards, it would not be too fanciful to assume that the main reason beards became a central topic (since "the beardlessness of the Latin clergy was cited as a reason for breaking communion with Rome prior to all the subsequent arguments about the orthodoxy and liceity of the *filioque* in the creed", Sicienski (2023, p. 5)) was their sheer nature as *obvious*, *visible* (and *material*) indicators of difference and otherness. Clerical beards or beardlessness became a visible signifier of identity. This is of import, since in contrast to azymes—which might seem trivial today, yet the problem concerned the Church's core sacrament and its Eucharistic elements; as such, it indeed had a theological significance—identifying clerical beards or beardlessness as a church-dividing issue seems like the very line dividing theological differences from the aversion to the traditions of other local churches, i.e., a certain "ecclesial culturomonism", if we are to put it thusly. Today, properly distinguishing theological disparities from differences in local traditions or *theologoumena* is the very starting point for any theological dialogue that would make sense, and retaining a diversity of traditions *while* pursuing and guaranteeing doctrinal unanimity on core issues *sine qua non*—and being able to distinguish which is which—seems the only possible way to intercommunion.

Returning to beards, in Part I of the book, Sicienski offers a fascinating cornucopia of information, sources, and stories on beards in the scriptural and patristic tradition and in the East–West polemic from the ninth to the fifteenth century and to our era (including the reassessment of beards today, not least among hipsters and online bards of beards

with a staggering ability in producing historically informed literature on the topic). An interesting recurring theme is the implicit and, at times, explicit sexualization of facial hair on both sides of the razor and the East–West divide. There seems to lie beyond all the appeals to tradition, scripture, and the Fathers an understanding, by those who abhorred shaven clerics, of shaving the beard as pursuing the appearance of a young boy or of a woman, which “often carried with it the implication that one wanted to play this role in some sort of ‘unnatural’ sexual act” (Sicienski 2023, p. 5). On the other side of the spectrum, a preference for shaven clerics seemed to entail a regard of facial hair as virile and attractive—perhaps *too* virile and attractive for the needs of celibate Western Christian clerics having forsaken marriage. Much later than the Schism, Eastern cultural (rather than theological) enthusiasm for beards took new turns, even beyond clerical beards and particularly in Russia, with the archbishop of Rostov in 1460 pronouncing the shaved as “abandoning the image of God”, the 1551 Stoglav Council forbidding shaving since it was “not an Orthodox, but a Catholic tradition”, Ivan the Terrible being credited with saying that “shaving the beard is a sin the blood of all martyrs will not wash away”, and Patriarch Adrian of Moscow decrying in 1690 those with Westernizing tendencies and saying that “by shaving, [they] made themselves look like apes and monkeys” (Sicienski 2023, pp. 71–72). Later, things changed somewhat with Peter the Great, but that is a different story.

Yet this is only one piece of the larger puzzle and picture that Sicienski paints. Importantly, the pre-eminence of beards as an arena for polemics started to recede in conjunction with the rise of the importance of *filioque* and the papacy alongside with azymes as dividing issues, plus purgatory after the thirteenth century: “by the time negotiations began for another reunion”, i.e., between Lyon and Ferrara-Florence, 1274–1438, “clerical beards, like most of the other ‘errors’ on the Byzantine lists, were simply no longer regarded as essential” (Sicienski 2023, p. 69).

5. Of Fire and Eschatology

The previous two issues largely belong to the past; they are instructive today insofar as they demarcate, in different ways, the line between local traditions, *theologoumena*, and polemics on the one hand, and substantial theological disparities on the other. The third issue, however, can rather easily be described as immensely more interesting today from a theological perspective. The question of “purgatory”, while nominally so, is anything but limited to the acceptance or rejection of a Catholic doctrine that first took institutionalised shape in the thirteenth century (during which “the Greeks, who had remained content with the fathers’ ambiguity on the fate of souls after death, were puzzled by the language and concepts being employed by their Latin counterparts and responded with more questions than answers. . . . In fact, it was Pope Innocent IV’s desire to impose the teaching on the Greeks that led to the 1254 definition of Purgatory that eventually became the doctrine’s ‘birth certificate’”, Sicienski (2023, p. 233)). It is indeed a wider question concerning the Christian witness on the hereafter, and whether this should be largely clouded in reverent silence in its details, apart from Jesus Christ’s and the Nicene Creed’s explicit utterances on the matter, or detailed and developed in a quasi-architectural way, as is the case with a clear tripartite division of the hereafter. It is, one thinks, not utterly unfair to opine that the Catholic Church’s insistence on the *universal* normativity of its *entire* doctrinal deposit *and more* (i.e., everything that is considered binding for the universal Church) leads to an emphatically cataphatic stance on issues where the Orthodox are more reserved and apophatic as far as final and normative statements are concerned, and that this raises a further issue in a path towards eventual intercommunion. For example, though purgatory might not be figuring heavily in ecumenical debates right now, in contrast to the papacy and *filioque*, could there be an end of the road *without* considering it and arriving at some consensus (even if the Roman Catholic Church has never *formally* defined it in binding detail, apart from asserting her belief in it (Sicienski 2023, p. 275n2)? On the other hand, and in spite of sporadic utterances by bishops, primates, or even saints, as well as local traditions, *theologoumena*, and so on (for example, the tollhouses tradition), the Orthodox

Church is exceedingly thin on specific binding doctrinal assertions on the *details* of the hereafter save the obvious, scriptural, and creedal, i.e., the *Parousia*, the final judgement, heaven and κόλασις; a place of κολασμὸς that is αἰώνιος—whatever that might mean, given contemporary research on the very *meaning* of the term in the early Christian, late antique and patristic context (Ramelli and Konstan 2013)—and the (bodily) resurrection of all. For, as David Bentley Hart very aptly and accurately puts it, “Orthodoxy’s entire dogmatic deposit resides in the canons of the seven ecumenical councils—everything else in Orthodox tradition, be it ever so venerable, beautiful, or spiritually nourishing, can possess at most the authority of accepted custom, licit conjecture, or fruitful practice” (Hart 2015). Reverent silence on such matters might indeed be wise since, despite the rare impression sometimes given in particularly long-winded preparatory meetings (of a more bureaucratic nature) for ecumenical dialogue, no committee member has reposed in advance of its participation in the meeting.

The theological development and history of purgatory and its reception in the East as portrayed by Siecienski is too interesting to sum up here; let it suffice to say that, all along, a point of convergence was the acknowledgement by both Catholics and Orthodox, following scriptural and patristic witness, of the importance and potency of prayers for the dead, prayers that can indeed achieve some change—this by definition entailing the conviction that the moment of death does not conclusively seal the fate of *every* person forever, hence inferring some sort of “middle state”. Siecienski guides us through the various interpretations, in East and West, of the Gospels, Paul, Origen, Augustine (for whom, interestingly, the eternal fire “was both real *and material*” (Siecienski 2023, p. 225)), and the patristic texts in general on this and on the “purifying fire” both before and after the formation of the doctrine of purgatory in the West. As already noted, the subject is much more nuanced—and interesting—than a mere question of the East’s “acceptance” or “rejection” of purgatory (both at Ferrara-Florence and way beyond), or at least something *like* purgatory; Siecienski (with Constan and Bathrellos as potent secondary sources on the Orthodox patristic reception as well as *theologoumena* on the hereafter) chronicles the differences and exchanges concerning a fascinating variety of crucial theological issues, such as the ebbs and flows of theologies emphasizing God’s justice and punishment on the one hand and God’s love and forgiveness on the other. The summary treatment of modern and contemporary authors by Siecienski is also commendable—see, purely indicatively, (Siecienski 2023, pp. 305–11) for recent Orthodox responses and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s (later Pope Benedict XVI) insights. One cannot help but note that while Siecienski remarks that “neither side expressed great interest in renewing their earlier debates about Purgatory and the state of souls after death”, noting “the previous century’s general disinterest in eschatology” as partly responsible (Siecienski 2023, p. 305), it is Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas, a crucial figure in late 20th century ecumenical dialogues, who based a considerable extent of his theology on eschatology.

6. A Concluding Reflection

Siecienski concludes *Beards, Azymes, and Purgatory* (Siecienski 2023, p. 311) by mentioning the debates, both within Orthodox Christianity and beyond, sparked by David Bentley Hart’s universalist *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (Hart 2019)—although “universalism” here means anything but a simplistic, happy-ending version of the salvation of all, given Hart’s “purgatorial” reading of scripture, the fathers, and tradition. This debate might indeed provide an opportunity for rebooting ecumenism, as it forms an invitation to discuss what we *do not* know (and *cannot* know) in detail from a bindingly doctrinal point of view, i.e., not in order for the Catholics and the Orthodox to arrive at (joint or not) conclusive doctrinal utterances, but in order for them to jointly explore what they had been slightly too eager to opine about in the past. These current debates take place in the context of a wider reassessment of sources, on the basis of reliable critical editions of texts that would be undreamt of in previous centuries, if not decades, together with reliable translations (e.g., (Origen 2017), or Maximus the Confessor’s works

translated by Fr. Maximos Nicholas Conostas) and reassessments on the meaning of crucial terms such as αἰὼν, as previously mentioned; on the hereafter in general (e.g., Ramelli 2013; plus the layperson's version, Ramelli 2019); on what Origen *actually* said and contributed to, juxtaposed to what was remembered as "Origenism" in later centuries; and so on, including the question of the synodical condemnation (i.e., at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, 553 AD) of Origen—but not Gregory of Nyssa!—and of a particular iteration of ἀποκατάστασις, a synodical condemnation that we today know as spurious. This is a discussion to which Siecienski himself has contributed in his "(Re)Defining the Boundaries of Orthodoxy" (Siecienski 2010a), and Hart summarizes it as follows: "it is true that something remembered by tradition as 'Origenism' was condemned by someone in the sixth century, and that Origen was maligned as a heretic in the process; and it is also true that for well more than a millennium both those decisions were associated with the Council of 553 by what was simply accepted as the official record. But, embarrassingly, we now know, and have known for quite some time, that the record was falsified . . . The oldest records of the council . . . make it clear that those fifteen anathemas were never even discussed by the assembled bishops, let alone ratified, published, or promulgated. . . . The best modern critical edition of the Seven Councils—Norman Tanner's—simply omits the anathemas as spurious interpolations. Even if the anathemas had actually been approved by the council, they no more constitute a serious condemnation of Origen than they do a recipe for brioche" (Hart 2015). Revisiting the distinction(s) between the actual Origen, the remembered "Origen", Origenism and "Origenism", together with the torrents of concomitant theological issues of all shapes and colours, could perhaps, curiously enough, help re-articulate and re-frame the *desiderata* of Orthodox-Catholic dialogue—not by addressing this or that particular and partial issue, but by calling on the Churches to offer a robust witness of their faith, theology, community, history, and practice beyond all that is simply considered a given, and hence almost never properly or critically revisited from the perspective of ecclesiality.

Discussing all this anew, and together, would constitute a part of what we could term *an ecumenism of failures* (to borrow a phrase by Christos Yannaras), a readiness to discern what we *lack*, what we *do not know*, what is only due to unfortunate historical contingency and what *is not*, and a realization of what we ought to explore *together*—including what remains yet unchartered—while preserving the distinction between the effable and the ineffable: the cataphatic and the apophatic. Rather than resulting in a relativization of doctrinal issues for the sake of an ecumenical zeal, this would be quite the opposite: allowing for the actual witness of the faith, for *doctrine* rather than *theologoumena* and historical contingencies, to occupy centre stage in the dialogue, and for ecclesial theology itself to flourish. Such an undertaking would be, at a minimum, rather interesting.

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