Article

Rebooting Ecumenism, the Theological Equivalent of the Climate Crisis: The Role of Urgency and Accountability on the Road to Ecclesial Interdependence

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Abstract: This article puts forward the argument for the acute and urgent need to move from ecclesial self-sufficiency to ecclesial interdependency in the ecumenical process. The difficulties in ecumenical cooperation mirror those in the climate crisis, as despite a global crisis of relevance for Christianity and for the ecumenical movement, individual Churches, much like individual states, fail to work together effectively as they negotiate their own internal challenges. Not dissimilar to the ecological climate breakdown, what we understand as the history-bound reality of the Church will not be safeguarded and will not be made relevant in today's globalised, pluralistic, interconnected, and dominantly secular, in many contexts, world, except by concerted action from all Churches.

Keywords: ecumenism; ecumenical movement; Receptive Ecumenism; synergy; Orthodox Church; Orthodoxy; ecclesiology; interdependence; accountability; urgency; discernment

1. Rebooting Ecumenism—A Synergic Process

Ecumenism is a matter of ecclesiology, which means it is a matter of eschatology[1], which means it is also a matter of mystagogy[2]. Anyone who agrees with this, must acknowledge that there is a sacramental, divine, mystical reality at the core of ecumenism. Furthermore, in as much as the Church is a synergic reality, a divine–human joint endeavour, ecumenism is equally a synergic reality, a divine–human activity. Synergy implies proximity, close cooperation, harmony, and unity. In this sense, as a matter of eschatology, ecumenism is inevitably a question of proximity—to God and one another. To be 'one in Christ' (Gal. 3:28), to be 'new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17), is only possible where a radical synergic process of 'mediating the distance' has taken place. Ecumenism's drive to be a practice of minimising distance (at the level of theology, life, prayer) is not originally its own; rather, it is the human response—the Church's response—to God's continual impetus to minimise the distance between Him and us and between ourselves, in and through Jesus Christ.

In the hundred-plus years since the start of the modern ecumenical movement (Edinburg 1910), we have been very successful at de-sacralising and de-synergising ecumenical practice and professionalising it in an institutional bureaucratic way. The ecumenical synergy we perceive and work towards is less of the divine–human kind and more of the human-to-human kind, as we work towards reconciliation between members of various Churches and between Churches as institutions with synods and theological commissions. A simple, but I hope not simplistic, way of gauging the qualitative difference in this regard is to observe the disparity between the 'human ecumenical structures' and the 'human–divine ecumenical structures' that aim to facilitate ecumenical closeness—the former, in the shape of theological commissions, WCC departments, ecumenical agencies, etc., far outnumber the latter, for which the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity stands as an insufficient exponent.

Ecumenism is hamstrung by a failure to translate this synergic vision for unity, the sense of being invested spiritually in the process, and the accountability that comes

from this, from ecumenical institutions to living ecclesial contexts. This is the proverbial 'bottleneck' of ecumenism.

In this landscape, it feels natural—almost inevitable—to think about 'rebooting' ecumenism. But how do we reboot a process that is fundamentally synergic in a divine–human way, not merely in a 'coming together of different human energies' way? If ecumenism is a calling, a vocation, a divine eschatological imperative related to the "unity of all"—not just of Church members among themselves but simultaneously with the Triune God—and not primarily a 'human project for Christian unity', how can we contemplate a human-managed reboot? The key is identifying the process anew as a synergic process originating in God that calls humanity to a radical transformation of outlook. It is to realise, in the words of Fr. Alexander Schmemann that "*the real crisis is not on the level of 'adjustments' between the Church and the world* [NB. or, in the case of ecumenism, between Churches themselves] *but on that of the ultimate Christian vision of God, world and man…*" (Schmemann 2001, p. 59). In practice, this means to create structures and foster interactions rooted in this awareness.

To reboot ecumenism is to identify, own, and call out the flaws that *we* have introduced in the process. Doing so allows us to both see anew God's original design for the Church, manifested on Pentecost, and be more receptive to God's continual movement towards unity with all creation, in and through His Church, as co-labourers. This is part and parcel of the synergic character of ecumenism; so, it is a question not merely of theological awareness but of applied, practical theology rooted in that awareness.

On our part, at the centre of this radical action for unity, rests the theological realisation that cancelling or minimising the distance between us and God is inseparable from cancelling the distance between each other. This leads to an assumed eschatological pragmatism which asks, "what can *I* do to mediate the distance?". The great prophetic and eschatological call of the ecumenical movement to all Churches is that *our own ecclesial distance from God* (experienced in unique ways in our own various Churches) *cannot be ever fully cancelled or mediated on our own, outside of ecumenical practice.*

In this context, this article puts forward the argument for the acute and urgent need to move from ecclesial self-sufficiency to ecclesial interdependency in the ecumenical process. It will do this in three parts:

- Firstly, it will briefly consider the state of the ecumenical journey so far, why it has led to the theological equivalent of the climate crisis, and what are some of the structural blockers that hamper progress.
- Secondly it will consider the ways in which the Orthodox could better negotiate urgency and accountability as they participate in the ecumenical dialogue.
- Thirdly, it will attempt to suggest possible components for a rebooted taxonomy of ecumenical engagement.

2. The Ecumenical Journey and Why It Has Led to the Theological Equivalent of the Climate Crisis

The pronouncement of climate advocates and scientists calling for the enacting of urgent and meaningful climate policies is as radical as it is simple: the planet will not be protected and it will not be 'saved' except by concerted and concrete common action from each and every one of the world's countries. This is a warning we ought to appropriate theologically in the ecosystem of the Christian world.

The place in which we find ourselves is, granted, a place marked by immense progress in the ecumenical rapprochement since the early decades of the 20th century. Thus, one might query, not without basis, "*Why should we reboot ecumenism?*" After all, despite its shortcomings, the present ecumenical plateau is no fenland; rather, it is a summit—the summit of more than 70 years' work of reconciliation and dialogue (if one were to use as reference the 1948 establishment of the WCC)—manifested in shared worship, mutual learning, and the *prosoponic* (face-to-face) rediscovery of one another across the family of Christian Churches. Yes, we are some way off the mark of expectation for unity that dominated the early days of the movement (recognition of sacramental validity, Eucharistic

sharing, integrated ecclesiological structures, etc.) but instead of looking at this as at a stalled process, should we, perhaps, approach this period at the start of the 21st century as a 'decanting stage', as the 'resting of the dough stage'? Things change slowly in the Church (granted, slower in some than in others), and what feels like a pause now, in wider historical perspective, may be merely the space between breaths?

It may well be that this is a decanting period. One ought not to depreciate what has been achieved—not by human effort alone, but by the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit. We cannot ignore achievements[3] like the international theological dialogue between Churches, agreed statements that have clarified and affirmed synoptic positions on key theological issues, the lifting of historic anathemas, joint action on climate and social justice issues, and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity—which, despite the opposition and condemnation it triggers in many majority-Orthodox contexts (Doru 2023), carries a poignant prophetic tension, representative of the entire ecumenical movement.

The issue remains, however, that, for as much as ecumenical progress is real and the fruit of human–divine synergy, it is also a tower with a very small base, which beyond a rotating cluster of theologians, clergy, and church activists (who communicate in a curated ecumenical lingo), does not really extend into the wider ecclesial community. This is an issue to which I will return later in this paper, but it is important to recall Yves Congar's dictum regarding reception as an ecclesiological reality fundamental to the ecumenical process. According to Congar, reception is

> "...the process by means of which a church (body) truly takes over as its own a resolution that it did not originate in regard to its self, and acknowledges the measure it promulgates as a rule applicable to its own life. [...]"

> "it includes a degree of consent, and possibly of judgment, in which the life of a body is expressed which brings into play its own, original spiritual resources" (Congar 2022, p. 32)

There is scarce observable evidence that ecumenical resolutions or bilateral agreements reached in theological commissions have been received and weaved in the life of individual Churches, even less so at grassroot level in parishes or dioceses.

The (partial) failure of ecumenism to deliver on the promise of unity adds to the wider sinfulness of our world—manifested as dividedness, greed, lust for power, and injustice. These elements shape the being of the world, our *zeitgeist*, even as the world seeks healing. As no one country can have an impact on the planet's damaged climate on its own, neither can individual Churches make a difference in and "for the life of the world" (John 6:15) on their own, without a synergic ecumenical effort. Without renewed ecumenical synergy, i.e., without common, coherent joint-up witness, Christ's redemptive sacrifice is 'parochialised' and 'denominationalised' instead of being affirmed in its universality.

The sobering reality is that, much like in the climate crisis, the many meetings and declarations issued over decades of ecumenical dialogue have done too little to lower the ecumenical temperature of our ecclesial milieu—we are as polluted as ever by the toxic emissions of ethnoreligiosity, jurisdictional imperialism, misconceptions and misreading, traditionalism and liberalism, or of doing theology in 'denominational bubbles' without concern for ecumenical consequences[4] as in the early days of the ecumenical movement— and this ecumenical climate crisis spills out into the wider fabric of our world.

Aspects of this challenge have been identified time and again at various meetings and in statements by ecumenical leaders.

In his 2005 presentation at the event marking the 40th anniversary of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC, Cardinal Walter Kasper was contemplating both the progress made by the ecumenical movement and the need to revisit some of its failings, i.e., some of the things that may be part of a 'reboot'. Cardinal Kasper was acknowledging that after decades of

> "intense ecumenical experience, we can look back with gratitude for the progress made in the journey towards full visible unity. But we need also to look critically at the present situation of the ecumenical movement. [...]

At the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century, the ecumenical movement needs a revitalised ecumenical vision, a renewed spirit and a new commitment by all partners." (Kasper 2005)

Cardinal Kasper's agenda for renewal, for a 'reboot' of the ecumenical movement, had five points: *clarity on its theological foundations*; *a shared, honest, and coherent vision and goal for what its unity ought to be* (where unity is not confounded with uniformity, and plurality is not equated with contradictory doctrinal pluralism or indifferentism); *renewal and conversion of heart at both personal and institutional levels*; *spiritual ecumenism rooted in prayer*, not mere ecumenical activism; and *practical ecumenism that has social and political impact* (because it focuses on the dignity of the human person and human rights, on the sanctity of life, family values, education, justice and peace, health care, the preservation of creation, and the advancement of interreligious dialogue) (Kasper 2005). Cardinal Kasper's five-point agenda for renewal highlights the areas where the ecumenical ecosystem is suffering. What is troubling is that these are not issues of periphery but core pillars of ecumenism that affect Christian witness on a global scale, and on which little progress has been made over so many decades.

In his 2005 keynote speech[5] at the Interchurch Center in New York, addressing the challenges facing ecumenism in the 21st century, the then General Secretary of the WCC, Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, spoke about the ways in which the Churches "*are called continually to re-examine our relationships, to ask if we may find ways of working together in more suitable patterns, more creative environments, more faithful ministries of service*". His entire speech conveyed a sense of tension between the ecumenical vision of greater fellowship and cooperation and the practical challenges of achieving them, which he perceived to be related to the "*imperative of learning to listen*", of not equating ecumenical institutions with the ecumenical movement—"'*the ecumenical movement' and 'the World Council of Churches' are not interchangeable terms*"—and to the need of "*reconfiguring the ecumenical movement*" so that it both better reflects a global rather than a Euro-centric reality and meets the challenge of providing substantive answers to those seeking profound spiritual answers in a globalised yet fragmented world. Dr Kobia's speech recognised the impending 'crisis of constituency' facing the ecumenical movement and the need to extend its base—as a response to the danger of institutionalising the ecumenical undertaking.

Resonating concerns are discernible in the November 2018 address of Dr. Agnes Abuom, Moderator of the World Council of Churches, to the Swedish Ecumenical Weekend, in Uppsala, Sweden,[6] entitled '*Prospects and Challenges for Ecumenism and the Ecumenical Movement*'. Dr. Aboum identified five challenges of contemporary ecumenism: *broader unity*; *moral discernment* of the important ethical questions facing the world today; *the reshaping of diakonia* so that it bridges the gap between religious communities and international organizations; *the generational challenge*, expressed in the need to give voice and a say to young people; and *the gender challenge*, articulated as the need to bring women closer to the centres of decision-making in the Church.

The issues raised by Kasper, Kobia, and Aboum represent overarching challenges to the ecumenical movement that are the fruits of local failures. They will not be solved by ecumenical institutions—whose role is (ought to be) to facilitate and resource not to sweep in with prepackaged solutions—but by being owned with urgency and accountability by Churches, communities, at a grassroot level. This transition of 'ownership' from ecumenical institutions to the hoi polloi, to living ecclesial contexts, has been and remains the bottleneck of ecumenism.

How could this be overcome? I believe that the place to start is by addressing the structural blockers of this transfer of ecumenical ownership at the level of local Churches already taking part in the process. These structural blockers are, in my opinion, the following: (a) the primacy of ecclesial self-sufficiency over ecclesial interdependence; (b) the naive *schadenfreude* perspective that 'the problems of other Churches are not our problems', especially in relation to societal relevance; (c) the misunderstanding of what 'spiritual ecumenism' is—in relation to Receptive Ecumenism. A lot of what follows is contextualised in relation to the Orthodox Church, not only because I am familiar with its background,

but also because its reluctance to authentically encourage and disseminate an ecumenical relational consciousness in its own context, while otherwise intensely active theologically in the ecumenical movement, invites consideration.

2.1. Ecclesial Self-Sufficiency and Ecclesial Interdependence

Ecclesial self-sufficiency is the great bane of ecumenism because it fundamentally goes against the need for relationship and the impetus for unity and reconciliation at the heart of the ecumenical movement. The compounded damage of ecclesial self-sufficiency is that it snuffs or deems irrelevant the motivation for urgency and accountability in the quest for unity.

In some churches, this self-sufficiency is coated in words like 'tradition' (Cavarnos 1992); in others, the term used may be 'scripture' (Vanhoozer 2021, especially pp. 225–26) or 'the gifts/baptism of the Spirit' (Black 2020, especially pp. 26–27), while in others, ecclesial self-sufficiency may be coated in the drive to 'stay relevant' vis-à-vis the shifting sands of society. Ecclesial self-sufficiency treats ecumenical engagement as a process that has to do with 'witness' rather than 'conversion'. This witness is predominantly seen unidirectionally as witness towards 'the others' (certainly so by the Orthodox)—and understands anything related to 'conversion' in dogmatic terms or statements that encapsulate or proclaim 'the truth', rather than as a wider process of ecclesial conversion of practices, of outlook—as the shedding of our ecclesial conditioning (which often has to do not with theology but with socio-cultural and historical habituations), which ultimately requires a process of internal conversion to what makes one's own tradition authentically itself.

To be sure, 'conversion' and 'witness' should not be understood as two binary choices, where conversion trumps witness. They are, of course, innately linked and part of the same unitary movement of ecclesial expression—like inhaling is connected to exhaling in breathing. One might indeed argue that conversion is the sine qua non of witness, as any witness that is not rooted in conversion (of the heart) is "only a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1).

Ecclesial self-sufficiency is present when/where witness and (continual) conversion are seen as separate movements. This makes ecclesial self-sufficiency immune to the ecumenical paradox that ecumenical engagement, when occurring with faith, hope, and love, leads to a deepening of one's own faith identity, in their tradition. One becomes more Orthodox, more Catholic or Anglican, and so on.

In the words of Yves Congar:

> "*the discovery of another spiritual world does not uproot us from our own, but changes the way we look at many things. For myself, I remain a Catholic, a fact I do not hide from myself or from others, but ecumenism has freed me from a certain narrowness of outlook, characteristics of the Latin and of the Mediterranean man by bringing me into touch with Eastern Christians, Scandinavians, Anglo-Saxons and with their respective traditions. I have kept my Latin anthropological make-up, but have looked critically upon its limitations.*" (Congar 1963, pp. 72–73)

Ecclesial self-sufficiency does not preclude ecumenical engagement, but it has at its core the apprehension (fear) of losing or diluting one's identity because of or through ecumenical engagement. I recognise this predominantly in my own Orthodox Church.

Because of this apprehension, ecclesial self-sufficiency stands as the polar opposite of ecclesial interdependency, which sees 'the other' as vital to one's one identity and to coming closer to Christ, to the revealed truth of Christian identity as unity in and with Christ. Resistance to ecclesial interdependency is predicated on the simplistic but powerful fear that it seeks the formation of a syncretic truth or identity. Rather, ecclesial interdependency puts at the core of Christian identity—both in its ecumenical expression and in its 'denominational' embodiment—the need for relationship, dialogue, and knowing each other. It perceives of these things not as secondary or as a residual effect of ecumenical interaction, but as essential to Christian ecclesial identity. Ecclesial interdependency joins

and sees compatibility between being firm in one's faith and, at the same time, open to 'the other', as part of the Church's natural response to Christ's prayer for unity.

The preponderance of ecclesial self-sufficiency as the default modus vivendi of many of the Churches involved in ecumenical dialogues is a major contributor to the 'theological climate crisis' facing Christianity in today's world. By 'theological climate crisis' I mean the observable dismantling of our established/shared ecosystems of belief and practice, which struggle to cope with decades and centuries of erosion of the unified Christian message and witness in the world—certainly in the Western world.

For example, a Pew Research Centre study of 2015 projects that by 2050, Christianity will involve the same percentage of the world population as in 2010 (31.4%)[7], which despite growth, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and East-Asia[8], means a real-terms stagnation or decline. It is worth pondering that the growth of Christianity in the Global South is attributed to Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches, which are the least engaged in the ecumenical movement. Despite the fragmentation associated with Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity, one element that stands out is their unique approach and affirmation of ecclesial interdependency—manifested in the form of international Church networks that create and project (the message and reality of) a connected ecclesial world-wide ecosystem—something glaringly missing from the way the other Christian Churches tackle the ecclesial ecumenical agenda.

The theological expression of our 'theological climate crisis' fuelled by ecclesial self-sufficiency is twofold. On the one hand, it manifests as a form of '*ecclesial idolatry*' in relation to God, rooted in ecclesial self-sufficiency, and, on the other hand, as '*kerygmatic irrelevance*' in relation to society, to the world.

Ecclesial self-sufficiency is a form of ecclesial idolatry overwhelmingly responsible for the 'ecumenical theological climate crisis' of our time because—regardless of the particular manifestation it may take in various Churches—the same dynamic is at play, i.e., Christ and the Gospel are eclipsed by the institution of the Church and by all the ecclesial theological paraphernalia that transform faith identity into the religious identity of external observances and '*isms*'.

In the context of the Orthodox Church, this danger (reality?) was pointed to by Fr. Alexander Schmemann in his Journals (Schmemann 2000). Wonderfully introduced by Fr. John Jillions, in his article "Thicket of Idols": Alexander Schmemann's Critique of Orthodoxy" (Jillions 2019), Schmemann decries the way in which the Orthodox Church

> "*is perpetually looking backward to a mythic past rather than forward to the coming of Christ and his Kingdom, thus robbing Orthodoxy of its original eschatological vision. Instead of living the tension between history and eschatology . . . Orthodoxy has settled comfortably for "hopelessly Constantinian" Byzantine and Slavic worlds that substituted spirituality for Christ (208).*" (Jillions 2019, p. 22)

Schmemann's diagnosis is stark and, regrettably, has not become outdated in the more than four decades since it was put across:

> "*What happened was the reduction of the Church to a mysterious piety, the dying of its eschatological essence and mission, and finally the de-Christianization of this world and its secularization.*" (Ibid., p. 22)

When the Church becomes sufficient to itself, familiar and comfortable with what clearly and particularly designates its expression in the world, it rejects whatever is perceived as potentially disruptive to the socio-institutional and historical construct of its identity. God, Christ himself, becomes a historic figure, whose commandment to trade and exchange one's talents to multiply them until He returns is deemed too risky to the entire establishment, to the degree that self-sufficiency becomes the norm—even more, it becomes a virtue—as it completely does away with the risk of losing anything by external engagement. What this achieves, though, is to introduce a distance between the Church and its Lord, between the Body and the Head. The Church listens to its own self-taught defensive impulse, piously protecting a mythic past and a socio-constructed identity,

rather than listening to Christ's call to live out the eschatological tension between history and eschatology.

Ecumenism is part of that tension; it requires reaching out, it requires challenging one's deep-seated assumptions (about oneself and about 'the other'). Moreover, it puts into even sharper relief how ecclesial self-sufficiency becomes ecclesial idolatry. When ecumenism is either dismissed off-hand (as heresy or betrayal) or engaged in as performative action instead of an exercise in learning, openness (vulnerability), and humility, then it generates an inner-looking dynamic excluding 'the other' and, by extension, the Christ present in that 'other'.

I still see this, more often than one would have expected by now, in how my own Orthodox Church negotiates its ecumenical commitment. The idol of self-sufficiency deforms Christ's prayer for the unity of those who believe in Him into a parochial, denominational exercise and relegates it from a universal, vital, dialogical and eschatological vison for unity in the image and likeness of the Trinity (*"that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you"*) to an optional, one-sided exercise in theological haggling.

2.2. 'The Problems of Other Churches Are Not Our Problems' Adage—The Crisis of 'Kerygmatic Irrelevance'

Outside of the confines of the Church, in society, ecclesial self-sufficiency leads to 'kerygmatic irrelevance'[9]. What do I mean by 'kerygmatic irrelevance'? I mean to say that the proclamation of the 'Good News' is no longer a cohesive herald's call that has to do with an *existential encounter* with God in the Lord Jesus Christ at the level of both structures and persons, but rather a cacophony of voices carrying a denominational message—a tradition-specific message—to which today's secular and disenchanted society (of Europe and, increasingly, of the U.S.A.) or the non-Christian contexts of the Middle and Far East react with indifference or cynicism.

It is well documented in scholarship that the landscape of Christian belief and practice in both Europe and the U.S.A. has been changing from the 1960s, in a diminishing trend. Even in Eastern Europe[10] and Russia,[11] the Orthodox Church is facing disenfranchisement[12], with the number of active or practicing believers in single or low double-digit territory despite high percentages of nominal affiliation. In part, this has to do with internal aspects specific to each Church, but the wider ecumenical dissonance today has a compounding effect.

Failure to move away from an ecclesial self-sufficiency outlook results in a failure to witness coherently, which in turn translates as the decline or erosion of religious belief, identity, and practice in society. We see this both within specific Christian traditions and in global Christianity, and I will exemplify this briefly with two pertinent examples.

The 2021 U.K. census indicated, in a stark but unsurprising first, that less than half of the population of England and Wales considered themselves Christian[13]. Another telling example, also based on census data, comes from a historically and predominantly Orthodox country, Romania, where the Orthodox Church faced, for the first time ever, a decline in the percentage of affiliation within the span of a decade (from 16,307,004 at the 2011 census = 86.45% to 14,025,064 at the 2021 census = 85.541%)[14]. It represents only 0.9 of a percentage point, but in population terms, it marks a significant decline of almost 2.3 million people. The trend is not dissimilar across Europe, although there are local variations. Corroborated with data from the U.S.[15]—where there is statistical evidence to support the claim for loss of affiliation and church attendance for both Protestants and Catholics—matched by a rise in the number of the religiously non-affiliated ('nones'), it paints a picture of an overall diminishing landscape for Christianity.

The reasons for the decline are complex, varied, and often very contextual (and go beyond the scope of this paper), but the pattern for religious disaffiliation from Christianity seems to include a combination of pluralism, social emancipation, and mobility—prompted by migration, higher levels of education, and the mixing of religion and politics on the one hand[16] and a failure of transmission of the faith to the younger generations on the other

hand. This failure of faith transmission can be framed theologically both as a 'hermeneutical crisis' (where the Church is unable to palliate the gap between a dynamic society and an 'immobile' faith identity, usually linked with ethnicity or 'traditional values') and as a 'failure to witness' because of fragmentation and polarisation, often caused by narrow-minded attitudes to significant issues of faith in society, from the role of women to worship language, to ecumenical engagement.

This has ecclesial self-sufficiency writ large. It does not just amount to a failure to witness authentically within the ecosystem of one's own tradition but is connected to the wider failure to witness ecumenically in society. It is, in effect, a combination of both, since part of the societal hermeneutical crisis experienced by many Christian Churches today cannot be disjointed from the global ecumenical hermeneutic crisis.

Ecumenism is not a panacea for the crisis of relevance and witness that confronts traditional forms of Christianity today, but it provides a context in which Christian Churches can look at solutions together and learn from each other—mistakes and successes both. Not dissimilar to the ecological climate breakdown, what we understand as the history-bound reality of the Church will not be safeguarded and will not be made relevant in today's globalised, pluralistic, interconnected, and dominantly secular, in many contexts, world, except by concerted action from all Churches. It is not only concentrated action against poverty, sickness, humanitarian relief, and the like (because Churches are not just "religious relief NGOs"), but also concerted action at the level of theological, sacramental, and eschatological vision and practice that is required. To be clear, I am not referring here to a crisis of diminishing numbers (although this is part of the issue) but to a crisis of relevance in the world, which I perceive to be fundamentally related to a failure to engage ecumenically.

Not to act ecumenically with renewed urgency is to drive ourselves to irrelevance and extinction, despite God's beautiful design. The difficulties in ecumenical cooperation mirror those in the climate crisis, as individual Churches, much like individual states, have to negotiate their own internal challenges, the needs and tensions of their own 'households', over and against those of the wider *oikumene*. What hope is there for the Church to fulfil its calling to convert (i.e., redeem) the world, to be the vehicle of new life in the world, when it cannot convert, when it cannot redeem its own internal reality? If Christians cannot find the language, the action, the process to speak and exist towards each other in a way that leads to unity, how will they find it in relation to a secular, pluralistic, globalised world?

Ecclesial self-sufficiency postulates that 'the problems of other Churches are not our problems'. Ecumenism affirms that we cannot insulate ourselves ecclesiologically from the global Christian ecosystem. In this context, failure to shift from ecclesial self-sufficiency and subscribe with urgency and accountability to the imperative for ecclesial interdependence in ecumenism is to bury one's talent (out of a misplaced fear of losing 'the gift' or of punishment) and is theologically counter-eschatological. In a more practical sense, it introduces in the theological ecosystem of the world-wide Christian Church radical damages that go beyond local or regional ecclesial ecology and rather mirror the planetary damage done to the natural world by the disunity, abuse, and power dynamics manifested in the secular world.[17]

2.3. The Misunderstanding of 'Spiritual Ecumenism'—Receptive Ecumenism as a Path towards Ecclesial Interdependence

Frustrations over the state of ecumenical progress and the lack interdependency could be expressed in the way that a short yet punchy article in *The Tablet*, on 23 January 2020, does. It led with the provocative title 'Ecumenism is stalled and needs a kick-start'[18]. The article was squarely pointing the finger for this stagnation at the current tamed familiarity between the various ecumenical actors, a familiarity which mediates and screens any impulse that may rock the proverbial ecclesial boat and which has transformed ecumenical engagement in a very proficient exercise in maintaining the status quo. The authors decried the safe negotiation of the ecumenical plateau where Churches have been for several decades

and were apt to offer an example of how difficult questions, which would require actual 'movement' towards one another, are avoided. Considering the case of Catholic–Anglican relations, it highlighted that "*neither side has ever asked the other the obvious question: what would be your terms for full sacramental sharing of ministries, so we can start acting out the unity we say we desire so much?*"

Familiarity and a reluctance to not inflict damage to the hard-won improvements in ecumenical relations can indeed fuel ecclesial self-sufficiency—we dare not revisit the new-found boundaries of our ecclesial identities, lest we "spoil the peace". It can also have the opposite effect—approaches such as the one distilled in the question above, which champion approaching ecclesial interdependence in this direct, almost transactional way. Such proposals can harm more than they help, as they seem to ignore the layers of complexity inherent in the process of growing into ecclesial interdependence.

One such theologically sensitive approach to breaking the ecumenical dialogue deadlock is Paul Murray's Receptive Ecumenism (Murray 2008; Murray et al. 2022), especially because one of its main lines of approach focuses on ecclesial interdependence and mutual learning (or ecclesial interdependence *as* mutual learning), in a spirit of humility and openness toward the other. Receptive Ecumenism postulates that

"*considerable further progress is indeed possible, but only if each of the traditions, both singly and jointly, makes a clear, programmatic shift from prioritizing the question "What do our various others first need to learn from us?" to asking instead, "What is that <u>we</u> need to learn and can learn, or receive, with integrity from our others?"* (Murray 2014)

Receptive Ecumenism is a very compelling approach, deeply spiritual, and one that provides a more human (as opposed to institutional), humble, and grassroot-oriented avenue for the ecumenical journey—which it frames in terms of mutual learning and exchange of gifts. This receptive, learning approach is a blueprint for letting go of ecclesial self-sufficiency and, in my view, can go a long way toward addressing some of the damages arising from ecclesial self-sufficiency. By taking a spiritual, learning approach, Receptive Ecumenism seeks to reconnect and rebalance the theological aspects of ecumenism with the practical hurdles that get in the way of observable progress.

Receptive Ecumenism is not a silver bullet (none of its creditors claim this), and my concern for its effectiveness lies not in any of its tenets, but in the fact that to succeed, it must break new ground where the original modern ecumenical paradigm failed: it has to engage 'the many', not just those already on the inside of the ecumenical endeavour, and it must not tolerate to be perceived as a 'facelift' to what is 'the same old structure' underneath, but claim itself as the start of a renewed ecumenical paradigm. One way of doing this is to, gradually and considerately, move Receptive Ecumenism from its current confines of being primarily an academic exercise in creating a taxonomy of receptiveness, as it were, into the nitty-gritty of grassroots-applied receptivity. It has to be embraced by bishops and by deans of theological seminaries and tried out in student exchanges and in communities—initially, in urban parishes, because of their more plural and diverse constituencies. It then must use the 'shop floor' feedback to evaluate, readjust, and refine the approach.

Ecclesial interdependence cannot take shape unless we reframe ecclesial identity as witnessing to a journey. This 'journey witness attitude' is beneficial both to the ecumenical encounter itself and to the internal perception of each Church. This is not to minimise centuries of historic and theological development that shape the identity of the various Churches. Rather, it is to enact a radical shift in how historic and theological development is used, that is, not as fortified positions from which we sally forth in our ecumenical encounters, only to return and fortify them even more, but as living identity constructs that exist in a wider, interconnected ecclesial ecosystem.

Ecumenism realised in the major key of the 'clash of theological civilisations' misses out on a humble but key realisation—that our theological civilisations, despite the monolithic assurance they project, are kept together by small and fragile threads, by details that have to do with 'being on a journey'. Learning to identify the details of what makes the other

one's identity is one of the core dynamics of ecclesial interdependence—these fragile details range from considering how individuals we meet have been shaped in their personal faith character, to how things that sit just outside of a theological rationale (one may call them para-theological issues) shape that very rationale, e.g., nationalism, imperialism, totalitarianism, democracy, ethnoreligiosity, persecution, etc.

Ecclesial interdependency reshapes and reboots the terms of the ecumenical encounter by inviting us to pay attention to the details, to the fragility that is inevitably a part of the monolithic theological identity of the one we encounter as an 'other'. So, to borrow from the spirit of Paul Murray's question "What is that *we* need to learn and can learn, or receive, with integrity from our others?", I see the practice of ecclesial interdependence being framed in the attention called upon by the question "*What are the 'para-theological details' that hold the identity of the other together, as they engage with or reject me?*"

How does one move from ecclesial self-sufficiency to a place of ecclesial interdependence? Receptive ecumenism calls out for accountability and urgency.

3. Urgency and Accountability as the Place to Start

In the ecumenical movement, *urgency* and *accountability* may appear peripheral when considered against issues like *mission, justice and peace, diakonia, fellowship, or visible unity*. However, without a sense of *urgency* about the state of ecumenical progress, the perception (if not the reality) that ecumenism and the ecumenical consciousness that it generated has stalled will only continue to gain ground.

What must this sense of urgency be about? It must be about the reappropriation of the core of the Christian kerygma—i.e., the reconciliation and the restoration of unity between God and Man and between people themselves by the radical salvific action of Jesus Christ and the unabridged response of humanity to Christ's action, as embodied in the Church. It must be about the realisation that no one Church or Christian tradition will make a difference in the world on its own—in isolation or in spite of the others. It must be about realising that the only way forward toward that radical transformation of the world is through ecumenical effort, even as it is an imperfect effort. It must be about the realisation that it will remain an imperfect effort while it is not committed to with a sense of urgency and humble openness towards one another. And, finally, it must be about the realisation that any half-measure commitment to Christ's prayer for mutual love and oneness is not just a half-measure commitment to a flawed, perfectible human effort, but indeed is a half-measure response to Christ's last commandment to his disciples.

Correspondingly, the key to this much needed urgency rests with a renewed sense of *accountability*. This accountability must be three-pronged as follows: by all Churches *towards the ecumenical process itself*, by Churches *towards each other*, and by Churches *towards their own home context*.

We have become accustomed to spelling out these issues in subdued theological language like '*ecumenical commitment to shared witness*' for 'urgency' and '*ecumenical fellowship*' for 'accountability', rather than using words that aim to inject a sense of exigency to our ecumenical reality. For example, what difference would it make, in practice, to move from '*ecumenical commitment to shared witness*' to '*ecumenical implementation of shared witness*'? I believe the difference has to do with accountability and may result in agendas for joint work that could range from local networks for ecumenical cooperation on social issues to awareness workshops about the actual theological and spiritual progress in ecumenical dialogue, especially on key sacramental issues. These networks could initially be informal—but with episcopal blessing—and could include local clergy and interested lay Christians from neighbouring communities. It is extraordinary that even in the West, where Orthodox communities live alongside or even share worship spaces with Western Christians, and there is a greater sense of mutual dependency, this kind of initiative is virtually non-existent.

Being satisfied with the lingua franca of the soft ecumenical language of 'commitment' and 'fellowship' without practical tethers is to ringfence the issues of accountability and

urgency behind 'theological newspeak'. Ecumenical accountability starts with language. The non-specificity prevalent in ecumenical language lacks the urgency that commits to concrete action and creates an ecosystem geared around a 'perpetual engagement with terms'. Its second problem is that it paints over internal Church-specific issues which pit ecumenical commitment and dialogue against intra-denominational unity—this is structurally related to accountability. In that sense, *urgency* and *accountability* are the proverbial elephant in the ecumenical household, because of their intrinsic practical component.

Accountability in ecumenical engagement is crucial to the entire ecumenical endeavour because of the practical demands it places on what 'being ecumenical' means. Yes, we may agree on this and that issue, we may receive inspiring insights from one another, and this may lead to some degree of change in the nuances of our dialogue and theological formulations, but it is how we are accountable in practice that makes a difference. It is the incarnational aspect of accountability that changes the ecumenical reality.

The Orthodox Church and Ecumenical Accountability

The Orthodox Church is an excellent case study for examining the difficulty of embracing accountability as an ecumenical virtue—and indeed as an Orthodox virtue in ecumenical practice.

The Orthodox Church has a problem with ecumenical accountability because the dynamic of unity in the Orthodox Church is informed by looking inwardly for the source of accountability. It is flanked on one side by tradition (a particularly defensive and passive understanding of it) and on the other side by a perception of Orthodoxy as averse to pluralism (because of its propensity for schism). This generates a kernel of self-sufficiency in the ecumenical orientation of Orthodoxy, which places it at the antipode of receptive accountability. This manifests both within—as reflected by the state of the worldwide Orthodox Church today, where the most extreme and deformed expression of ecclesial self-sufficiency and partisan accountability is enacted in the Moscow Patriarchate–Ecumenical Patriarchate schism—and outwardly in the overall practical ecumenical engagement of the Orthodox.

The Georgian Orthodox theologian Tamara Grdzelidze diagnoses convincingly the failure of the Orthodox with respect to practical ecumenical learning by observing that while they learned a lot through the encounter, their learning is not really reflected in the doctrine and practice of the Orthodox Church (Grdzelidze 2022, p. 27). Grdzelidze's assessment is not uniquely applicable to the Orthodox and represents a valid diagnostic for many, if not all, Churches to varying degrees.

But why do the Orthodox, in particular, fall short on this issue? I think it is partly because accountability requires walking from the centre of one's own tradition to the boundaries of it, to a space where we can discern, as it were, "the space between boundaries". This is a vantage point where we can see as much into our own space as we can in the space beyond our borders. Only from here can we genuinely listen and be interested in what happens within the boundaries of 'the other'. In that sense, the role of accountability in ecumenism can be perceived as both a meeting place and a facilitating energy. But most Orthodox are reluctant to find themselves in that border space.

The other reason for the underdeveloped accountability and applied ecumenical receptiveness present in Orthodoxy is, simply put, that there is no motivation for it, in practice, in the Orthodox majority socio-religious contexts of Romania, Russia, Serbia, etc. Every time I re-visit my native Romania, I am reminded that the Orthodox there tend to live in a monolithic Orthodox structure that is not motivated to think receptively. To make a comparison, I have always felt that in these majority-Orthodox contexts, the ecumenical approach of the Orthodox is no different than that of a Saville Row tailor: it is open to visitors/customers who admire and are attracted by the legacy, the exquisite materials, the craftsmanship, and the selective club message. But, like a Saville Row tailor, the Orthodox are hardly motivated to open a stand in a marketplace. They might ponder in their fine

shop a kind of theoretic, academic type of receptive openness to what happens 'down the street' but will not feel compelled to venture outside.

This is related to the issue of ecclesial self-sufficiency and is compounded, as Grdzelidze argues in the same article, by the two-pronged difficulty that "*Orthodox participation in ecumenical dialogues is marked by an inner struggle between pre-modern and modern thinking*" (Ibid., p. 28) on the one hand, and that the perceived "oneness" of Orthodoxy is missing the practical institutional mechanisms for consensus decision-making and for speaking authoritatively as one body, on the other—like in the case of the Catholic Church. Grdzelidze asks the rhetorical question "*How is the relation between many (bodies) and one (Body) reflected in the Orthodox teaching today?*" (Ibid., p. 29).

What this means, in practice, is that there is no commonly held sense of accountability in the Orthodox Church as a whole—either for internal issues or for ecumenical matters. Yes, some individual Orthodox Churches may be more ecumenically receptive or accountable, but this does not absolutely commit other Orthodox Churches to the same response. What we are left with in Orthodoxy is a fragmented, parochial accountability that hinders progress.

This is detrimental to both the ecumenical movement in general and the Orthodox themselves, since as Fr. Ioan Sauca argues (Sauca 2004), even for the Orthodox, ecumenism is a vocation, a response to the Trinitarian gift of unity, made visible and accessible in Christ. In Sauca's words, "*The search for unity is for Orthodoxy an ontological vocation*" (Ibid., p. 219). But this ontological search for unity is sterile without ecumenical accountability and the development of a receptive ecumenical conscience, based on ecclesial co-dependency.

One way the Orthodox could better incorporate the virtue of accountability in ecumenical engagement is to perceive *accountability* as *discernment*. Understood as discernment, accountability opens itself to a spiritual/ascetic perspective conducive to the spiritual and practical transformation of relationships both for individuals and for communities. The virtue of discernment takes one on a journey from fear (of the unknown or the different) to love, because it circumscribes accountability towards oneself and the other to Christological accountability—the Christ in the other. For the Orthodox, recognising 'the Christ in the other' could be translated in terms of a journey to 'illumination' or 'deification'. This is a spiritual journey that cannot be separated from practical life-sharing. In this, it is also a prophetic preparation of the eschatological revelation of Christ (which in Matthew 25 is affirmed as Christ in the other).

Accountability is, therefore, the conduit between the mystical dimension of the Lord's injunction that we ought to love one another so that we may be one, as He is with the Father, on the one hand, and the human dimension of what it means to be in meaningful, enriching, listening, metanoic relationships, on the other. Accountability, in its ecumenical dimension, is an eschatological virtue, because it heralds in the here and now the relational reality of the Kingdom, where we are all one in God.

4. Components for a Rebooted Taxonomy of Ecumenical Engagement

Rebooting ecumenism is a process that has to happen simultaneously both in the existing global ecumenical structures and in the Churches themselves. Accountability and a sense of urgency for moving from ecclesial self-sufficiency to ecclesial interdependency should be the catalysts of this process, because without them, the crisis of 'kerygmatic irrelevance' in today's world will not be resolved.

4.1. Components for a Rebooted Taxonomy of Ecumenical Engagement at the Level of Ecumenical Structures

A rebooted ecumenical taxonomy should reframe the ecumenical process in the context of the 21st century, i.e., a post-colonial, globalised, more connected and plural world than in the 20th century, yet also more divided along partisan lines and polarising narratives. Ecumenism is realised today in a world where people and communities are routinely conditioned into choosing simple answers to complex problems. Ecumenism must avoid

the trap of simplification and stereotyping and be a force for critical yet nuanced exchanges rooted in Christian love and aim to foster learning rather than reinforcing prejudice.

To achieve this, ecumenism must showcase better and build upon the real progress in ecumenical rapprochement that has been taking place in the last 30 years, especially in Europe. This tends to happen mainly between Christians belonging to Western Churches, where ecumenical partnerships and groups, as well as shared ministry and inter-Communion, are commonplace. This has not been replicated in relation with the Orthodox, despite a significant increase in the Orthodox presence in Western Europe in the last 30 years, the possibilities of which have been greatly under-used ecumenically.

Fuelled by the enlargement of the E.U. to the East and, since, and even before that, by migration in the 1990s from majority-Orthodox countries, Orthodox Churches are now de facto local partners of western Churches, not just remote communities, with more than 1 million Orthodox in the U.K.,[19] 1.5 million in Germany, and more than 1.5 million in Italy (Hämmerli 2023, p. 42), to give only a few examples.

This has led to the appearance of an idiosyncratic 'Orthodox meadow' in the West, where communities, parishes, and Orthodox jurisdictions are being cross-pollinated by their very closeness, the inevitable ecumenical reaching out, and the currents of secularisation, cultural pluralism, de-institutionalisation, and weak links with secular state structures, which define Western European societies. However, as time passes, this wild Orthodox post-communist diaspora meadow in the West will move to become a walled or landscaped garden, as communities experience the inevitable process of sedimentation that the forces of habitus, tradition, and institutional consciousness eventually bring about. Therefore, a rebooted taxonomy of ecumenical engagement—certainly in Europe—ought to prioritise engagement with the Orthodox in the West.

A rebooted ecumenical taxonomy should adopt a local, zonal approach to the effort. Relations between Churches are different in Europe compared to Africa, South America, or the U.S.A.—one (ecumenical) size does not fit all. Relations are different even within the same zone; for example, in Europe, the ecumenical attitude and engagement of the Orthodox (even if it can be improved) is different in the West—more positive, more open, more nuanced—compared to the East (where ecumenical scepticism or downright anti-ecumenical attitudes that still appeal to labels of heresy or proselytism are commonplace) (Kalaitzidis 2013). Ecumenism cannot be rebooted in a global way except via a local approach, because at the core of ecumenism sits the struggle for Christian identity—and Christian identity, for all its universal, catholic, vocation is, in practice, shaped locally. This also means looking at grassroot models, or attempts, of ecumenical cohabitation.

Finally, one of the priorities of ecumenical engagement at the level of ecumenical structures in the 21st century ought to be the *creation of structures of accountability* that link up ecumenical processes with individual Church-specific realities. Without these structures, ecumenical receptivity will not flourish.

By the creation of structures of accountability, I do not mean the establishment of a new level of ecumenical bureaucracy. These structures need to be more organic in disposition and structure. To use a more body-oriented analogy, these structures of accountability must address the fact that 'the ecumenical breathing' of the Church is in some sense artificially maintained. Deeply embedded in the need to reboot ecumenism is the realisation that the ecumenical condition or 'health' of the Church is sustained only by a team of specialists, using specialist resources and speaking in jargon, and that the rest of the Body has not learned how to sustain it organically, on its own, or at least in a way less dependent on 'specialist supervision'.

It is a great challenge to the ecumenical movement that, instead of becoming a central part of ecclesial identity, the ecumenical practice of seeking unity is treated as a kind of extracurricular activity in the internal functioning and decision-making of member Churches. It has not been incorporated as an 'internal' practice and is not treated as essential to the proper functioning of Churches. The minority of specialists who are

involved ecumenically do not seem to be able (or invested) to convey its importance to the rest of the members,[20] who often look at these experts with suspicion or bewilderment.

This thin ecumenical consciousness, this high ecumenical tower with too small a base, is in my opinion one of the major reasons for the stagnation of ecumenical progress outside of the established familiar circles where it already takes place. The disconnect between 'the professionals' and 'the λαός' is a major factor of the lukewarm present condition of ecumenism. This gulf runs the risk of turning sterile even the existing progress in ecumenism, because the ecumenical family tree cannot self-pollinate ad infinitum—it needs to be replanted from its current walled garden into the meadow of the Church. For this, new structures of accountability are needed, both theological—like Receptive Ecumenism—and practical-institutional, with local, Church-specific character and awareness. One way of doing that, especially in the West, especially for the Orthodox, is to make more use of resources available through national ecumenical organisations—like Churches Together in England,[21] for example—and move from a largely nominal membership and participation to one that has impact in local ecumenical partnerships or collaborations. This, however, cannot be achieved without episcopal encouragement—something that should be addressed in relevant meetings.

4.2. Components for an Orthodox Rebooted Taxonomy of Ecumenical Engagement

The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, the most frequently served Liturgy in the Orthodox Church, is bookended by petitions for unity, tucked in longer litanies at the beginning and towards the end of the service. One of the petitions in the Great Litany at the opening of the service includes the words "For the peace of the whole world, for the welfare of the holy Churches of God and *for the unity of all*, let us pray to the Lord", and towards the end of the service, just before the reciting of the Lord's Prayer, we pray "*Having asked for the unity of the faith and the communion of the Holy Spirit*, let us commend ourselves, and each other, to Christ our God."

We need to hear these words as an ecumenical imperative, not just as a call internally addressed to the Orthodox. Therefore, an Orthodox rebooted taxonomy of ecumenical engagement has to have a sacramental, prayerful dimension—raising the questions "What would an Orthodox spiritual ecumenism look like, in practice?" and "What would it contribute to the existing outline of spiritual ecumenism?"

Part of that 'Orthodox spiritual ecumenism' could be shaped by looking back at the Patristic tradition and reappropriating voices from among the Church Fathers—like St. Basil the Great[22] or St. Gregory the Theologian—who, while firm in their faith and dogmatic positions, demonstrated a mature ecumenical consciousness and had a more irenic and sensitive approach to overcoming differences and repairing situations marred by disunity (where this was possible).

In his Oration 22, St. Gregory the Theologian treats disunity and a resistance to reconciliation as an alignment with the work of the Antichrist and a failure of love, arguing that "*he will not attack the strong or those who have closed ranks in love. No. First, the kingdom must be divided against itself.*" (Gregory of Nazianzus 2003, p. 122)

St. Gregory posits questions that cut too close for comfort, when one considers they were asked more than 1600 years ago, yet capture the state of the Christian world today:

> "*Why in the world, then, do we, the disciples of love, hate one another so? Why do we, the disciples of peace, engage in wars which do not admit of treaty or truce? Why are we, the disciples of the chief corner stone, detached from one another? Why do we, the disciples of the rock, wobble this way and that? Why are we, the disciples of light, blind?*"
> (Ibid., Oration 22.4, p. 120)

He also pencils out a structure of theological ecumenical accountability in restoring unity:

> "*Will we not put an end to this wrangling? Will we not determine what issues admit investigation and to what degree, and which exceed our capacity? [. . .] Will we not decide*

among ourselves which issues we should not look into at all, which should receive our attention, but with restrictions, and which we should concede and relinquish, whatever form they take, to those who like to argue, on the grounds that they are matters that do not adversely affect our doctrine in any way? Which, too, are the exclusive province of faith, and which are receptive to our powers of thought as well? Which again are also worth fighting for, not with weapons, but with reason ardently applied?" (Ibid., Oration 22.11, p. 125)

St. Gregory seems at pains not to lose the middle ground of engagement between differing factions, not to allow them to lose sight of what they hold in common, which should be more than enough—if approached in the spirit of peace and reconciliation—to help them overcome, in conversation, their differences. St. Gregory projects a realistic hope that disagreement can be overcome, because of the faith content that is held in common, when he says

"we shall reach agreement on all the other points as well; after all, we worship the same Trinity, subscribe to virtually the same beliefs, and belong to the same body; and the futile and barren offshoots and excrescences of the issues currently under discussion we shall cut away like a public cancer and destroy." (Ibid., Oration 22.12, p. 126)

and because he believes that striving for unity and reconciliation, even in an imperfect human way, is a form of imitatio Dei, entering into God's eternal work of restauration:

"For it is God who first and foremost will decide and settle these issues, he who establishes a bond between all things; and second, those of mankind who work for the good and recognize the blessings of concord. These blessings originate with the Holy Trinity, whose unity of nature and internal peace are its most salient characteristic, . . . [which] extend to the whole of creation, whose glory is its absence of conflict." (Ibid., Oration 22.14, p. 128)

The Orthodox possess the sacramental, patristic, and practical resources to contribute to the rebooting of the ecumenical movement. Appropriating ecumenical accountability as a virtue and as part of the process of deification in the Orthodox context will help placate the self-sufficiency and monolithic thinking characteristic of religious structures and socio-religious milieus where Orthodoxy exists as a majority Church.

In that sense, the Orthodox experience of the diaspora, given the inevitability of proximal, practical cohabitational ecumenism in the West, is a major opportunity for meaningful inroads towards a practically functional and theologically appropriate receptive ecumenical orientation for the Orthodox Church, rooted in accountability and a renewed sense of ecclesial interdependence. There is, in this context, an opportunity for the kenotic application of ecclesial identity in relationship with 'the other' that is essential for the future of the whole Church of Christ.

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Notes

[1] Ecumenism as a matter of ecclesiology and eschatology is understood here in the sense of the Church fundamentally existing as 'life in Christ', as the locus of ultimate truth, as the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, which is the unity of all in and through Christ, with the Father and the Holy Sprit. The link between ecclesiology and eschatology was expounded by Fr. Alexander Schmemann in his article (Schmemann 1967) and also in his article (Schmemann 1977).

[2] Mystagogy, Gr. μυσταγωγία (*hidden meaning, interpretation of mystery, leading through the mysteries*) is associated with the process of entering or participating in a sacrament, originally that of Baptism, and by extension, into the sacramental, mystical reality of the Church as the Body of Christ. Not to engage with ecumenism (in the sense of the process for and practice of the unity of the Body of Christ) as a matter of mystagogy is to misinterpret the process altogether and to rob it of its proper, scriptural, mystical, and synergic character, i.e., to negate that the process involves, by its very nature and origin (John 17: 20–21), something that transcends one's ability to grasp it rationally or as part of a binary cause-and-effect dynamic.

3   https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/achievements (accessed on 18 January 2024).

4   Consider the latest examples, one from the Orthodox and one from the Protestant ends of the ecumenical spectrum: the *Russkii mir* teaching of the Moscow Patriarchate (see Coman 2023) or the controversial decision (criticised by both opponents and proponents of same-sex marriage) by the Church of England to approve the blessing in church of same-sex couples, https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/prayers-gods-blessing-same-sex-couples-take-step-forward-after-synod-debate (accessed on 6 March 2024).

5   *Challenges Facing the Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century*, (available at https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/challenges-facing-the-ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century) (accessed on 6 March 2024).

6   https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/prospects-and-challenges-for-ecumenism-and-the-ecumenical-movement (accessed on 6 March 2024).

7   https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/ (accessed on 5 January 2024).

8   https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2021-03/is-christianity-shrinking-or-shifting (accessed on 5 January 2024).

9   Kerygma, Gr. κήρυγμα (*to preach, to proclaim*).

10 https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/08/orthodox-christians-are-highly-religious-in-ethiopia-much-less-so-in-former-soviet-union/pf_11-08-17_orthodoxy-02-00/ (accessed on 20 October 2023).

11 https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/05/29/russians-are-not-waiting-for-a-church-boom-a65792 (accessed on 11 November 2023).

12 For a relevant empirical study on the disenfranchisement rates of Orthodox Christians in the U.S.A., see (Krindatch 2020) and (Malkhasyan 2020) (I am grateful to Fr. Abraham for making his manuscript available to me).

13 (46%, 13.3% lower in a decade, from 59.3% at the 2011 census), https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ethnic-group-national-identity-language-and-religion-census-2021-in-england-and-wales (accessed on 20 December 2023).

14 https://eurel.info/spip.php?rubrique470&lang=en (accessed on 23 November 2023).

15 https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/ (accessed on 5 January 2024).

16 https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/how-u-s-religious-composition-has-changed-in-recent-decades/#Disaffiliation-among-older-adults (accessed on 4 January 2024).

17 NB. This is not to ignore the role that Churches themsleves have had (still have) in damaging the natural world, either because of a history of colonialism (in the West) or because of disunity, abuse, and power dynamics—as for the war in Ukraine, as the latest example, where the environmental damage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (blessed by the Moscow Patriarchate) has been significant and long-lasting. See a paper by the E.U. Parliament on this issue: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/751427/EPRS_ATA(2023)751427_EN.pdf (accessed on 7 March 2024).

18 https://www.thetablet.co.uk/editors-desk/1/17430/ecumenism-is-stalled-and-needs-a-kick-start (accessed on 29 July 2023).

19 As of 31 March 2023, Romanian nationals' applications for the E.U. Settlement Scheme in the U.K. were 1,479,460 million. (https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/eu-settlement-scheme-quarterly-statistics-march-2023/eu-settlement-scheme-quarterly-statistics-march-2023). Considering that the same ratio applies to Romanian migrants in the U.K. (85.3% of Romanians identified as Orthodox at the 2021 census), that would imply that there are at least 1,261,979 million Romanian Orthodox in the U.K.

20 For a more extensive treatment of the issue of 'ecumenical consciousness' and why it has not developed on a wider scale, see (Oxley 2010, especially ch. 6, pp. 161–71).

21 https://cte.org.uk/working-together/local/unity-at-a-local-level/, accessed on 2 February 2024.

22 For example, St. Basil's Canon. 1., from his Epistle 188, where he pastorally but not confoundingly navigates the way in which schismatics can be joined to his Church, for the sake of unity.

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