



Praveen Joy Saldanha

## Nicholas Afanasiev's Dissent from Universal Ecclesiology: The Rise of Eucharistic Ecclesiology

### Abstract

Nicholas Afanasiev (1893-1966) is one of the renowned Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century who coined the term 'Eucharistic ecclesiology'. Afanasiev developed his Eucharistic understanding of ecclesiology in contrast to Cyprian's universal ecclesiology. Afanasiev claims that, for the early Christians of the first three centuries, the Eucharist was the reason to come together as Eucharistic assemblies; thus, the Eucharist was forming the Church. The juridical or canonical understanding of the Church that emerged after Cyprian's ecclesiology, however, is the reason for the shift from the Eucharistic ecclesiology to the universal ecclesiology. Drawing inspiration from 'the return to the sources', especially from the works of Ignatius of Antioch, he develops his integral understanding



Rev. Praveen Joy Saldanha (Karnataka, India) is a doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, where he is a member of the Research Unit Systematic Theology and the Study of Religions. He was ordained as priest in 2015 for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Mangalore, India.

of Eucharistic ecclesiology by dissenting from Cyprian's universal ecclesiology. The rise of Eucharistic ecclesiology brought fresh air into the field of ecclesiology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, this article analyses the key aspects to see why and how Afanasiev dissents from Cyprian's universal ecclesiology and how he develops the basic tenets of Eucharistic ecclesiology by returning to the sources and in contrast to universal ecclesiology. Moreover, his approach of contrasting universal ecclesiology with Eucharistic ecclesiology will be critically analysed to see how far Afanasiev is correct in his dissent concerning Cyprian's universal ecclesiology. The article concludes by shedding light upon Afanasiev's contribution to the field of ecclesiology by developing his Eucharistic ecclesiology.

### Keywords

Eucharistic Ecclesiology, Nicholas Afanasiev, Cyprian of Carthage, Universal Ecclesiology, Local Church, Universal Church, Eucharist

## 1 Introduction

Russian Orthodox theologian Nicholas Afanasiev (1893-1966) occupies a unique place among the theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for his contribution to Eucharistic ecclesiology. He is considered "the most original ecclesio­logist of the Russian emigration"<sup>1</sup> and his Eucharistic ecclesiology is regarded as an im-

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Valliere, *The Influence of Russian Religious Thought on Western Theology in the Twentieth Century*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, eds. Caryl Emerson et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 664 (660-676).

portant benchmark in the development of modern Orthodox ecclesiology.<sup>2</sup> Some of his renowned works are *The Church of the Holy Spirit* (1948), *The Lord's Supper* (1950), "The Church Which Presides in Love" (1960), "Una Sancta" (1963).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he was an observer at Vatican II and his work was quoted in the footnotes of drafts of *De Ecclesia*.<sup>4</sup> Drawing inspiration from 'the return to the sources,' especially from the works of Ignatius of Antioch, he developed his integral understanding of Eucharistic ecclesiology by dissenting from Cyprian's universal ecclesiology that was prevalent in the Church from the third century onwards. We will unpack his argumentation and evaluate his dis-

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<sup>2</sup> Radu Bordeianu, Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue: Retrieving Eucharistic Ecclesiology, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44/2 (2009), p. 240 (239-265).

<sup>3</sup> Afanasiev's works were not published as per the time when they were written. The dates in brackets represent the time of writing. The titles mentioned above were published as: *L'Église du Saint Esprit* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1975) and its English translation *The Church of the Holy Spirit* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); *Le Repas du Seigneur*, *Contacts* 68 (2016), pp. 445-571; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, in *The Primacy of Peter in the Orthodox Church*, ed. John Meyendorff et al. (London: The Faith Press, 1963), pp. 57-110; *Una Sancta*, *Irénikon* 36 (1963), pp. 436-475, translated in English as *Una Sancta* in *Tradition Alive*, ed. Michael Plekon (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pp. 3-30.

<sup>4</sup> See *AS (Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani Secundi)* I/4, 87, n. 2.1; AS II/1, 251-252, n. 57; AS III/1, 253-254. Afanasiev's essay "The Church Which Presides in Love" was widely read among the bishops present at the Council. Moreover, precisely this essay has been referred to in a footnote in both the first and second draft of *De Ecclesia* and in the third draft a *relatio* explicitly recognizes his influence on a new insertion in *Lumen Gentium* § 26. Cf. Paul McPartlan, *Ressourcement, Vatican II and Eucharistic Ecclesiology*, in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, eds. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 403 (392-404); Anastacia Wooden, Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanasiev and Its Ecumenical Significance: A New Perspective, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 45/4 (2010), pp. 543-544 (543-560).

sent concerning Cyprian's universal ecclesiology. The paper concludes by shedding light upon Afanasiev's contribution to the field of ecclesiology.

## 2 The Central Aim of Afanasiev's Eucharistic Ecclesiology

Afanasiev observed that the true nature of the Church was not visible in Eastern ecclesiology, and neither in the Western ecclesiology that had been developed from the medieval period onwards. Hence, he undertook the important task of revisiting the history of early Christianity to uncover the primitive vision of the Church that was concealed behind ecclesial structures as well as the empirical or juridical factors that seemed to be alien to the primitive nature of the Church.<sup>5</sup> Michael Plekon remarks that Afanasiev's Eucharistic ecclesiology is to be considered "his response both to the actual and decadent conditions of ecclesial life in Orthodoxy and to the ecclesiological positions of the pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church and Reformation Churches."<sup>6</sup> For Afanasiev, reviving the ecclesiology of the early Church was significant to understand the true nature of the Church in its originality:

"As with all of history, that of the Church is irreversible. We cannot return to the time of early Christianity, not only because of radically changed historical conditions but also because the experience of the Holy Spirit's guidance of the church, accumulated through the passage of time, cannot be laid aside. Nevertheless, the time of early Christianity remains an ideal for us, according to which we must check our ecclesial life. It was the time when the nature of the Church shone clearly through the fabric of history. Examining this first era should assist us in eliminating the superficial deposit

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<sup>5</sup> Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 255-256.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Plekon, 'Always Everyone and Always Together': The Eucharist Ecclesiology of Nicholas Afanasiev's *The Lord's Supper* Revisited, *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 (1997), p. 154 (141-174).

formed by historical events and show us more clearly the path to follow.”<sup>7</sup>

It is important to distinguish the obsolete empirical factors from the really ecclesial ones so that the life of the Church responds to the current and historical aspects of its existence. Once the crust of empirical elements that impede the true nature of the Church crumbles down, the true nature of the Church in its originality, i.e., the Church whose living source is the Eucharist, will appear to us.<sup>8</sup> Victor Alexandrov asserts that Afanasiev possessed a rare gift of reasoning and a clear presentation of his thoughts. However, he did not leave a systematic exposition of his entire Eucharistic ecclesiology due to the pioneering nature of his work.<sup>9</sup>

### 3 The Basic Tenets of Afanasiev's Ecclesiological Vision

Afanasiev begins his reflections on ecclesiology by asserting that the different models of the Church that have come up in history could be reduced to two fundamental types: Eucharistic ecclesiology and universal ecclesiology.<sup>10</sup> Although universal ecclesiology had been predominantly followed in Western Christianity, as well as in the Orthodox Church throughout the last centuries, it is not the earliest ecclesiological model of the Church. Afanasiev states: “universal ecclesiology [...] is not the primitive ecclesiology, but quite the reverse: it has taken the place of a different

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<sup>7</sup> Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 256-257.

<sup>8</sup> Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, p. 256.

<sup>9</sup> Victor Alexandrov, *La théologie du père Nicolas Afanassiëff, Le Messager Orthodoxe* 159/2 (2015), p. 40 (35-47).

<sup>10</sup> Afanasiev clarifies that when he speaks of different ecclesiologies, he refers to different conceptions of the Church and not to different churches. Afanasiev, *La doctrine de la primauté à la lumière de l'ecclésiologie, Istina* 4 (1957), p. 407 (401-420). Afanasiev mentions that although one finds different ecclesiologies that were not necessarily mutually exclusive in the history of Christian thought, they differ enough from each other to shed a different light on this or that fact of the history of the Church. Afanasiev, *L'apôtre Pierre et l'Évêque de Rome, Theologia* 26 (1955), p. 466 (465-475).

ecclesiology which I call Eucharistic.”<sup>11</sup> Alexander Schmemmann agrees with Afanasiev’s categorization of these two ecclesiological interpretations of organic unity.<sup>12</sup> As the universal ecclesiology became predominant, the Eucharistic ecclesiology that prevailed in the primitive Church almost disappeared in the later centuries.<sup>13</sup> Hence, Afanasiev’s Eucharistic ecclesiology is an attempt to restore the self-understanding of the Church that prevailed during the first three Christian centuries.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.1 Universal Ecclesiology

According to Afanasiev, universal ecclesiology appears mainly in the writings of Cyprian of Carthage (c.200-258), who focused on preserving the visible unity of the Church in the midst of a series of schisms and internal ecclesial problems. Regarding the unity of the Church, Afanasiev mentions that Cyprian’s ecclesiological model derived inspiration from two aspects: first, the organization of the Roman Empire, where one can notice that the emperor guaranteed the empirical unity of its provinces; second, the Pauline image of the body and its various parts or organs,

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<sup>11</sup> Afanasiev, *L’Église qui préside*, p. 26; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> Schmemmann states that Afanasiev, in a series of articles, has shown that “there existed (and still exist) two ecclesiological elaborations or interpretations of this organic unity: the Universal and the Eucharistic. This distinction is of capital importance for the understanding of the Orthodox idea of primacy.” Alexander Schmemmann, *The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology*, in *The Primacy of Peter*, eds. John Meyendorff et al. (London: The Faith Press, 1963), p. 35 (30-56).

<sup>13</sup> Anastacia Wooden remarks that although universal ecclesiology replaced Eucharistic ecclesiology by the fourth century, it did not disappear completely but rather preserved in the patterns of the worship of the Church and in different elements of ecclesial life to some extent. Anastacia Wooden, *The Limits of the Church: Ecclesiological Project of Nicolas Afanasiev* (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., 2019), p. 371.

<sup>14</sup> Viorel Coman, *Dumitru Stăniloae’s Trinitarian Ecclesiology: Orthodoxy and the Filioque* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019), p. 231.

which do not exist or function properly without the whole.<sup>15</sup> Afanasiev asserts that Cyprian drew inspiration from these two aspects and constructed his universal understanding of the Church: the Church is a unique organism that is spread around the whole world but divided into many parts (local churches). Hence, the local church is considered as a part of the universal Church and does not have ecclesial value in itself, but rather only through the participation in the whole. In other words, the local church derives its ecclesial nature only when it has its rooting in the universal Church.<sup>16</sup> Afanasiev shows that according to the understanding of universal ecclesiology, local churches do not possess fullness and unity; being parts of the Church, they together form the universal Church that possesses fullness and unity.<sup>17</sup>

Afanasiev argues that the universal ecclesiology of Cyprian portrays the episcopate as the empirical factor and the visible sign of the unity of the Church. Moreover, the unity of the episcopate is the basis of the unity of the local churches because the episcopate is one: "*Episcopatus unus est* because the 'throne of Peter is one', in which God has established and shown the source of all

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<sup>15</sup> Afanasiev, *L'Église qui préside*, pp. 12-14; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, pp. 59-61. Afanasiev points out that Cyprian brought into the Church the Roman concept of empire. Afanasiev, *La doctrine de la primauté*, p. 403.

<sup>16</sup> Afanasiev, *L'Église qui préside*, p. 11; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>17</sup> Afanasiev, *L'Église qui préside*, p. 13; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 61. Alexander Schmemmann notes: "The universal ecclesiology finds its fullest expression in Roman Catholic theology, crowned by the Vatican dogma of 1870. Here the only adequate expression of the Church as organism is the universal structure of the Church, its universal unity. The Church is the *sum* of all local churches, which all together *constitute* the Body of Christ. The Church is thus conceived in terms of *whole* and *parts*. Each community, each local church is but a part, a member of this universal organism; it participates in the Church only through its belonging in the 'whole'." Schmemmann, *The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology*, p. 35.

unity.”<sup>18</sup> Each bishop is the head of a local church and also the successor of Peter. He serves as a sign of unity only when he is in communion with all the bishops who form the one episcopate. Hence, what makes a bishop a sign of the Church’s unity is his membership in the episcopal college and not his role as the chief pastor of the diocesan community that is entrusted to him. The unity of a bishop with other bishops in the episcopal college is a concrete sign, which shows that his local church is a part of the universal and catholic Church. Through their bishops, local churches are united together to form the universal Church. Hence, the principle of unity of the Church is attributed to the multiplicity of bishops united in peace.<sup>19</sup> Besides, Cyprian’s understanding fosters the limits of the Church based on the episcopate: “The bishop is in the Church and the Church in the bishop, and if anyone is not with the bishop, he is not in the Church.”<sup>20</sup> Afanasiev asserts that the universal ecclesiology of Cyprian, indeed, leads to the doctrine of primacy. Since every local church has one bishop as the head, the universal church, too, ought to have one bishop as the head. Although Cyprian had not drawn any conclusion from his ecclesiology that the bishop of Rome is to be regarded as the head of the universal Church, as Afanasiev mentions, his ecclesiological model inevitably demands a doctrine of primacy.<sup>21</sup> Theologians such as Bernard P. Prusak,<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Afanasiev, *L’Église qui préside*, p. 14; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 62. Idem, *Una Sancta*, p. 449; *Una Sancta*, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Afanasiev, *L’Église qui préside*, pp. 14-15; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>20</sup> Cyprian, *Epist. LXVI*, VIII, 3; cited in Afanasiev, *Una Sancta*, p. 451; *Una Sancta*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> Referring to Cyprian’s understanding of the Church, Afanasiev asserts: “If a universal theory of the Church is adhered to, the doctrine of the primacy will somehow be a necessary concomitant.” Afanasiev, *L’Église qui préside*, p. 18; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 65.

<sup>22</sup> Catholic theologian Bernard Prusak asserts that Cyprian of Carthage “considers communion with the bishop of Rome to be synonymous with the unity and charity of the universal Church... For Cyprian, all who hold the faith have to hold to the unity of Peter; whoever deserts the Chair of Peter is not in the unity of the Church.... Neither draft of Cyprian’s *On*



Roger Haight<sup>23</sup> and J. Patout Burns Jr<sup>24</sup> note that Cyprian did not advocate the Roman centralization, however, his ecclesiological views may have had an impact on the ecclesial system that developed from the medieval period onwards.

Afanasiev considers that, according to the basic principles of universal ecclesiology, the reunion of the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church after the schism is nearly impossible, because both Churches believe that only one true Church exists and there cannot be two universal Churches: "For the Orthodox, the only true Church is the Orthodox Church. For the Catholics, it is the Catholic Church."<sup>25</sup> This implies that the reunion of Churches means the very problematic act of returning to the true Church of which the separated part had gone away and ceased to be the Church.<sup>26</sup> Besides, Afanasiev points out that, even now, universal

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*the Unity of the Catholic Church* advocates the kind of Roman centralization that would emerge in the medieval period, or the primacy of universal, full, and supreme jurisdiction proclaimed by Vatican I. His emphasis on the role of Peter always sought to support the apostolic authority of all bishops viewed as a college (Ep. 33.1)... Cyprian's views persisted in the Catholic churches in North Africa." Bernard Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), pp. 135-136.

<sup>23</sup> Jesuit theologian Roger Haight, in *Historical Ecclesiology*, asserts that during the time of Cyprian of Carthage, "the church in North Africa... did not recognize a jurisdictional authority over itself. The bishop of Rome was not accorded any universal authority... The primacy of one bishop of a region over others that developed in the fourth and fifth centuries, the patriarchal system, would be consistent development from the time of Cyprian, as he and other bishops had leadership roles in their regions... The bishop of Rome is *primatus* and plays a vital role in the universal Church, but he does not possess direct jurisdictional authority over other churches in other provinces." Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History: Volume 1: Historical Ecclesiology* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 185.

<sup>24</sup> J. Patout Burns Jr., *Cyprian the Bishop* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 165.

<sup>25</sup> Afanasiev, *Una Sancta*, p. 444; *Una Sancta*, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Afanasiev, *Una Sancta*, p. 445; *Una Sancta*, p. 9.

ecclesiology holds an upper hand in the Roman Catholic as well as the Orthodox Churches.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.2 Eucharistic Ecclesiology

According to Afanasiev, the numerous problems raised by the understanding of universal ecclesiology can be resolved by a Eucharistic ecclesiology as it flowed from the inner nature of the Church. Afanasiev had proposed a Eucharistic ecclesiology in the winter of 1932-1933, even when the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches had not shown any signs of mutual openness.<sup>28</sup> Eucharistic ecclesiology is the original and earliest ecclesiological vision of the first three centuries that was derived from the Pauline writings as well as the writings of the apostolic age, especially from the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-108).<sup>29</sup> It held that the Eucharistic assembly of the local church possessed the fullness of the Church. According to Afanasiev, the fullness of the local church is not something to be derived from outside itself, rather it is derived from the fullness of the Eucharist, because Christ is not partially but wholly present in the Eucharist: “As the Body of Christ, the Church manifests herself in all her fullness in the Eucharistic assembly of the local church, because Christ is present in the Eucharist in the fullness of his body. This is why

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<sup>27</sup> Afanasiev states: “The universal sort is now predominant, especially in Catholic doctrine. The Orthodox Church has not clearly defined her attitudes, but our ‘school’ teaching follows Catholic doctrine and accepts universal ecclesiology as an axiom.” Afanasiev, *L’Église qui préside*, p. 10; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 58; In *Una Sancta*, he reaffirms this and states that the central ideas of Cyprian’s universal ecclesiology still structure the ecclesiology of both Churches, although they are not accepted completely. Afanasiev, *Una Sancta*, 440. This line is missing, may be due to editorial error, in the English translation of Afanasiev, *Una Sancta*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Afanasiev, *Dve idei vselenskoï Tserkvi* [Two Conceptions of the Universal Church], *Put’* 45 (1934), pp. 16-29; *Deux conceptions de l’Église universelle*, *Le Messager Orthodoxe* 164-165 (2018), pp. 175-191.

<sup>29</sup> Afanasiev, *L’Église qui préside*, p. 27; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 75.

the local church possesses all the fullness of the Church [...] the Church is where the Eucharistic assembly is.”<sup>30</sup>

In Eucharistic ecclesiology, the autonomy and independence of every local church are upheld. As per the primary principles of Ignatius' Eucharistic ecclesiology, Afanasiev asserts: “every local church was autonomous and independent; autonomous for it contained in itself everything necessary to life; and independent by not depending on any other local church or bishop whatever outside itself.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, all local churches are endowed with absolute equality as each one of them is the Church of God in its fullness. Besides, the autonomy, universality, and unity of the local churches are centred on the Eucharist.<sup>32</sup> Hence, they are not just a part of a larger whole, as it happens in the case of universal ecclesiology.<sup>33</sup>

In this ecclesiological model, the distinctive empirical sign of the Church is the Eucharistic assembly, for the reason that all those who participate in the Eucharistic assembly belong to the Church. When the Eucharistic assembly is considered as the

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<sup>30</sup> Afanasiev, *Una Sancta*, pp. 452-453; *Una Sancta*, p. 14. Cf. Afanasiev, *L'Église qui préside*, p. 29; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 76.

<sup>31</sup> Afanasiev, *L'Église qui préside*, p. 26; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 73. Benjamin Safranski adds that, for Afanasiev, independence of local churches does not mean modern connotations of ‘separation’, but rather it meant “each local church (each local Eucharistic assembly gathered around bishop) was literally ‘not dependent’ on the other; its status as the Church could not be withdrawn by any power or authority of itself and it did not derive that status by the allowance or sanction of Rome or any other Church.” Benjamin Safranski, *Nicholas Afanasiev and Episcopal Collegiality in Cyprian*, in *St. Cyprian of Carthage and the College of Bishops* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), p. 158 (155-208).

<sup>32</sup> Joseph G. Aryankalayil, *Local Church and Church Universal: Towards a Convergence between East and West: A Study on the Theology of the Local Church According N. Afanasiev and J.M.R. Tillard with Special Reference to Some of the Contemporary Catholic and Orthodox Theologians* (Ph.D. diss., Université de Fribourg, Fribourg, 2004), p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> Afanasiev, *L'Église qui préside*, p. 27; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 74.

principle of unity of the Church, it does not exclude the understanding of the bishop as the principle of unity in the local church. It is due to the fact that in the Eucharistic celebration the bishop presides over the Eucharistic assembly and he is included in the Eucharist. Eucharistic ecclesiology is not in line with a universal ecclesiology, which sees the bishop, without any consideration of his relation to the local church, as the sign of the unity of the local church.<sup>34</sup> Afanasiev remarks that Eucharistic ecclesiology situates the true unity of the Church in the unity of the Body of Christ that finds its concrete expression in the Eucharistic assembly.<sup>35</sup>

After offering a Eucharistic definition of the Church, Afanasiev counters the paradox that it seems to create. Although in empirical reality many local churches are existing, this does not mean that many Churches of God in Christ exist. Since Christ is one and unique, a multiplicity of Churches of God in Christ is impossible. Moreover, Euclidean arithmetic cannot be applied to ecclesiology and add up the local churches. Hence, “‘One plus one is still one’ in ecclesiology. Every local church manifests the fullness of the Church of God because it is the Church of God and not just one part of it.”<sup>36</sup> This clarifies the reason behind Afanasiev’s rejection of universal ecclesiology. The local church is not to be considered merely a part of the universal Church because to

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<sup>34</sup> Afanasiev, *Una Sancta*, p. 453; *Una Sancta*, p. 14. Elaborating on Afanasiev’s position, Christopher Ruddy remarks that universal ecclesiology identifies the bishop with episcopal college and places him above the Church whereas Eucharistic ecclesiology considers bishop as the head of the Eucharistic assembly and situates him within it and thus he becomes a member of the episcopal college. Christopher Ruddy, *The Local Church: Tillard and the Future of Catholic Ecclesiology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Afanasiev states: “The actual limits of the Church are determined by the limits of the Eucharistic assembly.” Afanasiev, *Una Sancta*, p. 453; *Una Sancta*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Afanasiev, *L’Église qui préside*, p. 28; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 75.

make such a claim means to reject the full presence of the indivisible body of Christ in the Eucharistic assembly.<sup>37</sup> Elaborating on the unity of the Church of God and the plurality of local churches, Afanasiev notes:

“The plurality of local churches does not destroy the unity of the Church of God, just as the plurality of Eucharistic assemblies does not destroy the unity of the Eucharist in time and space. In the Church, unity and plurality are not overcome: the one also contains the other. The unity of the Church in its empirical life is manifested by a plurality of local churches, and the plurality of local churches safeguards the unity of the Church of God in Christ.”<sup>38</sup>

Eucharistic ecclesiology contributes to ecumenism as it upholds the catholicity of every local church. In the communion of churches, local churches mutually recognize catholicity, and the acts of a local church are received by all the local churches. When a local church would tolerate irregularities internally, other local churches may refuse to receive an ecclesial act, which is not a punishment, but rather a fraternal admonition, which is a desire to assist that weaker local church. However, once the local church renounces her irregular acts, the goal of the refusal of the reception is achieved and the peace is restored in the communion of local churches bound by love. If the local church refuses to renounce her irregular acts despite the non-reception and help offered to her by other churches, it would lead to the rupture of communion between the local church and other local churches. However, the admonished church, whether it is still in communion with other local churches or not, remains a Church because all local churches seek to strive for the highest manifestation of the Church of God in Christ, but without achieving it perfectly.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, *The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanasieff: Prospects and Challenges for Contemporary Ecumenical Dialogue*, *Diakonia* 27 (January 1994), p. 25 (18-44).

<sup>38</sup> Afanasiev, *L'Église qui préside*, p. 29; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 76.

<sup>39</sup> Afanasiev, *Una Sancta*, p. 457; *Una Sancta*, pp. 16-17.

According to Afanasiev, Eucharistic ecclesiology contributes to a reconciliation of Christians, especially between Orthodox and Catholics, and the Eucharist is the essential link to re-establishment of Christian unity. Although the separation of churches indeed is a tragedy, it must not be exaggerated. The differences are canonical in nature, and they lie on the surface and not extended to the depths. Despite the differences, the validity of the Eucharist was not denied. Hence, there exists a unity among the communities which validly celebrate the Eucharist.<sup>40</sup> Hence, Afanasiev proposes a solution to end this schism, i.e., the application of a Eucharistic ecclesiology to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Orthodox-Catholic relations, which shows that there still exists unity between Eastern and Western Christianity.<sup>41</sup> Having dealt with the basic tenets of Afanasiev's Eucharistic ecclesiology, the following section deals with Afanasiev's reading of Cyprian's ecclesiology and re-assessment of the criticisms raised against Afanasiev's point of view.

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<sup>40</sup> Afanasiev, *L'Eucharistie, principal lien entre les Catholiques et les Orthodoxes*, *Irénikon* 38 (1965), pp. 338-339 (337-339); The Eucharist, the Principal Link between the Catholics and the Orthodox, in *Tradition Alive*, ed. Michael Plekon (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pp. 48-49 (47-49).

<sup>41</sup> Afanasiev's proposal of Eucharistic ecclesiology as means of dialogue between Orthodox and Catholics is realized in the documents of Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue. Bordeianu, *Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue*, p. 241. Afanasiev's Eucharistic ecclesiology had an impact on the documents of the international Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue, especially the Munich document (1982), entitled *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity* § 3.1, 3.2. For a detailed analysis of Eucharistic ecclesiology as found in the documents of the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue see Peter De Mey, *An Investigation of the Willingness to Develop a Eucharistic Ecclesiology in Roman Catholic Magisterial Teaching on the Church and in the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Ecu-  
menical Dialogue*, *ET Bulletin* 19/2 (2008), pp. 79-99.

#### 4 Reassessment of the Criticisms of Afanasiev's Reading of Cyprian's Ecclesiology

Afanasiev's reading of Cyprian's ecclesiology has been criticized by several theologians.<sup>42</sup> Hence, this section reassesses some of the criticisms raised against Afanasiev. It is to be noted that Afanasiev is not always negative with regard to Cyprian. Afanasiev considers Cyprian as an excellent model of a pastor, because, as a bishop, he refused to take any initiative without that being confirmed by the presbyterate and the people.<sup>43</sup>

Afanasiev is known by many not through his works, but rather through the works of his critics, such as John Zizioulas. This situation points out that very few scholars had grasped the integral

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<sup>42</sup> This recurring criticism is found in the following authors: P. Th. Camelot, Saint Cyprien et la primauté, *Istina* 4 (1957), pp. 421-434; Aidan Nichols, The Appeal to the Fathers in the Ecclesiology of Nikolai Afanas'ev: II. From Cyprian to Denys, *Heythrop Journal* 33 (1992), pp. 247-255; John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion – Studies in Personhood and the Church* (coll. *Contemporary Greek Theologians* 4) (Crestwood/New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), p. 156, n. 59; John Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries*, trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), p. 126; Joseph Aryankalayil, *Local Church*, pp. 59-66; Michel Stavrou, L'ecclésiologie eucharistique du Père Nicolas Afanasieff et sa réception, *La Pensée orthodoxe* 9 (2012), pp. 15-16 (7-25); Benjamin B. Safransky, Nicolas Afanasiev and Episcopal Collegiality in Cyprian, in *St. Cyprian of Carthage and the College of Bishops* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books/ Fortress Academic, 2018), pp. 155-208; Amphiloque Miltos, L'ecclésiologie de saint Cyprien de Carthage: un faux dilemme entre les perspectives universelle et eucharistique, *Contacts* 262 (2018), pp. 201-224.

<sup>43</sup> Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 62-63. Cyprian is a model of faith and witness in the persecution. Afanasiev states that Cyprian is an ideal image of a bishop as he was brilliant in his activity in the Church. However, his theological work had many internal contradictions and has been a topic of discussion even to this day. Afanasiev, *La doctrine de la primauté*, p. 406; *L'Église qui préside*, p. 16; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 64.

ecclesial vision of Afanasiev and his method.<sup>44</sup> It is to be noted that Afanasiev and John Zizioulas are two prominent Orthodox theologians who developed a Eucharistic ecclesiology. Zizioulas gives credit to Afanasiev for developing the fundamental principles of Eucharistic ecclesiology.<sup>45</sup> However, Zizioulas also criticizes Afanasiev's Eucharistic ecclesiology on several aspects<sup>46</sup> and states: "Eucharistic ecclesiology such as has been developed by Fr Afanasiev and his followers raises serious problems, and because of this it is in need of fundamental correction."<sup>47</sup> Zizioulas himself acknowledges that he had read or had access to only

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<sup>44</sup> Wooden, *Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanasiev*, 544.

<sup>45</sup> See John Zizioulas, *L'apport de la théologie orthodoxe occidentale, Service orthodoxe de presse* 326 (Mar 2008), pp. 25-26 (25-29); *Eucharistic Ecclesiology in the Orthodox tradition*, in *L'ecclésiologie eucharistique*, ed. J.-M. Van Cangh (Brussels: International Academy of Religious Sciences, 2009), pp. 187-188 (187-202).

<sup>46</sup> Christophe D'Aloisio, in his recently published work, presents a list of Zizioulas' disagreements against Afanasiev's Eucharistic ecclesiology: "1) the 'sacramentalization' of Afanasiev's ecclesiology; 2) the rejection of canon law; 3) the catholic character of the parish; 4) the lack of pneumatology; 5) the absence of an articulated link between the local and universal levels in the Church; 6) the empirical modalities of the communion of the local churches, especially the communion of churches at the ordination of a bishop; 7) the erroneous exegesis of St Cyprian of Carthage; 8) the absence of an eschatological understanding of the collective apostolic succession in each local church; 9) the sterile dialectic between the ontological or functional character of ordination to a ministry and 10) the recognition of the character of Church to ecclesial communities isolated from communion." D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, p. 318. (Translation is mine). Most of these criticisms in the synthesized form can be found in Zizioulas' work *Being as Communion*. Analysis of all these criticisms is beyond the scope of this article. For an analysis of these criticisms see Victor Alexandrov, *Nicholas Afanasiev's Ecclesiology and Some of Its Orthodox Critics, Sobornost* 31. 2 (2009): pp. 45-66; Plekon, *Always Everyone and Always Together*, pp. 141-174; D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, pp. 314-332; Anastacia Wooden, *Afanasiev and His Critics: A Call to Reassessment, Logos* 59/1-4 (2018), pp. 11-30; Wooden, *The Limits of the Church*, pp. 334-338.

<sup>47</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, pp. 23-24.



five works of Afanasiev, viz., “L’Apôtre Pierre et l’évêque de Rome,” “La doctrine de la primauté à la lumière de l’ecclésiologie,” “The Church which presides in Love,” “Le Concile dans la théologie orthodoxe russe,” and “Una Sancta.”<sup>48</sup> The major reason for this is that many of Afanasiev’s works were not easily available because some of them were published post-humously, and some of them were translated recently from Russian to French or English. Recent scholarship on Afanasiev’s works shows that Zizioulas’ knowledge of Afanasiev’s ecclesiology is fragmented and his critiques on Afanasiev’s Eucharistic ecclesiology are not entirely correct or the result of misreading when one understands Afanasiev’s integral ecclesiological vision that is found in all his works, which are available now.<sup>49</sup> Christophe D’Aloisio notes that Zizioulas does not seem to have a fundamental disagreement with Afanasiev, except when he misreads Afanasiev. A careful study of both these theologians of the contemporary Orthodox Church would suggest that Zizioulas appears a faithful continuator of Afanasiev’s thought.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4.1 Cyprian’s Ecclesiology: The Basis for Universal Ecclesiology?

Afanasiev considers that Cyprian’s works played a pivotal role in the transformation of the traditional Eucharistic ecclesiology into universal ecclesiology. However, he was not the only theologian to consider that Cyprian’s writings were the reason for the reversal of these notions. Nicolas Zernov, a friend of Afanasiev, published an article on Cyprian’s ‘reversal’ of the concept of ecclesial unity.<sup>51</sup> Afanasiev holds on to a similar view as the one

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<sup>48</sup> Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, p. 36, n. 47.

<sup>49</sup> D’Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, pp. 314-332; Wooden, *The Limits of the Church*, pp. 334-338.

<sup>50</sup> D’Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, p. 332.

<sup>51</sup> Nicolas Zernov published in the July 1933 issue of *The Way (Put’)* whereas Afanasiev published in the issue of July 1934: Nicolas Zernov, *Svyatoy Kiprian Karfagenskiy i Yedinstvo Vselenskoy Tserkvi* [Saint Cyprian of Carthage and the Unity of the Ecumenical Church], *Put’* 39 (1933), pp.

held by Zernov.<sup>52</sup> The review of this article published in *Irénikon* presents the following account: Cyprian would be responsible for the overthrow of the old ecclesiastical conception, which placed the community of Christians, and not the hierarchy, at the base of the Church. The consequences of this revolution would be individualism because submission to the legitimate bishop becomes a condition for belonging to the Church.<sup>53</sup> According to these theologians' reading of Cyprian's works, from Cyprian onwards, the concept of ecclesial unity had not centred on the uniqueness of the Eucharistic assembly, but rather on the 'episcopate' of 'universal Church'.<sup>54</sup> In the "Preface" of Afanasiev's *Église du Saint-Esprit*, Olivier Rousseau remarks that Cyprian's works might have clouded the true ecclesiology of the early Church that would have resulted in the spread of a juridical and hierarchical understanding of the Church in the East and in the West.<sup>55</sup> Although a universal ecclesiology is more apparent in the Catholic Church than in the Orthodox Church, Afanasiev opined that it is not completely absent in the Orthodox Church either.<sup>56</sup> Richard Gaillardetz remarks that this contention of Afanasiev adds more "bite" to his ecclesiology as previous Orthodox

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18-40; Afanasiev, Dve idei vselenskoï Tserkvi [Two Conceptions of the Universal Church], *Put'* 45 (1934), pp. 16-29.

- <sup>52</sup> Afanasiev often refers to Cyprian in his criticisms of universal ecclesiology. However, he does not reproach Cyprian for a lack of logic as Zernov does, rather he affirms that "logic by itself is not proof of truth." Afanasiev, *L'Église qui préside*, p. 16; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p.64.
- <sup>53</sup> Review of 'S. Cyprien de Carthage et l'unité de l'Église œcuménique (*Put'* 39, supplément)', *Irénikon* 11 (1934), pp. 602-603.
- <sup>54</sup> Afanasiev does not accept the essential premise of universal ecclesiology, i.e., the principle of universal ecclesial unity by a universal episcopate. Moreover, he points out that both in the East and the West, Eucharistic ecclesiology of the local church was almost forgotten. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, p. 65.
- <sup>55</sup> Olivier Rousseau, Préface, in Afanasiev, *Église du Saint-Esprit* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1975), p. 10 (7-12).
- <sup>56</sup> To support his claim, Afanasiev cites the Moscow Council's (1917-1918) definition of the diocese as "one part of the Russian Orthodox Church when governed by a bishop according to canon law." Afanasiev, *L'Église*

theologians just used this notion of universal ecclesiology to attack the West.<sup>57</sup>

#### 4.2 The Impact of the Roman Empire on Cyprian's Doctrine of the Church

Afanasiev asserts that although Cyprian was not Roman by birth, he was at least in spirit. Cyprian's idea of the universal Church was deduced from the concept of the Roman empire.<sup>58</sup> T. Camelot does not agree with Afanasiev's views on Cyprian's ecclesiology. Camelot claims that Cyprian has always remained faithful to Scripture. Moreover, he states that Cyprian's Roman education and his acquired Roman spirit have not influenced or changed his theology.<sup>59</sup> Aidan Nichols too holds on to this idea.<sup>60</sup> Anastacia Wooden remarks that it is not possible to prove that the Roman empire did not at all influence his thinking. However, it is not correct to ascribe that the Roman empire was the only reason for the development of the universal vision of the Church. As per Afanasiev, the traces of the universal understanding of the

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qui préside, p. 11; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, p. 59. Here the local church is considered as merely a part of the whole, which in turn is the understanding of the universal ecclesiological view that started from Cyprian.

<sup>57</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanassieff*, p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> It is because Cyprian felt that in his time the empirical unity of the Church was not strong enough. He considered that Rome was firmly established and that the concept of the empire transformed the whole of *oikumene* into a single Roman empire. Afanasiev, *La doctrine de la primauté*, p. 403-404.

<sup>59</sup> Th. Camelot, *Saint Cyprien et la primauté*, p. 424, n. 4.

<sup>60</sup> According to Aidan Nichols, Cyprian may not consider the model of Roman empire to the life of the Church for two reasons. Firstly, Cyprian too, just like his fellow North Africans, may have shared an instinctive dislike for the Roman imperial power. Secondly, Cyprian, too, had experienced two persecutions under Roman emperors viz., Decius and Valerian and that would have left him with a bitter memory of Roman state. Aidan Nichols, *The Appeal to the Fathers in the Ecclesiology of Nikolai Afanas'ev: II: From Cyprian to Denys*, *The Heythrop Journal* 33/1 (1992), p. 248 (247-266).

Church were already there in the Jerusalem Church and gradually strengthened by an imperial ideal that Rome is the center of all local churches. Afanasiev considers that Cyprian comes under this category.<sup>61</sup>

Another criticism of Afanasiev is that Cyprian is the reason for the substitution of law to sacramental understanding, which was the organizing principle of the ecclesial body. This criticism of Afanasiev seems not very well-grounded as one can find in Cyprian's writings the image of the Church not only as a body but also as a mother, a root, a bride, house of God – which are foreign to a juridical understanding of the Church.<sup>62</sup> However, Afanasiev is aware that Cyprian did not push his theory to the end; but, as a consequence of his understanding of a universal ecclesiology, ecclesial practices were assumed.<sup>63</sup>

#### **4.3 Does 'Catholic' for Cyprian Refer 'Only' to the Universal Church?**

Afanasiev is critical, even in his first writings, about any form of quantitative understanding of the catholicity of the Church.<sup>64</sup> Although elements of universalistic tendencies were existing in the early Church, it is Cyprian's works that manifest elements of a universal or quantitative ecclesiology. By its very nature, the Church is ecumenical or universal because it embraces all local churches that are spread all around the world. In Afanasiev's understanding, Cyprian's notion of catholicity is not innovative. Just like his predecessors, Cyprian also understands catholicity as unity and fullness. However, the difference lies in the subject to which catholicity is attributed. Catholicity is attributed to the local church in Paul's epistles, whereas in Cyprian's works it is an attribute only of the multiplicity of churches. According to Afanasiev, the change that took place does not concern the understanding of catholicity, but rather the understanding of the

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<sup>61</sup> Wooden, *The Limits of the Church*, p. 380.

<sup>62</sup> Nichols, *The Appeal to the Fathers: II*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>63</sup> D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, p. 67.

<sup>64</sup> Gaillardetz, *The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanassieff*, p. 21.

Church. Cyprian regarded that the epithet *Catholic Church* can be aptly referred to the universal Church because this unique organism is divided into local churches. Moreover, the universal Church empirically appears as a collection of multiple parts of the whole, i.e., local churches.<sup>65</sup> Hence, according to Cyprian, “the sum of the local churches, in their concrete existence, shows the Church to be one and unique. The ecclesial nature of the local churches flows from their rooting in the universal Church.”<sup>66</sup>

One of the major criticisms against Afanasiev's reading of Cyprian was Afanasiev's alleged claim that in Cyprian 'catholic' refers 'only' to the universal Church.<sup>67</sup> Aidan Nichols shows that Cyprian did not deny the catholicity of the local church, as long as it was articulated within the universal Church, around the pulpit of Peter occupied by all the bishops gathered in concord.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Cyprian's conception of episcopal ministry tends to reconcile and integrate local and universalist aspects of the Church. Besides, at the end of his life, Cyprian clearly stated that each local church is the whole Church, in the sense that the Church of Christ, one and whole, is entirely present in each of them, since it is united to the rest of the churches.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Afanasiev, *L'Église qui préside*, p. 13; *The Church Which Presides in Love*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>66</sup> Afanasiev, *Una Sancta*, p. 440. *Una Sancta*, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Zizioulas remarks that Afanasiev does not correctly interpret the notion of *catholica ecclesia* in Cyprian of Carthage. Zizioulas asserts that this notion in Cyprian refers to the local church of Carthage. Hence, it is difficult to accept Afanasiev's view that Cyprian was the founder of the universal Church as well as the idea of the church organization is derived from the Roman empire. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, p. 126; *Idem, Being as Communion*, p. 156, n. 59.

<sup>68</sup> Nichols, *The Appeal to the Fathers: II*, p. 247. In Cyprian's works, one can see the continuation of Tertullian's ecclesiology, that the Church is an eschatological reality, the community of saints, possibly sanctified by martyrdom. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, p. 68.

<sup>69</sup> Nichols, *The Appeal to the Fathers: II*, p. 251. D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, p. 69. Continuing Ignatius' understanding of the local church, Cyprian extends the conception of

A careful and non-selective reading of Afanasiev's writings shows that he enumerates Eucharistic and universalistic tendencies in Cyprian as well.<sup>70</sup> Afanasiev did not consider Cyprian as the father or the inventor of the universalistic ecclesiology, or Ignatius as the inventor of mono-episcopacy. Moreover, Afanasiev never makes claims of absolute categorizations that would have portrayed Cyprian's ecclesiology as "totally," "solely," or "absolutely" universal. Afanasiev's concise arguments and selectiveness of patristic sources (of which he was well aware) have served a well-defined purpose. Afanasiev intended to show that there were two conceptions of the Church in the Church, viz., Eucharistic and universal, whose first clear expressions were found in the writings of Ignatius and Cyprian and consequently their works greatly influenced the self-understanding of the Church.<sup>71</sup>

## 5 Critical Remarks

The criticisms of Afanasiev's reading of Cyprian's ecclesiology do not in any way invalidate Afanasiev's theological reasoning because Afanasiev follows a logical argumentation in his works.

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the Church to the communion of the local churches, manifested in the communion (concord) of the bishops of the respective local churches. Nichols remarks that in Cyprian's view an individual bishop does not lack any particular quality that all the bishops together as a body would have. Nichols, *The Appeal to the Fathers: II*, pp. 249-251.

<sup>70</sup> Afanasiev's views on Cyprian's understanding of the regional proves the point: "The [regional] council unites the assemblies of the church into an ecclesial region and represents the highest authority for all the assemblies within the region. Within the region, however, each assembly remains independent - it is not subordinate to any other assembly. The catholic design of the supreme ecclesiastical body excludes the possibility of a singular supreme authority. This thesis was strongly defended by Cyprian." Afanasiev, *Tserkovnyye sobory i ikh proiskhozhdeniye [Church Councils and their Origins]* (Moscow: Orthodox Christian Institute, 2003), pp. 168. Cf. Wooden, *The Limits of the Church*, p. 379.

<sup>71</sup> Wooden, *Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanasiev*, pp. 551-552; *The Limits of the Church*, pp. 379-380.

Hence, whatever the value of Afanasiev's interpretation of Ignatius, Cyprian, and other Fathers, he follows a logical argumentation in his thesis that does not absolutely require an infallible patristic knowledge.<sup>72</sup> It is unlikely that Afanasiev was not aware that his interpretation of Cyprian is incomplete. The schema of *The Limits of the Church*, the intended second part of his doctoral dissertation, had two chapters on Cyprian of Carthage, which Afanasiev failed to complete. Although Afanasiev cites Cyprian several times in his works, Cyprian was not the main topic of his investigation.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to note that Afanasiev discerns an unchanged universal ecclesiology in Jewish-Christian consciousness prior to the destruction of Jerusalem when certain ecclesial communities were seen as extra-territorial extensions of the Church of Jerusalem. Afanasiev considers that this awareness of an ecclesial extension beyond the local Eucharistic assembly was not very prevalent, and it disappeared with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Moreover, it was not assumed by the churches founded by the Apostle Paul.<sup>74</sup>

Afanasiev's critical interpretation of Cyprian raises questions such as whether Cyprian was responsible - actively or passively - for universalistic ecclesiology, and for the incursion of law into the ecclesial life, or more precisely, for the predominance of law in theology. However, the significant aspect in Afanasiev's theology is not to identify the person who is responsible for the ecclesiological shift, but rather to deconstruct the universalist conception of the Church and the prevalence of law over the spiritual life in the Church, in light of the New Testament and the ancient liturgical tradition.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, p. 69.

<sup>73</sup> Wooden, *The Limits of the Church*, p. 378.

<sup>74</sup> Afanasiev, *La doctrine de la primauté*, p. 407.

<sup>75</sup> D'Aloisio, *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff*, pp. 69-70.

## 6 Conclusion

Afanasiev attempted to redefine the ecclesiological understanding by returning to ancient theological resources. These sources enabled him to go beyond the juridical understanding that was prevailing in the Church and recover the Eucharistic vision of the Church, a conception of the body of Christ that is based on the local level, in order to be better articulated in the universal communion of love. Although his reading of Cyprian's ecclesiology is criticized, Afanasiev's ecclesiology remains relevant as his focus was to respond to the ecclesiological problems of his time. His intention was to show that two conceptions of the Church can be developed in the history of the Church. His concern was that these universalistic tendencies have overshadowed the catholicity of the local church, looking at them as merely parts of the universal Church. He emphasized the need to return to the primitive ecclesiological vision. His Eucharistic ecclesiology upholds that the local church is independent and autonomous, the local church fully manifests the Church, *una sancta*, in other words, the fullness of the ecclesiality of each Eucharistic assembly, the necessary reconsideration of the place of the bishop in the local church from the Eucharistic perspective. Moreover, he dealt with the local and universal dimensions of the Church and laid a foundation for a fruitful conception of the communion of local churches. Afanasiev's emphasis on the catholicity of the local church had an impact on the Eucharistic ecclesiology developed in the documents of Vatican II, especially *Sacrosanctum Concilium* § 41 and *Lumen Gentium* § 26. Afanasiev's Eucharistic ecclesiology also had an impact on the documents of the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue.