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Church Unity as Political Unity: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective¹

Cerkvena edinost kot politična edinost: pravoslavni pogled

Abstract: The image of the Church as a holy city is present in the Scriptures, in the writings of the holy fathers, and in the thoughts of modern Orthodox theologians. If the church is a polis, the unity of the Church must, in some ways, although not exhaustively, be a political unity. In this article, I argue that the Church is a City of God both as a present and as an eschatological reality. First, by seeing the Church as a polis, one can reconfirm that Orthodox unity is a unity in the ecumenical councils, canons, and creeds. Second, by seeing the Church as a polis, one can use the concept of citizenship to understand which behaviours would be considered dishonourable. The concept of citizenship would also provide a new vocabulary to explain the relations between Orthodox Christians, Orthodox Christians who are not in communion with each other, and non-Orthodox Christians.

Keywords: ecclesiology, city, polis, citizenship, councils, constitutions

Povzetek: Podoba Cerkve kot svetega mesta je prisotna v Svetem pismu, besedilih cerkvenih očetov in misli modernih pravoslavnih teologov. Če je Cerkev polis, mora biti njena edinost v nekaterih pogledih – čeprav ne izključno – politična. V prispevku zagovarjamo stališče, da je Cerkev božje mesto tako v sedanji kakor tudi večnostni resničnosti. Prvič, gledati na Cerkev kot na polis lahko potrdi, da je pravoslavna edinost zaobjeta v ekumenskih koncilih, kanonih in veroizpovednih obrazcih. Drugič, gledati na Cerkev kot na polis omogoča uporabo koncepta državljanstva za razumevanje, katera ravnanja so nečastna. Koncept državljanstva bi lahko tudi prispeval k novemu besednjaku za razlago razmerij med pravoslavnimi kristjani, pravoslavnimi kristjani, ki med seboj niso v občestvu, in nepravoslavnimi kristjani.

Ključne besede: eklezijologija, mesto, polis, državljanstvo, koncili, ustave

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1. Introduction

The image of the Church as a holy city is present in the Scriptures, the writings of the holy fathers, and in the thoughts of modern Orthodox theologians. This understanding of the Church as a polis, however, has not contributed much to the discourses on Church unity. When discussing Church unity, many theologians understandably discuss the more familiar image of the Church as the body of Christ (Lossky 1957, 174; Bordeianu 2011, 185; Zizioulas 1997, 147–148; Malmenvall 2018, 393; Raczyński-Rożek 2019, 760). Yet the Church is also a polis. If the Church is a polis, then Church unity must in some ways, although not exhaustively, be a political unity. Furthermore, if unity is necessary for the existence of a polis, then it is also necessary for the survival and the flourishing of the Church *qua* polis.

In the first section of this article, I show that the Scriptures, the holy fathers, and some modern theologians see the Church as a polis not only as an eschatological reality, but also as a present reality. In the second section, I propose two examples of how understanding the Church as a polis can contribute to the discourses on church unity. First, understanding the Church as a polis will reaffirm the necessity of conciliar unity. The reason is that just as the councils, the constitution, and concord are central to political unity, the same is true of Church unity. Second, understanding the Church as a polis would provide a new vocabulary for speaking about the relation between the Orthodox Church and non-Orthodox churches. I will end the article with a brief conclusion.

2. The Church as Polis

In this section, I will show that the Scriptures, the holy fathers, and some modern theologians see the Church as a polis. I will also argue that this political nature of the Church is already a present reality, not just an eschatological reality.

2.1 The Scriptural Basis

The Sermon on the Mount offers an initial remark of the Church as a city. After saying that the disciples are the light of the world, Jesus uses the image of the city to illustrate his point further: a city (*polis*) built on a hill cannot be hidden (Matt 5,14), just like his disciples are the light of the world that should not be hidden.

St. Paul elaborates further on the idea that the church is a polis. He writes that the citizenship (*politeuma*) of believers is in heaven (Phil 3,20) and that they are now fellow citizens (*sumpolitai*) in the covenant of promise (Eph 2,19). I argue here that this citizenship is already a present reality, not merely an eschatological projection. The reason for this is twofold. First, in Eph 2,19, St. Paul uses the present tense (*este*) in his description of believers as fellow citizens. The same case obtains with Phil 3,20, where St. Paul says that the citizenship of believers exists (*huparchei*)—in the present tense—in heaven. Second, Eph 2,19 also says in the same sentence that Christians are members of the household of God. There is no questi-

on that believers are members of the household of God now (Evdokimov 2011, 49). If that is the case, it is only consistent that believers are also fellow citizens now. On this model, one might say that if the Church is the city of God, then the different jurisdictions (e.g., the five ancient patriarchates) could be the households in the city, with their respective *paterfamilias* in the office of the patriarch or the pope.

The language of citizenship in Ephesians and Philippians suggests that the believers are citizens of something. I argue that the believers are citizens of the polis of God, which is the Church. One evidence for this is available in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the polis of God is directly identified with the Church. Heb 12,22-23 says that »you [the believers] have come (*proseléluthate*) to Mount Zion, to the city (*polei*) of the living God, to the festal gathering of the thousands of angels, to the church of the firstborn (*ekklēsia(i) prōtotokōn*) whose names are written in heaven.« [my translation] This passage literally asserts that the Church is the city of God and that Christians have already come—in the perfect tense—to this city. Accordingly, Christians are already citizens of the City of God.

Finally, the book of Revelation contrasts the great city of Babylon with the holy city of Jerusalem which has twelve foundations, which are Christ's apostles (Rev 21,14). The New Jerusalem is not a human achievement, but something that comes down out of heaven (21,2). It is also the Bride of the Lamb (21,2), which points out that the city is in fact the Church because the Church is the Bride of Christ (cf. Eph 5,25-27). The image of the Church as a polis in the Book of Revelation is undoubtedly eschatological.

The passages discussed above are evidence that the Scriptures describe the Church as the city of God both as a present and as an eschatological reality. This understanding is confirmed by the holy fathers, to whom I now turn.

2.2 The Writings of the Fathers

Some of the Church fathers agree that the Church is a polis. I will only mention three in this article. First, in one of his commentaries, St. Cyril of Alexandria quotes Heb 12,22-23 to describe the Church as the city of heavenly Jerusalem:

»And the boast of the church will never end or cease because the souls of the righteous are leaving earthly matters behind and sailing to the city above, the heavenly Jerusalem, the church of the firstborn ›who is our mother,‹ as Paul says« (2013, 356).²

Second, St. Basil the Great also sees the Church as a polis, which he explicitly asserts in his commentary on Ps 59 (*Homily 20*):

»The shoe of the divinity is the God-bearing flesh, through which he approaches men. In this hope, pronouncing blessed, the time of the coming of the Lord, the prophet says: ›Who will bring me into the fortified city?‹

² Note, however, that in another commentary, he sees the Church as a mountain instead of a city (2008, 63–64).

Perhaps, he means the Church, a city, indeed, because it is a community governed conformably to laws« (1963, 339).

More importantly, he thinks that the description of the Church as polis does not apply only to the New Jerusalem above, but also to the Church at present: »Since God is in the midst of the city, He will give it stability, providing assistance for it at the break of dawn. Therefore, the word, ‚of the city‘, will fit either Jerusalem above or the Church below (1963, 304).« (Homily 18 on Ps 45)

Lastly, Blessed Augustine is famous for his *De Civitate Dei* (11.1), in which he argues that the Church is the city of God, based on Ps 87,3 (»Glorious things are said of you, city of God« [NIV]), Ps 48,1 (»Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain« [NIV]), and Ps 48,8 (»As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD almighty, in a city of our God.« [NIV]).

In addition to the writings of St. Cyril, St. Basil, and Blessed Augustine, the description of the Christian Church as a polis, specifically as Jerusalem or the city of God, is also present in other Greek and Latin texts before and during Augustine’s time, for example, in the writings of Ambrose and Origen (O’Daly 1999). I shall now discuss the writings of more recent theologians.

2.3 The Writings of Modern Theologians

Some Orthodox theologians believe that the Church is a polis. A few, like Christos Yannaras, believe that the Church is already a polis at this present age. Yannaras draws a comparison between the Greek *ekklēsia* as a political assembly and the Church as a Christian assembly (2013, 21–22). For him, a polis is not simply a settlement, but rather an event; it is a way of life. In the same way, the church is not a building, but an ecclesial/Eucharistic event. The Christian polis is characterized by trust in God and love for each other (Gounopoulos 2018, 64; 79). A joint Orthodox-Catholic document in 1982 also seems to assert that the Church is a polis, which is manifested as a present reality in the local church (Joint International Commission, 1982; 2014, 57).

While Yannaras is very explicit about the fact that the Church is already a polis even in the present age, Sergei Bulgakov is a little bit unclear about whether the Church is already a City of God or not. He indeed puts a strong emphasis on the eschatological aspect of the Church as polis. In the *Bride of the Lamb*, he sees the Church, the heavenly Jerusalem, the City of God, as a future reality at the end of the world (1976, 521). The City of God is not a part of history, but something that is meta-history. I am guessing that he means the City of God is fully realized ‚after‘ (*meta*) the history of the world ends. That the City of God is something eschatological is also asserted by Bulgakov in an essay in his *Two Cities*, when he discusses the Russian intelligentsia: »A certain unworldliness, the eschatological vision of the City of God, the coming kingdom of righteousness /... / make up the familiar, invariable and distinctive characteristics of the Russian intelligentsia.« (1999, 74) Here he seems to say that the City of God is still yet to come. However, in an article entitled „On the Question of the Apocatastasis of the Fallen Spirits“, he says

that the Church as the City of God is already present now: »The history of the world, which is also the history of the Church, is the building of the Kingdom of God, the City of God.« In this work, he identifies history with temporality, which concerns both ,the present æon' and eternity (1995, 28–30).

Finally, some theologians tend to emphasize the eschatological aspect of the Church as polis. For instance, in his reflection on the Holy and Great Council of 2016, Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović quotes Rev 21,2; 22-23, implying that the Church is a Holy City, which will be manifested at the end of the world (2017, 43). In the same way, Nikolai Berdiaev notes that Khomiakov does not believe that the Church is the City now, although Khomiakov believes that the Church is the Coming City (1998, 335–336).

In the remainder of the article, I will continue with the assumption that the Church is already a City of God even in the present age, although it is still imperfect in many ways.³ In a sense, then, the Church is ,already, but not yet' the City of God. I will now discuss the benefits of seeing the Church as a polis for the discourses on church unity. I will begin with a discussion of the councils, the constitution, and concord.

3. Church Unity as Political Unity

A simple definition of a polis, which is also accepted by St. Basil, is that it is »an established community (*sustēma*) administered according to law (*nomon*)« (1963, 302). There are two elements of a polis that are explicit in this definition, viz., an organization of people and a law. This way of understanding the polis is also present in Aristotle, who says in the beginning of his *Politics* that »every state (*polin*) is a community of some kind (*koinōnian tina*), and every community is established with a view to some good« (1252a1–2).⁴ The political community must share a constitution in common: the constitution is a ,fellowship' (*ē gar politeia koinōnias estī*) (1260b40). The constitution, which describes the political offices and the telos of a polis, in turn will determine the rest of the administrative laws for the polis (*Politics* 4.1). Based on this definition of the polis, political unity should be understood in terms of the unity of the community in accordance with the accepted constitution. In the following, I will first discuss the importance of councils, constitution, and concord for political unity. Afterwards, I will discuss the issue of citizenship in political unity.

³ In one of his books, Frank Senn, a Lutheran scholar, argues that the church is a *civitas*: »The church itself is to replicate on earth the new Jerusalem that the Seer in his revelation saw coming down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:10). Here in the Apocalypse we see a sectarian faith that stands against the world and moves toward the most catholic model of Christianity—that of the *polis* of a world empire whose *Kyrios* or *Dominus* is Christ Jesus.« (2006, 139)

⁴ The English translation of Aristotle's texts in this paper is taken from Aristotle (1984).

3.1 Councils, Constitution, and Concord

Hannah Arendt observes that an ancient polis is primarily not a physical space surrounded by walls, but instead an organization of people who act and speak together (1998, 198). To live a political life embodies freedom, and everything must be decided by words and persuasion (1998, 26). This is a correct observation of the political life in ancient Greece, where a polis or a city-state is ruled by a special assembly of people, in the form of a council. The assembly would consist of citizens who are free and equal in their political rights to partake in decision-making for the city, including in producing legal and political documents. In *Politics*, Aristotle writes that »there must be a body which convenes the supreme authority in the state. In some places they are called ‚probuli‘ (*probouloi*), because they hold previous deliberations, but in a democracy more commonly ‚councillors‘ (*boulē*).« (1322b, 15–17) The Roman Republic, at least in the early days, can also be imagined as a polis. In the Roman Republic, the Senate is the center of power, but it has less constitutional power than its Greek council counterpart. The Roman Senate is functioning more as an advisory assembly. There are, however, more forms of the popular assembly in the Roman Republic than in the ancient Greek society. These Roman assemblies are the *comitia curiata*, *centuriata*, *tributa*, and the *concilium plebis*. Both in ancient Greece and in Rome, it is the assemblies or councils of citizens that have the authority to decide on legal and political matters.

This fact about the polis has a direct relevance to the Church. If the Church is a polis, then Church matters must also be decided ultimately by a council or an assembly. The very first significant deliberative meeting of Christ’s apostles happened in Jerusalem (Act 15), where the New Testament Church began during the Feast of Pentecost. The Jerusalem meeting in Act 15 would be a precedent for the future conciliar meetings of the Church as the City of God.

The early Church prefers to adopt the image of Greek *ekklēsia* instead of the Jewish *qahal* (Hovorun 2015, 4). This is simply a historical fact. The similarity between the Greek council or the Roman senate and the Church council is widely recognized. Cyril Hovorun also highlights the political nature of the Church by agreeing that »the council is not just an appendix to the Church, but the Church itself is a council« (2017, 82). He goes on to argue that the ecclesial conciliar procedures are adapted from the Roman senate to be a blueprint for the works of the bishops, including the emphasis on the equal rights to speak and vote (*isēgoria*) of the council participants (2017, 84). Moreover, Leo Donald Davis mentions that the collective deliberations of the bishops follow the official Roman senatorial formulæ of convocation (1983, 23).

Just as the unity of the ancient polis depends on the conciliar unity, the unity of the Church as polis should be a conciliar unity. John Meyendorff writes that »wherever and whenever there is disagreement, the tradition of the Church recommends that a conciliar procedure take place« (1987, 126). When the bishops meet, they deliberate as equals. As Bulgakov says, there cannot be any *episcopus episcoporum* or a super-bishop (1999, 124).

Furthermore, just as the Greek councils are responsible for the legislation of the polis, the Church councils are responsible for the canons of the Church. For the Church to be united, not only should the councils be recognized as the supreme authority for deliberation, but also the canons resulting from those councils should be obeyed. Aristotle's idea of political unity is useful here. In the polis, some people are rulers and legislators, and others are the ruled. Both the rulers and the ruled must be virtuous in their own capacity (Deslauriers 2013, 138–139). Political unity can obtain only when the legislators produce excellent legislation through the conciliar procedure, when the rulers virtuously govern the people in accordance with the laws, and the ruled willingly obey the laws. In the same way, unity in the Church can obtain only when the Church councils produce great canons that are obeyed by the Church community under the rule of the bishops. This understanding of Church unity reaffirms the fact that the Church is indeed a canonical community (Clapsis 2000, 117). How one interprets the canon law of the Church is indeed a complicated issue, but the reception of the canons in the life of the Church must avoid the extremes of legalism and anarchism (Erickson 1991, 10–12).

In the ancient polis, obedience to the law is essential to achieve concord among citizens (Bakke 2001, 119). Concord is a necessary element for political unity. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle says that »friendship (*hē philia*) seems too to hold [cities] (*tas poleis*) together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for [concord] (*hē homonoia*) seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction (*tēn stasin*) as their worst enemy« (1155a, 22–26). Again, later in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that »a city is [in concord] when men have the same opinion about what is to their interest, and choose the same actions, and do what they have resolved in common« (1167a, 25–28). Blessed Augustine, too, in *De Civitate Dei* emphasizes the importance of concord for the unity of the city: »For the rational and well-ordered concord of diverse sounds in harmonious variety suggests the compact unity of the well-ordered city.« (17.14)⁵

Since the very beginning of the Church, civil conflict or dissension is a reason for split or division. The first Jerusalem council in Act 15,2 begins with a sharp dispute (*staseōs*) between Paul and Barnabas and the party of the circumcisers about the matter of circumcision of the Gentile believers. Canon 15 of Nicea I says that in case there are discords (*tas staseis*), the Canon must be obeyed. Such obedience, in turn, will result in concord.

The importance of concord is attested in other documents of the early church, such as in „Apostolic Canon“ 34 (Hagiorite and Agapius 1957, 50):

»But let not even such a one do anything without the advice and consent and approval of all. For thus will there be concord (*homonía*), and God will be glorified through the Lord in Holy Spirit; the Father, and the Son; and the Holy Spirit.«

⁵ The translation is taken from Philip Schaff (1977).

In the *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius describes how Constantine oversees Nicea I, »There was no other way of resolving important issues except by synodal meetings; /... / [Constantine] promoted peace and concord by assembling the priests of God in obedience to the divine law« (1.51). As Kallistos Ware writes, the aim of every council is to attain a ‚common mind‘ through collective discernment (2019, 23).

The first letter of Clement to the Corinthians also emphasizes the importance of concord (*homonía*) and peace to stave off sedition (*stasin*) (20; 30; 51; 60–61). 1 Clem 30,3, for example, asks the readers to clothe themselves in concord and to avoid backbiting and slander.⁶

One practical consequence that comes from the emphasis on concord is the fact that the Church members as fellow citizens must become political friends with each other, which means that they would subscribe to the ideal of the City of God for a noble life, reaffirm the necessity and centrality of the conciliar fellowship, and obey the canons of the Church as best as they can. Such attitudes and actions will result in concord and peace.

In this section, I have shown that taking the image of the Church as polis seriously contributes to the discussion of church unity in that there is a strong confirmation of the need for conciliar unity, obedience to the canons, and concord. I will now discuss the issue of citizenship in a polis.

3.2 Citizenship

One other possible contribution from understanding the Church as a polis for the discourses on church unity comes from the issues of citizenship and church membership. Aristotle defines citizenship in his *Politics* (1275b, 17–21):

»The conception of the citizen (*politēs*) now begins to clear up. He who has the power to take part in the deliberative (*bouleutikēs*) or judicial (*kritikēs*) administration of any state is said by us to be a citizen of that state (*tēs poleōs*); and, speaking generally, a state is a body of citizens sufficing for the purposes of life.«

Aristotle also mentions that sometimes a polis will admit aliens as citizens if the law permits them to be (1278a, 26–27). In his definition of ‚citizen‘, Aristotle emphasizes the fact that citizens would potentially be able to hold public or political office.

The public offices or public roles in ancient Greece are called *hai timai* or honours. Those who are committing dishonour or disgrace (*atimia*) lose their privileges in public or political life. Aristotle makes the distinction between citizens as follows: »Hence, as is evident, there are different kinds of citizens; and he is a citizen in the fullest sense who shares in the honours of the state. Compare Homer’s words »like some dishonoured (*atimēton*) stranger«; he who is excluded from the honours of the state is no better than an alien (*metoikos*).« (1278a, 34–38)

⁶ See also Werner Jaeger’s discussion of Clement (1961, 16–17).

Atimia should be avoided to stave off penalty or exile. In the ancient polis, *atimia* is a designation for cases deserving of outlawry, such as establishing tyranny, overthrowing the democracy, or intentional homicide (Forsdyke 2005, 10–11).

If the Church is a polis, then *atimia* would be something that needs to be avoided to stave off schism or excommunication. In the Scriptures, the word can refer to sins, such as shameful lusts (Rom 1,26), or to a social disgrace, such as when a man wears long hair (1 Cor 11,14). St. Chrysostom thinks that having illegitimate children with slaves or prostitutes is an *atimia* (Wet 2015, 249).

The canons of the ecumenical councils do not speak much of *atimia* other than in Canon 6 of Constantinopolitanum I (Hagiorite and Agapius 1957, 213):

»But if anyone, scorning what has been decreed in the foregoing statements, should dare either to annoy the emperor's ear or trouble courts of secular authorities or an ecumenical council to the affrontment (*atimasas*) of all the Bishops of the diocese, let no such person be allowed to present any information whatever, because of his having thus roundly insulted the Canons and ecclesiastical discipline.«

Nevertheless, this rare appearance of *atimia* is very informative: dishonour is attributed to those who would belittle the canons, which in this context concerns accusations against Orthodox bishops. The canons emphasize the importance of honour or office (*timē*) repeatedly, for example, in Nicea I (Canons 7–8), Constantinopolitanum I (Canon 3), and Chalcedon (Canon 4).

My proposal is that the unity of the Church must be the unity of its members who have the honour (*timē*). *Atimia* will undermine church unity. It is very interesting that Yannaras, in his 2018 article on the hubris of autocephaly, uses the idea of *atimia* when talking about the Patriarch of Moscow with regards to the Episcopal Council of the Phanar. Yannaras thinks that the Patriarch »blackmails the economically (or politically) Moscow-dependent ‚primates‘ to follow him in his abstaining. In ecclesiastical language, such behaviour is characterized as ‚cheese‘, in common language: ‚dishonesty‘ (*atimia*)« [translated by Dimitri Conomos] (Yannaras 2018). The issues that are at hand here are far from uncontroversial and it is not my intention to offend the parties involved. What is important here is for the Church to identify which behaviours are considered an *atimia* and what appropriate responses need to be made to those behaviours.

What is interesting about the idea of *atimia* is that it is not only about dishonour, but also about the deprivation of political office. The word *timē* can mean honour or office. A citizen with full political rights would be a citizen with *timē*. However, one can be a citizen although at the same time an *atimos* (without honour or office). This would be a case in which a citizen is committing a punishable mistake or is being suspended in political activity or being exiled. In the same way, one can be a resident alien or a metic (*metoikos*) who is *atimos*. A metic is not a slave but barred from political participation and holding property (Nussbaum 1990, 419).

If Christians are fellow citizens in the City of God, then it is important to under-

stand who can be citizens, what is considered *atimia*, and who are considered the metics. In Orthodox theology, the citizens of the City of God are those who have received valid baptism and chrismation. It is probably safe to say that non-Christians can be considered metics or resident aliens.⁷ What about non-Orthodox Christians? Are they not fellow citizens of the City of God?

Some Orthodox theologians do not believe that baptisms of other churches can be fully recognized as valid. Some utilize the principle of the sacramental economy for the baptisms of the Roman Catholics and the Reformed Protestants (Merras 1998, 144). The baptisms of non-Orthodox churches are difficult for the Orthodox Church to accept because the sacraments of baptism, chrismation, and eucharist are ultimately inseparable (Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church 1993, 65).

Bulgakov understands the problem. To him, there needs to be a distinction between non-Christians and non-Orthodox Christians. While non-Christians probably are deprived of the sacraments and the life of grace, it is not entirely clear that non-Orthodox Christians are also on the same boat as the non-Christians (Nikolaev 2007, 90). And then there are the Oriental churches and Orthodox churches that are non-canonical. How should one view these groups? Canon 95 of the Council of Trullo clearly makes a distinction in the reception of different groups of people. Some need to be rebaptized, some need to be baptized, some need to be chrismated only, and some only need to repudiate their heretic beliefs.

The language of citizenship in the City of God might be able to provide a new vocabulary here. From the Eastern Orthodox point of view, Eastern Orthodox Christians are usually citizens with *timē*, unless someone is excommunicated.⁸ I argue that it is reasonable to think of those who are not Eastern Orthodox as analogous to passive citizens, i.e., citizens without *timē*. This would be true because one cannot hold an ecclesiastical office as a deacon or a priest in Eastern Orthodox Church without being Eastern Orthodox. But this is true as well in Roman Catholicism. The vocabulary of 'passive citizens' can in fact be used by other mainline Protestant denominations. Isn't it true that one needs to be a Lutheran to be a pastor in the Lutheran church? And isn't it true that one must be a Dutch Reformed of a certain denomination to be a pastor in that denomination?

In this section, I have argued that seeing the Church as a polis is beneficial in understanding Church unity. The reason is that one can try identifying forms of *atimia* and then avoid them at all costs. The language of citizenship also might provide a new vocabulary to understand how Orthodox Christians relate to non-Orthodox Christians.

⁷ An older Greek constitution refers to those who do not believe in Christ as metics, who can't be officers but can be soldiers (Arnakis 1998, 115).

⁸ Bernd Wannewetsch reminds us that a full citizen of the Church's polis can still be no more than a *paroikos* in the secular community (2004, 142).

4. Possible Concerns

One immediate concern about my proposal to take the city metaphor seriously might be about the competing claims of different Christian groups to be the true city of God, i.e., the true catholic church. How does the metaphor of the city help the relations between Christian groups not in communion with each other, who each think that they are the genuine city of God? My answer to this concern would be to point out that the problem of competing claims made by different Christian groups is present not only for the metaphor of the city of God, but also for other metaphors, such as the body of Christ. The Catholics believe that they are the true body of Christ, just as the canonical Orthodox believe that the true body of Christ only extends to the canonical jurisdictions (Jillions 2009, 296–297). Given these competing claims, the city metaphor might in fact offer a political language by which Christian groups may interact. For example, they need to be courteous to one another in ,diplomacy‘ (e.g., dialogues and gifting of relics and icons), ,hospitality‘ (e.g., papal visits and delegations), and ,trade‘ (e.g., exchange of goods and services for liturgical and legal purposes).

The second possible concern might be that this metaphor might not have a normative force. In other words, one might ask how the metaphor of the Church as a polis translates into a prescription that the Church must be politically united. To respond to this concern, I would like to quote Jesus’ wise words against the Pharisees, when he was accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, that a city (polis) divided against itself will not stand (Matt 12,25). Although not his main point in the immediate discourse, Jesus is saying that unity is an existential necessity and an ideal to pursue if a city wants to flourish. If the Church is indeed a polis, it is an existential concern that the Church must be politically united. In other words, the normativity emerges from existential needs to survive.

The third concern might be about how to determine which metaphors on church unity are most appropriate. The Scriptures depict the Church not only as a city, but also as a human body, a household, and a temple. The kind of unity in each of these metaphors is quite different. A human body has more unity than a household, and a household has more unity than a polis. Which unity is more important? As a response, this concern is actually not specific only for those who see the Church as a polis, but also for those who believe that the Church is depicted in many ways in the Scriptures. I believe each metaphor for the Church is useful in different ways. The metaphor of the Church as a polis is probably most useful when thinking about the Church as a hierarchical organization with its canon laws. The metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ, by comparison, might be more useful when discussing the various gifts that Christians can offer in their ministries together.

Another concern might be that my discussion of political unity is too materialistic, given the fact that the Church is actually a spiritual or alternative reality, not a physical reality. My answer to this concern would be to say that the utilization of political apparatus in the life of the church does not necessarily undermine the

spiritual nature of the Church. In fact, just as liturgy must be embodied in the worshipers, the spiritual nature of the Church is embodied in the political administration of the Church.

The last concern might be that the image of the Church as a polis is not really adding any practical or real-life contribution to the discussion of church unity. For example, what if people do not want to obey the canons and constitutions? To respond to this concern, my proposal to see the Church as a polis is not primarily motivated by the desire to give a practical contribution, but instead an affirmation of what the Scriptures and the holy fathers have presented to us, the teaching of which does have practical ramifications. The fact that some people are not obedient to the political administration of the Church simply shows the reality that the Church is still not ideal. The same kind of concern is present for other metaphors of the Church as well. For example, the image of the Church as the body of Christ is subject to the very same problem of noncompliance and anarchy of the different bodily parts. Still, theologians think that there are values to using the metaphor of the body of Christ for the Church.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the Church is a City of God as both a present and an eschatological reality. This idea is attested in the Scriptures, in the writings of the Church fathers, and in contemporary Orthodox discourses. Taking this political image of the Church seriously directly impacts the discourses on Church unity at least in two ways.

First, just as a polis is united by its people and its laws, one can reconfirm that Orthodox unity is a unity in the ecumenical councils, canons, and creeds. Efforts towards Church unity should then aim for a common acceptance of essential Church constitutions and conciliar decisions. This is not a reductive understanding of Church unity, because it can recognize other kinds of unity such as liturgical unity (Rommen 2017, 75–76; Vukašinović 2013, 255).

Second, just as a polis has different kinds of residents (e.g., active citizens, passive citizens, and aliens), the Church *qua* polis can be seen as a city with different kinds of members. Invoking the idea of citizenship would provide a new vocabulary to explain the relations between Orthodox Christians, Orthodox Christians who are not in communion with each other, and non-Orthodox Christians. More specifically, the idea of 'passive citizens' can be used to refer to other Christian groups. This strategy avoids categorizing other Christians as unbelievers (or, in political terms, as metics or aliens), and encourages discussions on the necessary conditions for having *timē* (honour or ecclesiastical office) for purposes of working towards Church unity.

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