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Avakian, Sylvie

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## Christian Unity in the Middle East

### The Prophetic Stance of George Khodr

Sylvie Avakian\*

#### Abstract

The Orthodox Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon, George Khodr, born in 1923, has played an important role in ecumenism and the ecumenical movement since the 1st Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, where he was made a member of the WCC youth commission. He is particularly remembered for his keynote address to the WCC central committee meeting in Addis Ababa in 1971 on “Christianity in a Pluralistic World: The Economy of the Holy Spirit,” at a time when the WCC was embarking on its programme of dialogue with peoples of living faiths and ideologies. This article explores the theological foundations of ecumenism in Khodr’s thought and theology, before turning to how he addresses the theological differences and the historical dilemmas that accompanied the history of the church and impaired East-West relations. In conclusion, the article argues that the model of “unity in diversity” as intended and conceived by Khodr best meets the conditions, the challenges, and the requirements for ecumenism in the contemporary Middle East. </abs>

#### Keywords

George Khodr, World Council of Churches, divine *oikonomia*, dialogue, unity in diversity

Born in Tripoli, Lebanon, on 6 July 1923, the Orthodox Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon George Khodr has played an important role in ecumenism and the ecumenical movement, attending at the age of 25 the 1st Assembly in 1948 of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam, where he was made a member of the WCC youth commission.<sup>1</sup> In 1971, he gave a keynote address at the WCC central committee in Addis Ababa on “Christianity in a

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\* Sylvie Avakian is a lecturer in Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen, Germany.

<sup>1</sup> Amal Dibo, “Metropolitan Georges Khodr of Mount Libanon,” in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education*, ed. Pantelis Kalaitzidis et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 220–24.

Pluralistic World: The Economy of the Holy Spirit,” at a time when the WCC was embarking on its programme of dialogue with peoples of living faiths and ideologies.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this article is to concentrate on the ecumenical stance of Khodr and through that to demonstrate the prophetic standpoint of the metropolitan.<sup>3</sup> By “prophetic,” I am referring to a person, who though being conscious of the limitations and the obstacles of human existence in history, nevertheless is aware of the horizon beyond all limitations and restraints. By obstacles and limitations, I mean the history of discord and partition between the different Christian traditions, of which Khodr is fully aware.

I will first demonstrate the theological grounds and bases for ecumenism in the thought and theology of George Khodr, which are the seeds for his prophetic stance, and then, in the second part, I will argue that Christian unity, as aspired for and sought by George Khodr, is unity in diversity. This part will address the theological differences and the historical dilemmas that accompanied the history of the church and impaired East–West relations, as they are addressed by George Khodr. To conclude, I will contend that the model of “unity in diversity” as intended and conceived by Khodr best meets the conditions, the challenges, and the requirements for ecumenism in the contemporary Middle East.

## **The Theological Foundations for Christian Ecumenism in Khodr’s Thought**

### **The mystical nature of Christian faith**

The concept of “divine Mystery” is essential to Khodr’s thought and to Orthodox theology as such. God is beyond human understanding and is inaccessible to human rational faculties.<sup>4</sup> It is

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<sup>2</sup> George Khodr, “Christianity in a Pluralistic World: The Economy of the Holy Spirit,” *Ecumenical Review* 23:2 (1971), 118–28.

<sup>3</sup> See further on George Khodr: Sylvie Avakian, *The “Other” in Karl Rahner’s Transcendental Theology and George Khodr’s Spiritual Theology within the Near Eastern Context* (Frankfurt am Main and Wien: Peter Lang, 2012); Sylvie Avakian, “The Mystery of Divine Love in the Apophatic Theology of Bishop George Khodr,” in *Theological Review of the Near East School of Theology* 33 (2012), 39–68.

<sup>4</sup> George Khodr, *The Orthodox View of God and the Human Being* [in Arabic] (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-nūr, 1982), 7–8. (This work was originally a lecture series presented within the context of the Orthodox Youth Movement in the year 1960.) Here, two remarks are necessary. First, Khodr conveyed his thought not through volumes of systematic theology, but through articles that appeared weekly in newspapers. Khodr’s early articles, from the 1960s, appeared in the Lebanese newspaper *Lisān al-ḥāl*. These articles are dated between 11 March 1962 and 25 January 1970. Later these were brought together and published in a series of four books, *Hadīth al-’aḥad*. Since the 1970s, Khodr’s articles (ranging between 2 and 5 pages) appeared weekly in the Lebanese *An-nahār* newspaper. In addition, since 1981, Khodr has written pastoral articles addressing his church community in the weekly bulletin of the Archdiocese of Byblos and Batroun. Second, all translations of George Khodr’s works from Arabic in this paper are mine.

through spiritual-mystical experience that one can see the depth of God.<sup>5</sup> Khodr points to Gregory of Nyssa (335–395), Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389?), and Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500), who emphasized apophatic mystical theology rather than a metaphysical conception of God.<sup>6</sup> Khodr further makes a reference to Palamas (1296–1357), according to whom the personal encounter with God and the possibility of deification is given to all members of the church, and the attainment of this potential is the final goal of Christian faith.<sup>7</sup> Hence, and in contrast to the speculative theology of the West, Khodr writes, “Discourse on divine being is inconceivable in Eastern Christianity since its whole heritage maintains the transcendence of divine essence and its unknowable nature.”<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the notion of mystery implies both hiddenness and revelation.<sup>9</sup> Hence, and contrary to the rational and the metaphysical approach of the West, Orthodox theology, according to Khodr, maintains the spiritual and personal approach for discerning the Christian Mystery.<sup>10</sup> Personal encounter with God, through contemplative prayer and reflection on the divine being, is the way to perceive divine Mystery, since the ultimate knowledge of God belongs not to the realm of scientific, rational examination, but to the realm of the heart and the spirit.

Theology, in this sense, is not the information one has about God; rather it is an experience far beyond human grasp, an experience that denies all attempts that aspire to make God conform to human understanding. The theologian accordingly is the one who is renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit so that they are on the path of deification,<sup>11</sup> since it is only through inner union with God that one comes to know God. It is only through divinely given light that one is given to transcend oneself toward God and aspire to see the very face of God, since the worldly human reality belongs to divine Mystery, which is revealed in the inner depth of human beings.

In this sense, divine liturgy is regarded as an important medium through which such spiritual experience can take place. The sacrament of the eucharist and its accompanying prayers are major elements for a possible discernment of the Mystery, and they are usually referred to as

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10–11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 10–12.

<sup>7</sup> John Meyendorff, *The Triads by Gregory Palamas* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983), 8.

<sup>8</sup> George Khodr, “God Is Love,” *An-nahār*, 21 January 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Kalistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, rev. ed. (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 15. See also Khodr, *Orthodox View of God*, 12–13.

<sup>10</sup> It is important here to see the different conceptions of mysticism in both Eastern Orthodox and Western Latin traditions. Western theology conceives of mysticism as “subjective, individual and necessarily esoteric knowledge, which, by definition, cannot be communicated to all,” as J. Meyendorff explains in his preface to *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, by Gregory of Nyssa, trans. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. xii–xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Khodr, *Orthodox View of God*, 10–12.

“mystical,” since through them an intimate participation in God is made possible. Thus, liturgy is the introduction to that one Mystery.<sup>12</sup> And yet, unlike Gregory Palamas, who rejected the need of both philosophy and science to know God, Khodr maintains the important task of science, reason, and philosophy beside the spiritual inclination.<sup>13</sup> Reason and science are helpful, though not exclusive, means for the knowledge of God, contends Khodr, since worldly knowledge can contribute to the knowledge of that which is beyond, even when such knowledge remains fragmentary and incomplete. Hence, thinking and faith, philosophy and theology (in the Orthodox sense of the word), nature and grace can be viewed as belonging together and yet they remain separate fields of knowledge and experience,<sup>14</sup> although faith is higher than thinking and deliberation, theology than philosophy, and grace is higher than nature since it transcends nature. In this way, Khodr claims the priority of spiritual experience, faith, and transformation over reason and objective, rational speculation.

### **Divine *oikonomia* and ecclesiastical economy**

At the WCC consultation on dialogue in 1970 at Ajaltoun, Lebanon, Khodr maintained that it is not possible to limit the work of the Holy Spirit within the walls of a historical church.<sup>15</sup> The consultation resulted in the “Ajaltoun Memorandum,” and led to the WCC central committee at its meeting in Addis Ababa the following year setting up its sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies. It was at this meeting in 1971 that Khodr, shortly after his ordination as a bishop, gave his address on “Christianity in a Pluralistic World – The Economy of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>16</sup> For a genuine theological dialogue, he stated, one’s aim should not be to

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<sup>12</sup> The liturgy in the Orthodox tradition, with the sacraments and their outward signs, are symbols for the divine Mystery. For further reading, see Enrico Mazza, *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age* (New York: Pueblo, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> It is this claim of the need for scientific, critical studies of the Scripture that Khodr’s thought is distinguished from that of Palamas.

<sup>14</sup> George Khodr, interviewed by Samir Farhat, *This World Is Not Enough* (Beirut: Dār an-nahār, 2006), 228.

<sup>15</sup> Jutta Sperber, *Christians and Muslims: The Dialogue Activities of the World Council of Churches and their Theological Foundation* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 218. Sperber remarks that Khodr’s address was the most “striking” on the subject and she refers later to Stanley Samartha’s claim that “Ajaltoun . . . may mean a more drastic break with past positions and attitudes than probably some of the churches are theologically and emotionally prepared for.”

<sup>16</sup> Khodr, “Christianity in a Pluralistic World.” This address of Khodr’s was criticized sharply by representatives of different religious traditions in the committee, who maintained, against the very wide concept of the Holy Spirit presented by Khodr, the importance of claiming the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to the historical revelation. Khodr explains in his response to the critiques that the uniqueness of Christ is not to be limited to a historical event (*ibid.*, 24). Furthermore, Khodr maintains that it is necessary for Christianity to contribute positively even to the faith and spirituality of the other religions (*ibid.*, 23). Nevertheless, Khodr’s contribution

convince the other party, nor to interpret the other tradition according to one's own values and understanding of truth. Rather, an honest move to the state of the Other is needed, so that one perceives the religious tradition and values of the Other through the eyes of the Other. This will even help to understand one's own tradition better, since all forms of spiritual richness are modes of divine care and providence.<sup>17</sup>

Reviewing the historical development of the Christian position concerning soteriology, Khodr explains that there were two different approaches by Christian apologetics from the very beginning. The first was universalist, which claimed that salvation is potentially granted to all humanity, while the second stressed the dualistic understanding of soteriology, implying that some will attain salvation while others will be punished by eternal damnation. Khodr finds the reason for the hostile approach – represented through Western speculative metaphysics – at the expense of the other positive and universal approach of Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, in the act of “crystallization” of the dogmatic, doctrinal body of the Christian faith in the early centuries opposing the heresies.<sup>18</sup> Similar historical reasons were behind the development of a negative, exclusivist approach within the Christian Medieval church in the West, concerning those who do not adhere to the claims of the Western church. The theology of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) and Thomas Aquinas contributed to the formation of such a theological position, which aimed to implement one Western socio-political unity that rules the world: an institutional church that rules out all “heresies” of other religious traditions. Thus, according to Khodr, theology and politics participated in forming the one Western civilized dominion over against the “under-developed countries” and their religions, of which Orthodox Christianity is a part.<sup>19</sup> An essential element of this unity, which Khodr calls “spiritual imperialism,” was the notion of “salvation history,” which results in “Christ” being the culmination of all human history and the “church,” the only context in which truth is to be

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was accepted and recommended for further studies by the different churches. See J. Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, 220–21. For further reading see S. E. Brown, *Meeting in Faith: Twenty Years of Christian-Muslim Conversations Sponsored by the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> George Khodr, “Dialogue between Religions,” 4 April 1965, in George Khodr, *Sunday's Word: Religion and Religions* [in Arabic] 2 (1985), 302–303.

<sup>18</sup> See a similar account of the two different streams of theology in the early church in Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1, 5–8. For a presentation of the dualistic view of salvation in the early period see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A&C Black, 1958), chap. 17; Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chap. 2. For the reasons for the triumph of the exclusive approach toward divine revelation and grace, see Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), 121–22.

<sup>19</sup> Khodr, “Christianity in a Pluralistic World,” 121.

found, echoing the claim of Cyprian: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. “God is indeed within history, but we forget that the divine event is the unfolding of the Mystery,”<sup>20</sup> states Khodr.

In this same address at Addis Ababa, Khodr offered a new and a broad understanding of divine *oikonomia* and the work of the Holy Spirit, embracing not only different traditions within Christianity but also other religious traditions. Christians can no longer claim to have an exclusive ownership of truth. Instead, it is possible to discern the work of the Spirit even when the Son is not specifically claimed. This, however, requires moving beyond the historical-categorical structures and symbols of a religious tradition, so that it will be possible to follow the tracks of Christ in different traditions. According to Khodr,

Contemporary theology must go beyond the notion of “salvation history” to rediscover the meaning of the *oikonomia*. The economy of Christ cannot be reduced to its historical manifestation but indicates the fact that we are made participants in the very life of God Himself. Hence the reference to eternity and to the work of the Holy Spirit. The very notion of economy is a notion of mystery. To say “mystery” is to point to the strength that is breathing in the event. It also points to the freedom of God who in God’s work of providence and redemption is not tied down to any event. The Church is the instrument of the mystery of salvation of the nations. It is the sign of God’s love for all humanity. It is not over against the world, separate from it; it is part of the world. The Church is the very breath of life for humanity, the image of the humanity to come, in virtue of the light it has received. It is the life of mankind itself, even if mankind does not realize this.<sup>21</sup>

In these words, Khodr’s perception of the “Church” comes to the fore. The church is the “instrument of the mystery of salvation.” The church is the future image and the anticipated hope of the whole humanity. Hence, it is through the work of the Spirit that all humanity is united in Christ: “It is [the Spirit] who fashions Christ within us.”<sup>22</sup> The Spirit’s work is not confined to a tradition; rather, its inspiration is at work throughout the world. Thus, the church is not separated from the world; rather, it is the sign of a “cosmic covenant” between God and all creation, as all humanity is proceeding toward the restoration of everything in Christ. Here it should be noted that for Khodr, the “other” is every other person, and specially the one who does not belong to one’s own religious tradition. And the meeting of love between the different traditions is what matters for him. Believers are to join their lives even with those who claim not to be followers of a religion, since the human being in given the potential of knowing God

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 126.

even without consciously being aware of that, and, hence, without referring to the name of “God.”<sup>23</sup>

Almost two decades after his first address to the WCC central committee, Khodr, at the WCC’s Baar consultation on interreligious dialogue (1991), presented his paper on “An Orthodox Perspective of Inter-Religious Dialogue.” He elaborated the all-inclusive concept of *oikonomia*, according to which God’s economy beginning from creation embraces all nations and religions through the Spirit. Concluding his address, Khodr writes that Christ is to be found in all religious traditions, “but also in poetry and art.”<sup>24</sup>

Behind Khodr’s perception of divine *oikonomia* and the ecclesiastical economy stands his perception of truth as such. In an article from 1986, Khodr elaborates on how truth is transmitted throughout the generations. Truth is all-inclusive, never limited to its particular embodiments throughout history. This explains Khodr’s all-inclusive conception of divine *oikonomia*, which is not limited to the historical forms that the Christian church took throughout history. Khodr asserts the need to present truth in new forms rather than maintaining the obsolete constructions of the past. Hence, those who are faithful to truth as such and yet are the faithful communicators of truth in their contemporary times and situation, these are the ones sent and baptized by the Spirit to become the ambassadors of Christ and to communicate truth in every possible manner so that it may witness to the wider horizons of divine Mystery.<sup>25</sup>

### **The incompatibility between *theologia* and *economia*: The givenness of God**

In *The Orthodox View of God and the Human Being*, Khodr referred to the Orthodox distinction between divine essence and divine energies that goes back to the early teachings of Irenaeus (2nd century) and Basil of Caesarea (329–79).<sup>26</sup> The essence–energies distinction became with

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<sup>23</sup> George Khodr, G. Ḥaddād, H. Duwayhī, and A. Maqdisī, eds, *Al-kanīṣah fīl-‘ālam* [The Church in the World], (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-nūr, 1973), 146.

<sup>24</sup> George Khodr, “An Orthodox Perspective of Inter-Religious Dialogue” *Current Dialogue* 19 (1991), 27. See also George Khodr, “Cultural Diversity: The Experience of Russia and the Arab East,” *An-nahār*, 1 August 2004.

<sup>25</sup> George Khodr, “The Contemporary Apostle,” in George Khodr, *Sunday’s Word: The Human Being in his Destiny and Morals* [in Arabic] (1986), 86–87.

<sup>26</sup> Khodr, *Orthodox View of God*, 14. Palamas has been accused by Catholic theologians of not remaining faithful to the Cappadocian tradition, where the distinction between God’s essence and energies is not so clear. Western theology, emphasizing the simple substance of God, cannot accept the essence–energies distinction. However, such a distinction between *theologia* and *economia* was already claimed by the Cappadocian fathers, who denoted this distinction, trying to overcome Arianism. The Cappadocians also tried, through this distinction, to overcome the monistic ontology of the Greeks, presenting the concept of the created being, whose origin is outside of its limited reality. See Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and the Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite* (London;

Gregory Palamas an essential principal of Orthodox trinitarian theology, with its emphasis on the incompatibility between the inner being of God and the divine economy.<sup>27</sup> The distinction is to be traced back to the patristic differentiation between *theologia* and *economia*, according to which God has an “essence” (οὐσία)<sup>28</sup> that is inaccessible to human senses and rationality; hence the human being has no share in it. However, there is also in God that which humanity can share in. This is referred to as divine “energies” (ἐνέργειαι),<sup>29</sup> “power” (δύναμις), “work,” “light,” “glory,” or “divine radiance,” which is already given to the human being with the creation. Divine nature reveals itself through the energies, which are eternal processions within God, however distinct from the essence.

Through retrieving the Greek Patristic tradition concerning the essence–energies distinction Khodr brings the theological notions of divine mystery and transcendence together with the divine becoming human and participating in human history. God is the inconceivable “wholly Other,” yet is the most intimate; God is a mystery, yet a personal God, whom one may encounter. Thus, divine energies given to all are the means through which the human subject encounters God in God’s wholeness. Such an encounter is purely spiritual, through which one meets the depth of God; and, yet, it is overwhelmed by divine transcendence. However, it is noteworthy that while the East maintained the complete otherness of God through the essence–energies distinction, the West, with its metaphysical framework, viewed the Orthodox distinction between divine essence and energies as an ontological distinction within Godself, and hence could not accept it. I would not hesitate to contend that this distinction makes a free

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New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 79. It is possible here to refer to Basil’s Letter 234, which implies the essence-energies distinction. See: P. Schaff and H. Wace, eds, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 8., St. Basil: Letters and Select Works (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895), letter 234 (at 274).

<sup>27</sup> This is a point of disagreement between the Eastern and the Western theological traditions. While the East insisted on the distinction between the inner and the economic realities of God, Western theology emphasized their unity. It must be noted however that there is a greater variety of theological positions in the West than just one integrated opinion. See D. Reid, *Energies of the Spirit: Trinitarian Models in Eastern Orthodox and Western Theology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 3–5.

<sup>28</sup> The Greek term *ousia* (Lat. *Essentia*, from *esse*) is translated as “to be” or “being.” In Plato’s use of the term, *ousia* indicated a particular being, whose idea is founded “beyond the essence.” Even though *ousia* was a Greek philosophical term used by both Plato and Aristotle, its use within the Orthodox tradition has an experiential, rather than philosophical, significance. Hence, the Orthodox doctrine of *ousia-energeia* is not to be considered a metaphysical theory. Reid, *Energies of the Spirit*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> The Greek term *energeia* (Lat. *energia*) translated as activity, was also used by Aristotle, who used it to refer to the power that makes a thing actual, “a state of functioning.” Hence ἐνέργειαν οὐσίαν, a real thing, was distinguished from that which is a mere potential. However, with the employment of both *ousia* and *energeia* by the church fathers, a new meaning was given to the terms based on the spiritual experience of God and Christ.

and an open theological position toward other religious traditions possible, since it admits the impossibility of having control over truth as such, namely the impossibility of claiming to have complete knowledge and understanding of who God in God's essence is. The distinction acknowledges simultaneously the many different forms and manifestations of the divine in the world.

### **The whole humanity as the image of God**

Following the main Orthodox teaching on the divine image, Khodr emphasizes that the human being is created according to the image of God and is given a dynamic principle that enables them to attain their original image. The created man "Adam" is not a particular person, claims Khodr, rather, "Adam" is the cosmic human being in whom humankind is represented. All human beings are of infinite value, since all carry the same image of the Creator and are offered the potential of growing and maturing to God's likeness. Furthermore, Khodr contends that all human beings together form the image of God. The total, universal all-inclusive humankind is the real image of God and the divine image in the human being is realized when humanity reaches its final unity.<sup>30</sup> This is the mystical body of Christ, Khodr claims, referring to the old concept of universal restoration of everything to the original image ἀποκατάστασις (*Apocatastasis*).<sup>31</sup> In an article published in 1989, "*Al-kalimah wal-ḥuriyyah*" (The Word and the freedom), Khodr says that according to the doctrine of creation in the Eastern church, every human being is eternally present as an image or an idea within the divine λογος and in time God actualizes the person.<sup>32</sup> Any human being is every human being. No humanity is possible apart from all its members. This is to say that human life is to be respected. Hence, any social-political striving that does not consider the life of every human being fails to fulfill the life of a society.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> George Khodr, *Orthodox View of God*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Khodr, *Al-kanīṣah fīl- 'ālam*, 130. The word ἀποκατάστασις appears in the Bible only in Acts 3:19-21, where it refers to the restoration of the whole cosmos, and this is the eschatological dimension of the word. Another important text for this view of the church fathers, Origin and Gregory of Nyssa in particular, is 1 Corinthians 15:28, which supports the argument for universal salvation.

<sup>32</sup> Here, reference can be made to Basil the Great and Maximus the Confessor (580–662), who referred to the *logoi* as "preexistent in the Logos" yet not simultaneously acquiring existence; rather, "some remain in potency till their due time. God is ineffably above; yet the one is many and the many one." See Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Herder, 1955), 26.

<sup>33</sup> George Khodr, "The Word and Freedom," *An-nahār*, 4 February 1989. See Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus*, 167–70. Maximus the Confessor referred to the claim made originally by Gregory of Nazianzus that the human being is "a portion of God and slipped down from above." This implies "some sort of primitive union" with God which is referred to as the "actual state of man" (167).

Thus one can speak, based on Khodr's concept of creation, of the eternal image of the human being in terms of "the supernatural principle," which directs one toward that which is beyond the natural order.<sup>34</sup> Every created existence is granted, from the very beginning, its perfect λογος, and consequently it is possible to speak of the many λόγοι and of the role of Christ not in terms of bringing any change into the λόγοι, but rather as fulfilling human nature so that it can reach its own perfection, or its own λογος.<sup>35</sup> Hence, the origin of humanity is to be found in God and this is the true meaning of incarnation; God becoming human. In this sense, sin is a distortion of the human reality. Sinfulness is not an aspect of humanity, but rather its deformation. Thus, humanity, in its origin, is disposed toward God and is given to share in the innermost being of God. Here, too, I contend, Khodr's thoughts prepare the ground for an open and ecumenical theology, according to which not only other Christian denominations but all human beings together form the image of God.

## **East-West Theological Differences and the Desire for Christian Unity**

### **The economy of the spirit and the givenness of divine grace**

In contrast to the Western<sup>36</sup> concept of *filioque*, Khodr claims that the role of the Holy Spirit in the world is not subordinated to that of the Son. It is the Spirit that makes the very presence of Christ in the human being possible, activating the divine words and transmitting them anew within the lives of human beings. Through the Spirit, the events of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ have uninterrupted efficacy in the lives of the believers.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Khodr maintains that the presence of Christ is extended to all human times through the Holy Spirit, in such a way that different religious traditions are equal fields for the Spirit to work in. The Spirit is active everywhere, turning all humankind into the people of God.<sup>38</sup> Khodr writes,

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<sup>34</sup> Khodr, *Al-kanīṣah fīl- 'ālam*, 129–30; George Khodr, "The Miracles and the Word," *An-nahār*, 2 October 2004.

<sup>35</sup> On this point, see Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Sweden: Håkan Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1965), 442–43. Here, Thunberg, referring to Maximus' theology, describes the role of Christ in relation to the mode of being (τρόπος). τρόπος in this sense refers not to "being" itself but to its "mode of existence." This is to say that Christ's role and the role of divinization in one's life is to renew one's "mode of existence" without effecting the "essential principal," λογος, according which one is created. See also *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), xiii.

<sup>36</sup> Here "Western" and "Eastern" should not be considered in their general and wide denotation; rather, by "Western theology," a distinctive line of thought, though paramount within Western theology, is addressed for which speculative metaphysics has a dominant role. Similarly, by "Eastern theology" a distinctive "spiritual" line of thought is addressed, which is represented in this paper through the thought and theology of George Khodr.

<sup>37</sup> George Khodr, "The Holy Spirit," *An-nahār*, 14 June 2003.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* See also Khodr, "The Miracles and the Word," 2004.

The economy of Christ is unintelligible without the economy of the Spirit. “God says, ‘This will happen in the last days; I will pour out upon everyone a portion of my spirit’” (Acts 2.17). This must be taken to mean a Pentecost which is universal from the very first . . . The Spirit is everywhere and fills everything by the virtue of an economy distinct from that of the Son . . . [The Spirit] is who fashions Christ within us . . . It is the Spirit that makes Christ an inner reality here and now.<sup>39</sup>

Khodr finds in the early tradition of the church a support for his understanding of the Holy Spirit. In Irenaeus’s works, the two economies of Christ and the Holy Spirit are articulated distinctly as the “two hands of the Father,” thus implying a distinctive role and function for each economy. However, Irenaeus’ intention was to confront the Gnostic supposition, at the time, that the body is evil. Thus, he maintains the necessity of both body and soul as is implied through the roles of both the Son and the Spirit.<sup>40</sup> The Son had to safeguard redemption through incarnation, while the Spirit is to make redemption attainable for the world. Retrieving Irenaeus’ theological metaphor, Khodr claims a reciprocal relationship between the Word and the Spirit, a relationship that safeguards the whole humanity’s belonging to divine economy. Through both the theology of the Word (the dispersed Word) and of the Spirit, humanity is viewed as part of the divine redemptive will. The seeds of the Word need the pledge of the Spirit so that all may grow in the “Christ-like values.” Thus, a new pneumatological paradigm has emerged with Khodr, according to which pneumatology can serve best as a point of departure for a theology that is open to different religious traditions,<sup>41</sup> and the Spirit is perceived as active even in the present, because it is not limited to space and time. It should be noted here that Khodr was one of the first 20th-century theologians to implement the theology of the Spirit as a departure point for addressing religious pluralism. Furthermore, grace is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world that acts directly upon the world enlightening and transfiguring it.<sup>42</sup>

Khodr’s concept of divine grace can be traced back to the teachings of Gregory of Nazianzus, who referred to a “Particle of Divinity” present in the human being. This “Particle of Divinity” itself is the uncreated divine grace which was implied and involved in the act of creation itself. This is to say that the human soul receives at once life and grace, which is the same as referring

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<sup>39</sup> Khodr, “Christianity in a Pluralistic World,” 125–26.

<sup>40</sup> On this point, see Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal–Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Acad. Press, 2000), 61–62.

<sup>41</sup> Yong maintains that Khodr was the first to present a “pneumatological interpretation of the question posed by non-Christian faiths to Christian Theology.” Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 60–61.

<sup>42</sup> A similar understanding of the relationship between grace and the Holy Spirit appears in Nikolai Berdyaev’s article *The Truth of Orthodoxy*,

<https://stgeorgegreenville.org/assets/files/Classes/Truth/WebPage.pdf>.

to the Holy Spirit. According to the Western-Thomist perception of divine grace, in Khodr's view, the human being is not really in partnership with God. The human being cannot be united with God, because of the unbridgeable gap between the divine and the human. Contrary to the Western position, Khodr explains that grace cannot be an act of God, but is rather Godself, though not the very essence of God.<sup>43</sup> Thus, for Khodr "there is a direct relationship between God and the human being,"<sup>44</sup> as grace, or the gift of the spirit, is intrinsically united with the gift of the Son through incarnation, and both together form the one divine Mystery.

Hence, following most Orthodox theology, Khodr contends that it is through the dwelling of the divine in the human that the human is essentially characterized and not by the grave distance between the divine and the human, created through "original sin," as Western theology since Augustine emphasizes.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, it is possible to remark here that most Western theology has adopted Aristotelian principles, using its metaphysical foundations and applying them within theology, making room for God within metaphysics. Eastern Orthodox theology similarly adopted the Aristotelian heritage; however, it interpreted it in experiential terms, leaving more space for God within theology, since it did not limit God to its own theological enterprise; rather it attempted to safeguard the otherness of God beyond human pursuit and ambitions.<sup>46</sup>

### **The East-West dilemma: History of discord**

Khodr seems to regard both Catholic and Protestant churches as belonging to the same Western tradition, which he traces back to Augustine as its theological founder.<sup>47</sup> Hence, there is in Khodr's thought a clear East-West theological divergence, which takes the form of perceiving non-Eastern Christianity as alien to the origin of Christendom. One important element of divergence concerns the Western concept of *filioque*. Khodr maintains that Eastern theology, from the very beginning, regarded both the Son and the Holy Spirit as eternal, tracing their origin only to God the Father. Western theology, on the other hand, with its addition of the

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<sup>43</sup> Khodr, *Orthodox View of God*, 15–16.

<sup>44</sup> Khodr, *This World Is Not Enough*, 84.

<sup>45</sup> Khodr, *Orthodox View of God*, 21. See also G. Khodr, "The Light as the Meeting Place," *An-nahār*, 30 March 1986.

<sup>46</sup> See Avakian, *The "Other" in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology*, 223–24.

<sup>47</sup> Khodr, 1981, 86. However, Khodr makes several references to the Protestant Church. In his "The Approved Priest," *An-nahār*, 24 October 2009. Khodr writes that it was only in the 17th century that the Catholic and the Orthodox churches started to found theological seminaries as they observed the Protestant pastors studying the Bible. Khodr writes further, "Thanks to Protestantism we understood that the minister is the one who carries the theology and is ordained as 'the servant of the Word.'"

*filioque*, has traced the procession of the Holy Spirit to the Son, and with its stress on the one divine essence has neglected the role of the Holy Spirit, substituting it with the church. Palamas, claims Khodr, made it clear that the Holy Spirit does not come from the Son.<sup>48</sup> Hence, the relation between the Son and the Spirit is not that of origin but of an eternal relationship of two divine persons. The Son is eternally begotten, and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father.<sup>49</sup> Khodr claims that the person of the Holy Spirit has been disregarded in most Western theology and has been replaced with papal infallibility and monarchy and the subsequent institutionalization of the church.<sup>50</sup> He refers to the Catholic theologian Yves Congar,<sup>51</sup> who has regarded the neglect of the Holy Spirit in Catholic tradition as lack of faithfulness to the biblical and patristic traditions.<sup>52</sup> For Khodr, it is only the Spirit that can bring the church out of its hierarchical and institutional system, so that it may rejuvenate and retrieve its original meaning and purpose.<sup>53</sup>

Hence, in most of his works, Khodr presents his thought in contrast to the Western position, attempting to show how the historical development of Western theology was not faithful to the universal message of the early Christians. Western theology (Catholic and Protestant), claims Khodr, is extremely influenced by the general Western cultural and political formation, which sees itself as controlling those Eastern Christians belonging to a different church tradition, and, hence, it has contributed toward the political ambitions of the West. Though Khodr can perceive a change in the course of action of the Western church after the Second Vatican Council, as the term “sister Churches” was used to refer theologically to the Greek and the Roman churches,

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<sup>48</sup> George Khodr, “The introductory word,” in Paul Evdokimov, *The Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Tradition* (Beirut: Al-būlusīyyah wal-manshūrāt al-urthūdhuksīyyah, 1989), 13.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. See also Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke, 1957), 158.

<sup>50</sup> This claim lies in the view that if the pope is regarded as the vicar of Christ, with the church as the realm in which the Spirit rules, then the pope has the authority over the church since it was originally accepted that the Spirit proceeds from the Son. Contrary to this claim, the West could see a different danger in the Orthodox assertion of the procession of the Holy Spirit only from the Father, as it may result in approaching the Father without necessarily regarding the Son as indispensable for faith. See G. Bray, “The Filioque Controversy,” in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. T. A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 214–17.

<sup>51</sup> Khodr in Evdokimov, *Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Tradition*, 16–17. Khodr is certainly well acquainted with the work of Yves Congar, who himself being a Catholic theologian, refers to several Byzantine theologians in his writings.

<sup>52</sup> See E. T. Groppe, *Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5–6. Early 20th-century neo-scholastic theological writings, claims Congar, did not even consider the role of the Holy Spirit concerning the mission of the church. He refers to a book by K. Adam, *Das Wesen des Katholizismus* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1949) in which the three persons of the Trinity represented are God, Christ, and the church, with no mention of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>53</sup> Khodr in Evdokimov, *Al-rūḥ al-quḍus fī al-turāth al-urthūdzuksī*, 17–18.

he nevertheless refers to a continued Roman dominance in the ensuing history through its emphasis on the supremacy and the infallibility of the pope. Thus, Eastern Christians are even today confronted by doctrinal difficulties that are set by the Roman church, which, according to Khodr, are not in conformity with the early heritage of Christian faith.<sup>54</sup> In an article published in 1985, Khodr describes the injustice done by Christians against other Christians by obscuring, relegating, and dismissing their historical-cultural heritage from the books of history, leaving not even the signs of their presence.<sup>55</sup>

Beside all the emphasized East-West disputes, Khodr, on different occasions, reflects positively on European culture. In his *Safar fi wujūh* (Travelling in faces) in 2001 – articles written during his various journeys to Europe as well as Russia and Egypt in the years 1972–2000 – he admires the peaceful, democratic life of European countries, according to which the other, with all their differences, is accepted and appreciated.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Khodr admires the critical thinking and the objective analysis of religious traditions that only through scepticism can reach a final synthesis. Thus, and though remaining faithful to Orthodox spirituality, Khodr can appreciate the Western scientific, critical methods and the empirical achievements as essential factors for human and social development and for a better understanding of the foundations of Christian faith.<sup>57</sup>

In his 2006 work *Hadhā al-‘ālam lā yakfī* (This world Is Not enough), Khodr values the Western humanist emphasis on democracy, the person, and personal freedom.<sup>58</sup> Commenting on European culture, he claims that the gospel was an important factor for its prosperity. Even now with its secular system, the gospel has been reinterpreted into secular terms and concepts. Khodr also makes positive references to the progressive character of most Protestant communities, tracing it to their devotedness to the word of God and their spiritual experience besides their application of the historical critical methods within the field of theological and biblical studies.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 90–91.

<sup>55</sup> George Khodr, “Christian Efficiency: Where Is It?” *An-nahār*, 15 December 1985.

<sup>56</sup> George Khodr, *Travelling in Faces* (Beirut: Dār an-nahār, 2001), 143–44.

<sup>57</sup> George Khodr, “Christian Muslim Relations: A Reading in the Present and the Future” in Faḍl Allāh, M.Ḥ. (ed.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: Referential Readings for the Past, Present and Future* [in Arabic], ed. M. Ḥ. Faḍl Allāh (Beirut: Markaz al-dirāsāt, 1994), 206. Here Khodr also says, “We don’t know till now any system that is not contravening except the Western democracy.”

<sup>58</sup> Khodr, *This World Is Not Enough*, 43–45. Khodr, clarifying his concept of the West, says that for him the West is mainly Europe, since he lived (mainly in France) and was influenced by the European culture.

<sup>59</sup> George Khodr, in *Thoughts and Views on Christian-Muslim Dialogue and the Common Life*, ed. S. Bustros (Jounieh: Al-būlusiyah, 1999), vol. 2, 14.

Hence, concerning the East-West dilemma, I conclude that Khodr moves between two positions. On the one hand, he regards the West, including the United States, as the dominance that has been imposed over the East throughout history, evincing bitterness toward the West on political and theological grounds, and relating the whole situation to colonialism and the intrusion of Western church authority. On the other hand, he appreciates the scientific and the cultural contributions of the West. In the article *Khawāṭer ba 'duhā mufreḥ* (“Thoughts: some of which are delightful”), Khodr writes, “Between me and Europe, there is a sort of attraction and repulsion, like between two lovers.”<sup>60</sup>

### **The move beyond history: Khodr’s understanding of the church**

The prophetic stance of Khodr lies in his conviction that human longing and eagerness for deification can unite East and West. Khodr’s profound openness toward every human being and toward every articulation of human existence, regardless of the history of conflict, is the ground for his prophetic position, and, hence, it remains unshaken. God does not extinguish pluralism since human beings do not really exist unless they are embraced and accepted by an other. This is the human self as it is poured and shed for the other so that it and the other might both exist.<sup>61</sup> Hence, and despite his critical approach concerning the Western Church, Khodr appreciates their yearning for truth. In an article from 1969, and reflecting on the Catholic community in Spain, Khodr writes, “The good thing in Catholicism today is that it is freed from its complexes . . . They [the Catholics] acquired the humility that makes them yearn for truth regardless from whom it comes . . . I doubt that the Orthodox people are liberated to the same extent.”<sup>62</sup> The church, claims Khodr, is the whole of redeemed humanity, which forms together the true image of God carrying within itself the enduring divine presence in the world.<sup>63</sup> Khodr thus speaks of a cosmic church that is not bound to particular historical existence; rather, every human being is given a share in the church since all are given divine sonship, while Christ is the only mediator for salvation. So, Khodr writes, “We hope that Christ is beyond all religious affiliation in this world, so that he gathers all the children of God together.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Khodr, *Travelling in Faces*, 159.

<sup>61</sup> George Khodr, “The ‘I’ and the ‘Other.’” *An-nahār*, 22 September 2007. See also G. Khodr, “Dialogue between Religions,” 4 April 1965, in Khodr, *Sunday’s Word: Religion and Religions*, vol. 2, 302–303.

<sup>62</sup> G. Khodr, “First Thoughts from Spain,” 3 August 1969, in G. Khodr, *Sunday’s Word: Religion and Religions*, vol. 2, 237.

<sup>63</sup> Khodr, *Orthodox View of God*, 21.

<sup>64</sup> George Khodr, “Christ the Mediator,” *An-nahār*, 29 May 2010.

Referring to the claim by Irenaeus that “where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace,”<sup>65</sup> Khodr defends the cosmic nature of the church, which is made possible through the Spirit and the freely given divine grace. Already in his *Al-kanisah fil ‘alam* (The church in the world) in 1973, Khodr expounds that the Eastern theological heritage regards every human being as partaking in divine being and as a member of the mystical body of Christ. This is the true nature of the church as it conceives itself to be a cosmic church, whose essence and true being do not contradict the worldly existence but rather are in open dialogue with it. Thus, according to Khodr, the church is the hope and the meaning of the world. However, since the church preaches about the kingdom of God, it is in continuous tension with the world, but it keeps the world in its prayers for its final union with God.<sup>66</sup> As long as the church is in the world, it has to maintain its prophetic mission concerning the injustice practised against the poor, so that it may help people hope for the kingdom and live in a world that is more humane, where the divine and the human are joined to shape the true image of creation. Finally, Khodr maintains that the church will attain its fullness at the last day when all the faithful from all different nations and races are gathered together.<sup>67</sup>

### **Unity in diversity**

For Khodr, Christian unity is not about the “melting” or “merging” of the different church traditions into one; rather, it is unity in diversity, which would be possible to attain through the “meeting” of the different traditions. So, he writes, “If we want a real unity that can be lived in harmony and lawful diversity, we should be aware that we cannot melt the two churches into one form, or configuration, since there is Western Christianity and Eastern Christianity, and each has its own particularities.”<sup>68</sup>

Here, the reader is again reminded that mainly two church traditions are discernable in the works and thought of Khodr: The Western tradition (seen as mainly Roman Catholic, though including Protestant) and the Eastern (Orthodox) tradition. In this sense, unity should always consider the difference between the two. Thus, any attempt for merging the two traditions and

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<sup>65</sup> Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” Book III, XXIV, 1 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, (Buffalo, The Christian literature Publishing Company, 1885), 458, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103324.htm>. Ideas of universal salvation were later rejected by Augustine, who taught about predestination and the eternal damnation of the wicked.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 144–45.

<sup>68</sup> George Khodr, “The Hope for Christian Unity,” *Raiati*, 26 October 2003.

the two church liturgies – Byzantine and Latin – into one would be mistaken and even impossible. In his article “The Papacy and the Christian East during the first Millennium” (2002), and following a long presentation of the history of the relationship between the papacy and the Orthodox East, Khodr summarizes the Orthodox position concerning unity by citing the words of Patriarch Nicholas Grammatycos (1084–1111):

There was a time when the pope was the first among us, when he had the same feeling and thought as us. Now that he has opposite views, how can he be called first? He must show he has the identical faith; then he can receive the primacy because it is faith that establishes the rankings – not violence and tyranny. If he does not show his faith as identical with us, he will never receive what he is asking.

Hence, the desired unity is a unity in plurality. Such unity is to safeguard the essential nature of the church. Khodr writes:

[The Church] is a communion of faith and sacraments, comprising of equal churches, each being independent in opening itself for others in love, so that no one authority or hierarchy sets the orders – based on divine command – for all the believers and the leaders of the churches.<sup>69</sup>

It should be remarked here that the notion of unity in diversity, ascribed to Khodr’s thought, is based on the distinction that Khodr, and most of Orthodox theology, makes between divine essence and energies. Divine energies are given to the human being in the world in many different forms and contexts. Divine essence, however, remains an ungraspable Mystery, to which belongs the mystery of the church.<sup>70</sup> Hence, to attain unity, each side should be able to comprehend and appreciate the tradition of the other so that both operate truly as “sister churches.” This requires a respectful collaboration from both sides. Khodr here warns against “proselytism,” which is for him a major obstacle on the way toward Christian unity, especially proselytism directed toward Orthodox communities. Having this in mind, and based on the theological contribution of Khodr in its wider terms, his theology of the work of the Spirit in the world, his conception of the church as a church beyond history and of the whole humanity as the image of God, his consideration of the common Eastern–Western devotedness to the word of God and the notion of the common spiritual experience,<sup>71</sup> it is possible to conclude that Khodr’s ecumenical contribution has a clear prophetic dimension.<sup>72</sup> Thus, and contrary to the

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<sup>69</sup> George Khodr, “Prayer for Unity,” *Raiati*, 16 November 2000.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Khodr, “Hope for Christian Unity.”

<sup>72</sup> For more examples on the prophetic position in Orthodox thought, see the works of Sergius Bulgakov and Nicholas Afanasiev.

mainstream position in Orthodoxy that maintains the need for other church-traditions to be incorporated into the fullness of the Orthodox Church,<sup>73</sup> I would not hesitate to perceive the thought of George Khodr as representative for the “prophetic model”<sup>74</sup> in the Middle East that aspires and longs for Christian unity, without insisting or claiming the need for any merging of the different traditions.

What makes Khodr’s ecumenical position especially important and needed in the present is his capability to bring his high perception and valuing of his own Orthodox tradition together with the desire for ecumenism among the churches in the Middle East and unity in the world. This is, of course, a rare case and not to be taken for granted, particularly in the Eastern world, where personal benefits and tribal systems have still a dominant word and most religious traditions (both Christian and Muslim) fail to see beyond their own dogmas, precepts, and goals. Though being convinced that Orthodoxy does represent the fullness of the Christian church, Khodr is aware of the historical faulty situation of both churches (Orthodox and Catholic) and those belonging to other traditions. This, however, does not invalidate the inner purity of the church for him. Furthermore, being an Orthodox does not hinder Khodr from perceiving the necessity of accepting and respecting the different church traditions. And, hence, the unity that is aspired for is for him a unity in diversity: a unity that safeguards the differences and yet aims at the fulfilment and the consummation of the one church, the body of Christ.

## **Conclusion**

After the great jubilee pilgrimage in 2001 by Pope John Paul II to Syria (Damascus), in the footsteps of St Paul, George Khodr describes the pope in an article, “The Pope’s Visit to Us” (2001), as a person who dreams of a better humanity and a united church. The dream of the pope is a dream of the heart, writes Khodr, that is valuable, regardless of the doctrinal convictions of a person. In the same article, Khodr comments that unity of doctrine is conceivable but the full “brotherhood” between the churches is needed independently of the unity of the doctrine. “The time for hostility and dispute is over. We forgive and love those who are in the West, who also love our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>75</sup> In these words, Khodr perceives the common path of both Church traditions in their service of the gospel, the poor, and the

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<sup>73</sup> A major representative in the 20th century for “mainstream” Orthodoxy is Georges Florovsky, who insists that doctrinal agreement is a prerequisite for sacramental unity.

<sup>74</sup> I am borrowing the terms “mainstream” Orthodoxy and the “prophetic” position from John A. Jilions, “Three Orthodox Models of Christian Unity: Traditionalist, Mainstream, Prophetic,” *International Journal of the Study of the Christian Church* 9:4 (2009), 295–311.

<sup>75</sup> George Khodr, “The Pope’s Visit to Us,” *Raiati*, 20 May 2001.

oppressed, and in their common following of the Lord Jesus until Jesus grants the final unity so that both become one body for him.

I will close this article with the words of the Orthodox Metropolitan taken from his text “Even if the World Ignores Its Own Heart” (2007). Here, the church is described as the icon of humanity and the heart of the world, the unity of which can reach fulfilment only in eternity, where the church and the world will become one:

The unity of the Church is not set over against the unity of the world because the Church is not in a relationship of opposition to the created world. The Church is the icon of what humanity will become. The Church in this respect is the meaning of the world, its intelligibility, or in the very significant expression of Origen in *Contra Celsum*, the “cosmos of the cosmos.” The Church is still the heart of the world, even if the world ignores its heart. For this reason, the life of the Church is symbolic in the strongest sense of the term. The Church recognizes the unity of the world by its own unity, revealed through the Spirit until the Parousia occurs, when the world and the Church will be the one spouse of the Lord of glory.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Khodr, “Even if the World Ignores Its Own Heart,” *The Orthodox Church in America* 43:5 (2007), 6, <http://www.oca.org/PDF/DOC-PUB/TOC/2007/toc-nativity-theophany.pdf> (article originally published in *Syndesmos News* in 1973).