

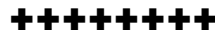
Afanasiev and His Critics: A Call to Reassessment¹

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Abstract

(Українське резюме на ст. 29)

This essay aims to clarify misunderstandings of Nicholas Afanasiev's ecclesiology in order to re-awaken interest in his authentic vision and to foster a more fruitful discussion of it. The eucharistic ecclesiology of Afanasiev is often considered to be in need of correction, yet a survey of the treatment of his thought in the writings of John Zizioulas and Aidan Nichols shows both their lack of familiarity with the complete scope of his work and their prioritizing of questions that were not actually addressed by Afanasiev himself. This has led to an inaccurate but widely held view of Afanasiev as over-exaggerating the local church vis-à-vis the episcopate, and advocating antinomianism and the minimization of dogmatic differences between Christian Churches. Rectifying this imbalance involves re-appraising Afanasiev first and foremost as a historian, rather than a systematic theologian, an approach that makes better sense of his treatment of issues such as the three-fold structure of ordained ministry and the ecclesiological thought of various fathers, and shows his conclusions as more nuanced than previously thought. Ultimately, this reassessment of Afanasiev not only reveals an ecclesiology that balances the universal with the local church, but also calls for further critique of his thought by engaging with his own writings, rather than distillations of them by other theologians.



¹ This essay is based on a presentation made at the IOTA (International Orthodox Theological Association) conference in Iasi, Romania, in January of 2019.