John D. Zizioulas, Eucharist, Bishop, Church: the Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries

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This book is the long-awaited English translation of Metropolitan John of Pergamon's doctoral thesis, the result of research supervised by Fr Georges Florovsky, George Williams and Krister Stendahl (then professors at Harvard), submitted at the theological school of the University of Athens, and originally published in Greek around 1965. The translation, which is excellent (though oddly following Zizioulas in giving koina Greek nouns a modern Greek plural), is made from the second Greek edition (1990), which differed from the first edition only in a few corrections.

In the forty years since it was written, the book's leading ideas have become well-known to a much wider circle than those familiar with the Greek original, mainly as a result of Metropolitan John's deep commitment to the ecumenical movement (for many years as a lay theologian, John Zizioulas). The notion of "eucharistic ecclesiology" is now firmly associated with the name of Zizioulas, though he had precursors in the Orthodox world, notably the Russian Nikolai Afanasieff and his fellow Greek Fr John Romanides. There are now books and articles on his ecclesiological ideas, most notably the work of the young Roman Catholic theologian, Fr Paul McPartlan, The Eucharist Makes the Church (1993). In such a context it is a curious experience to read, or re-read, the original thesis, now nearly forty years old. It goes without saying that the scholarship behind the book is now forty years out of date. In his preface to...