

ECUMENISM AS CIVILIZATIONAL DIALOGUE: EASTERN ORTHODOX ANTI-ECUMENISM AND EASTERN ORTHODOX ECUMENISM: A CREATIVE OR STERILE ANTINOMY?¹

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It is argued that those who uphold Ecumenism and Anti-Ecumenism in the Orthodox Church share much more in common than is normally thought to be the case. Both groups see the Orthodox Church as the *Una Sancta* of the Creed and that Orthodoxy must always witness to itself as the fullness of the Christian faith. They also both see ecumenical encounter (whether in dialogue or in condemnation of the Other) as being a species of civilisational dialogue between two very different realities of Christian East and West. Ultimately, it is contended, both parties have much to learn from one another so that their opposition is not a sterile but a creative antinomy.

Introduction

If the desire for Christian unity, the century or more push ‘that they all may be one’, is to remain vital then it will only come from frankly acknowledging that different Christian traditions have had and continue to have quite different motivations for their involvement in the movement. Orthodoxy is here no exception. From the very origins of Orthodox involvement in Ecumenism right down to the present day, the Orthodox—both those who opposed it and those who promoted it—have tended to see Ecumenism as being wrapped up with what might be called ‘civilizational dialogue’.

By ‘civilisational dialogue’ I mean the encounter of different cultural and/or religious traditions with each other which can take multiple different forms such as simply living side by side; working together on a common task; intellectual dialogue or conflict between individuals from the different groups; spiritual sharing between two traditions; and finally ‘diplomatic’ or formal dialogue between representa-

¹ This essay was first given as a keynote lecture for ‘Questioning Ecumenism in the 20th Century: Who, When, Why’, ‘The Desire for Christian Unity Research Program - 2017 Research Conference’, Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose Giovanni XXIII, Bologna, 13-15 November 2017. Convener: Prof Alberto Melloni. I am indebted to Prof Melloni and the Fondazione for the opportunity to think through these matters systematically and for feedback during the conference. It was subsequently published in another form in the UK in the *International Journal of the Christian Church*, 19.4 (2019), 265-85.

tives of governments or religions from the two parties.² It is 'civilisational' because Orthodoxy (or, perhaps, 'Orthodoxies' is more precise) in its self-understanding is an expression of different ancient societies or a different complex of cultural developments descended from said ancient societies than those ancient Western societies which have produced the multiple forms of Western religiosity. By using the expression 'civilizational dialogue' I am in no way advocating for some version of the Samuel Huntington (1927–2008) thesis of the clash of civilizations. What I am pointing out is something far more banal. The Orthodox have tended to see their Church as being the development of an alternative non-western narrative (or narratives) of Christianity which produced various non-western Christian civilizations that include the less well-known Kingdom of Aksum and the Zagwe Dynasty of Ethiopia, as well as the Arsacid Dynasty of the Golden Age of Ancient Armenia, but also Byzantium, which has carried on in the liturgical life of the Eastern Orthodox Church as a sort of continuing *ordo* of a unity of heaven and earth. And it is largely from the basis of this Eastern or Byzantine Orthodox tradition that what is written here comes. Historically, when the Orthodox have engaged with other Christian churches, 'civilizational dialogue' has been in the background, as they are always aware that they are encountering, whether to embrace or to condemn, bodies which are the products of Christian civilizations and cultures (often harmonized as the 'West' or 'Latin Christianity') which, though not unrelated to Orthodoxy, are in many ways fundamentally different. Here we are saying nothing astonishing. Nor are we underwriting the sometimes sterile polemicism of some of the most extreme anti-western statements of writers like Christos Yannaras (b. 1935) and Fr John Romanides (1927–2001). Orthodoxy is, in its self-consciousness, seen in its liturgical life and its traditions of prayer and worship, not Western but Eastern, not modern but pre-modern. As the late great ecumenist, Père Nicolas Lossky (1929–2007) wrote:

The Orthodox world has not experienced the Western crises which resulted in the Protestant Reformation and in the Roman Catholic Counter Reformation. The Orthodox world had its own crises in the East, as it had to deal from afar with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, its isolation under Islamic rule, the fall of Christian Constantinople to the Muslims (1453), the rise of nationalisms, etc. But since these crises did not affect the essential faith of the church, the Orthodox preserved a strong sense of unbroken continuity

² Here I am adapting the typology of inter-religious dialogue/encounter of Marianne Moyaert ['Chapter 9: Interreligious Dialogue' in *Understanding Interreligious Dialogue*, eds, D. Cheetham, D. Pratt, and T. David (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 202–204]. A separate paper would be needed to discuss how in late modernity churches in the Christian West have moved so far from Orthodoxy and the Christian East that the study of inter-religious dialogue is often more appropriate for understanding Eastern Orthodox/Western Christian relations rather than the much more usual lens of intra-Christian ecumenical studies.

with the faith of the apostles as interpreted and witnessed to by the seven great ecumenical councils and the Fathers of the Church.³

This means that—whether one sees it as a Gospel imperative or as the ‘heresy of heresies’ as some Orthodox zealots do—ecumenism, for Orthodoxy, always involves an encounter with difference, with a religious Other. The civilizational dialogue I am speaking of takes various forms in Orthodoxy in the history of ecumenism and in my lecture I want to trace a variety of these modes as seen in key pioneering pro-ecumenists like Fr Sergii Bulgakov and Fr Georges Florovsky and in the often inflammatory statements of anti-ecumenists such as St Justin Popović (1894–1979), the position of the Holy Community of Athos, and the opponents of the Holy and Great Council of Crete in June 2016. My question in the end is whether these two contrasting ‘camps’, the Orthodox pro-ecumenists and the Orthodox anti-ecumenists, both of whom are fellow communicants, are really that far apart given that they see ecumenism as an encounter with an Other and whether ultimately the polarity or antinomy we see is creative, helping the Orthodox Church to flourish, or sterile, forcing it into a static intransigence where it can never face the challenges of the modern world.

The most important mode of the civilizational dialogue, which is ecumenism for Orthodoxy, is the cultural dialectic of East with West. By constructing various visions of the West, Orthodoxy has defined itself as the Christian East.⁴ Thus, the dialectic is identity-forming and it would not be an understatement to say that the ecumenical movement in the last century or more has been absolutely crucial for the Orthodox for it has served—both positively and negatively—as the vehicle of its self-definition against the religious Other of the West. Another mode we shall see again and again in both Orthodox ecumenical and anti-ecumenical discourse is Orthodoxy as the Universal Church, *Una Sancta*, encountering the western churches or, for the anti-ecumenists when they are being politic, the various ‘western confessions’ and ‘bodies’ of Western Christian traditions (I shall return to this reluctance to speak of western churches as ‘church’ later).

Now it would seem as if this Orthodox theological mode is the height of ecclesiastical chauvinism, an assertion of one institution *über alles in der Welt*. But, as Fr John McGuckin, has reminded us, the Orthodox are pre-modern in their ecclesiology. They do not, at their best, see the Church primarily from an historical and sociological perspective, a typical modern way of viewing the Church, but eschatologically as ‘God’s unstoppable energy of salvation in the world’, which continues to

³ Nicholas Lossky, ‘Orthodoxy’ in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd Ed., eds, Nicholas Lossky, José Míguez Bonino, John Pobee, Tom F. Stransky, Geoffrey Wainwright and Pauline Webb (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 868–72, at 869.

⁴ See George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds, *Orthodox Constructions of the ‘West’*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) and *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008).

be manifested in one enduring Body of the Living Christ. They refuse to ‘allow the notion of the Church to be partitioned’ when they claim to be the Church and to possess its authentic tradition.⁵ Orthodox ecumenists hold to this view but then ask how the western churches can be related to the Church which is Orthodoxy or how individual non-Orthodox are related to the dynamism of salvation in Christ which is the Orthodox Church. Anti-ecumenists, in a very modern way, simply collapse the Church as ark of salvation with the canonical institution of the Orthodox Church and then say there is only darkness outside its bounds. But both alike see ecumenism as the Church encountering a religious Other, whether this is acknowledged as ‘myself as an Other’ (Ricoeur) or as an alien force depends but the same vision of uniqueness holds in both.

Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944)

An example of a pro-ecumenist who saw Orthodoxy’s encounter with other Christians under the light of the East-West dialectic as well as the ‘Universal Church-the churches’ mode is the great Russian theologian, philosopher and economist, Fr Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944).⁶ Bulgakov’s initial introduction to ecumenism was through attending the first congress of the Russian Christian Student Movement (RCSM) held in Pšerov, Czechoslovakia from 1–7 October 1923. The RCSM was an organization set up to bring together Russian youth in the emigration, primarily Orthodox but also including some Protestants, in order to encourage them in community, a wholistic Christian vision, and to counter Bolshevism. Each day of the conference was opened with a liturgy served by Bulgakov. There was also a strong eschatological sense in the participants, who saw themselves as members of a post-Constantinian Church dedicated to the churching of all of life and (for the Orthodox) the mission of presenting the icon of Orthodoxy to the West. The Eucharist, a strong sense of an eschatological call for Reunion of the Churches and that this must be led by Orthodoxy as the East showing the West the riches of the ‘Universal Church’ would become the hallmarks of Bulgakov’s ecumenism.

At this conference, Bulgakov, in the last speech said something quite typical of all subsequent Orthodox pro-ecumenism, which is that ecumenism was an encounter with the West at its Christian roots:

⁵ John McGuckin, ‘The Role of Orthodoxy in World Christianity Today—Historical, Demographic, and Theological Perspectives—An Introduction’ in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education*, eds, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitzGerald, Cyril Hovorun, Aikaterini Pekridou, Nikolaos Asproulis, Guy Liagre, and Dietrich Werner (Volos, Greece: Volos Academy Publications in cooperation with WCC Publications, Geneva, and Regnum Books International, Oxford, 2014), 3–8, at 7.

⁶ See Brandon Gallaher, ‘Fr. Sergius Bulgakov’ in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education: “That they all may be one” (John 17,21)*, eds, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitzGerald, Cyril Hovorun, Aikaterini Pekridou, Nikolaos Asproulis, Guy Liagre and Dietrich Werner (Volos, Greece: Volos Academy Publications in cooperation with WCC Publications, Geneva, and Regnum Books International, Oxford, 2014), 201–6.

Orthodoxy represents the universal truth, and its chief interpreter at present is the Church of Russia, but we can lose this position of leadership if we become unworthy of our calling. It is time for us also to enter into living contact with other confessions, and I am happy as an Orthodox priest to have shared our labours with representatives of the western traditions. We have a heavy task but we must not be intimidated by its weight, for we can achieve it with Christ's help.⁷

This conference was financed by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) and it would lead Bulgakov to subsequent fruitful collaboration with John Mott (1865–1955), the Secretary General of the YMCA, and Paul B. Anderson (1894–1985), a secretary of the YMCA assigned to work with Russian refugees in Europe. Bulgakov went on to attend the early conferences in the 1920s and 1930s of the Life and Work (Oxford 1937) and Faith and Order (Lausanne 1927, Edinburgh 1937) movements that paved the way for the foundation of the World Council of Churches (WCC). He rose to become one of the most important Orthodox ecumenical representatives before pulling out for health reasons in the spring of 1939.

The Eucharist was at the heart of Bulgakov's vision of ecumenism as an encounter of the Christian East with the West. In fact, his most audacious proposals from June 1933 through 1935, which ultimately came to naught, Florovsky and many of the Anglicans being opposed, were for limited episcopally blessed intercommunion between the Anglicans and the Orthodox in the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius⁸. Bulgakov's basic idea was for a mutual episcopal 'sacramental blessing' of Orthodox and Anglican Fellowship members, both ordained and lay, to partake of communion at one another's altars at Fellowship conferences; this would serve as a sort of seed leading to the eventual complete unity of the two Churches. In the case of the Orthodox, the blessing or sacramental sanction would come from Met. Evlogii (Georgievsky) (1868–1946) of the Russian Exarchate under Constantinople and Evlogii would ask for a corresponding blessing from the Patriarch of Constantinople. In the case of the Anglicans, the appropriate blessing would come from the diocesan bishop or from the Archbishop of Canterbury. Anglican and Orthodox bishops alike would confer the blessing on the Fellowship priest of the other Church so that the blessing would be fully mutual. Orthodox bishops would bless Anglican priests to

⁷ Bulgakov quoted at Nicholas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (NY/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), 229.

⁸ See Brandon Gallaher, 'Bulgakov and Intercommunion', *Sobornost* 24.2 (2002): 9–28 [sequel to 'Bulgakov's Ecumenical Thought', *Sobornost* 24.1 (2002): 24–55]; *Catholic Action: Ecclesiology, the Eucharist and the Question of Intercommunion in the Ecumenism of Sergii Bulgakov*, MDiv thesis, (St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 2003); 'Great and full of Grace: Partial Intercommunion and Sophiology in Sergii Bulgakov' in *Church and World: Essays in Honor of Michael Plekon*, ed. William C. Mills (Rollinsford, New Hampshire: Orthodox Research Institute, 2013), 69–121, and 'Fr. Sergius Bulgakov' in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism*, 201–6.

communicate at the Orthodox liturgy, to concelebrate with Russian priests if they so desired and to communicate Orthodox and Anglican laity in the Fellowship who wish to participate in these celebrations. Likewise, in an analogous fashion, which Bulgakov left to the Anglicans to determine, the Anglican bishop would bless the Orthodox priest to participate in intercommunion with Anglican clergy and laity. The particular sacramental blessing of Anglican laity to participate in intercommunion at Orthodox altars could take either the form of a blessing by a bishop but, more preferably, the form of Chrismation with the invocation of the Trinity by a priest. This latter rite is the standard Russian way of receiving converts to Orthodoxy and Bulgakov was using it to acknowledge the tacit Orthodox ecclesial status of these Christians. The final version of Bulgakov's proposals was ultimately rejected in June 1935 by the Fellowship council before, however, it could be discussed in open session at the conference.

Christian unity in and through the Holy Spirit is, he argued, not found in the discussions of Joint Doctrinal Commissions, but it is only given at and through the Chalice: 'the way towards reunion of East and West does not lie through tournaments between the theologians of the East and West, but through a reunion before the Altar'.⁹ Again we see our mode of ecumenism as civilizational dialogue, the East-West dialectic coming up, not in condemnation of the West but in an eagerness for union with other Christians who are, nevertheless, understood as the religious Other, who are coming into spiritual union with the Eastern Orthodox Church, when they meet Orthodoxy. This approach to ecumenism in no way subscribes to a sort of branch theory with Orthodoxy being one of the branches, along with Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, of the living tree of the Church. Here Bulgakov is also typical of both Orthodox ecumenists and anti-ecumenists in beginning with the non-negotiable assumption that 'Orthodoxy is the Church of Christ on earth. The Church of Christ is not an institution; it is a new life with Christ and in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit' and:

Orthodoxy is not one of the historic confessions, it is the Church itself in its verity. It may even be added that, by becoming a confession, Orthodoxy fails to manifest all its force and its universal glory; it hides, one might say, in the catacombs.¹⁰

⁹ Sergii Bulgakov, 'By Jacob's Well—John iv. 23 (On the Actual Unity of the Divided Church in Faith, Prayer and Sacraments)', *The Journal of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius* 22 (1933): 7–17, at 17, and at *Father Sergius Bulgakov 1871–1944. A Collection of articles by Fr. Bulgakov for the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius and now reproduced by the Fellowship to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the death of this great Ecumenist*, Introd. N. Zernov (London: The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1969), 11, and see Bulgakov, 'Spiritual Intercommunion', *Sobornost* 4 (1935): 3–7, at 7, and at *Collection*, 32.

¹⁰ *The Orthodox Church*, trans. Lydia Kesich (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, [1932] 1988), 1, 189.

The Orthodox, Bulgakov argued, were called in the ecumenical movement to perpetually witness to the non-Orthodox, the West, and the Western churches, concerning the uniqueness of the Orthodox Church as the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church which bears within itself the fullness of the faith. The Church, for Bulgakov, is a divine-human eschatological organism which is a spiritual reality incarnated in the world: visible and invisible, institutional and historical as well as spiritual and eternal. The invisible universal Church, *Una Sancta*, Orthodoxy as such, is, Bulgakov argued, like the ancient Jewish temple composed of two circles and all baptized Christians belong to her and are in a sense Orthodox insofar as they are Christian. In the inner circle, the holy of holies, is the visible empirical Church which coincides with the canonical family of Churches known as Eastern Orthodoxy, but in the larger circle, the court of the temple, are the other Western Christian confessions. These groups have to a lesser or greater degree 'a grain of Orthodoxy' insofar as they are related to the 'Orthodox' centre of the temple with its fullness of divine-human life, but all churches are alike ecclesial, tacitly Orthodox.¹¹

Bulgakov's emphasis on ecumenism as a form of witness to the truth of Orthodoxy would later become the fundamental trajectory for the Orthodox involvement in the ecumenical movement. However, Bulgakov's version of this now standard position is not meant to be triumphalistic, an example of ecclesiastical chauvinism. He argues that the Orthodox need to learn from their non-Orthodox Christian brothers and sisters and become convicted and changed by these encounters. He sees Christian reunion in Orthodoxy not as a 'Byzantinization' of the non-Orthodox but the non-Orthodox's entry more deeply into their specific identity as Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and so on, in entering into communion with the Church. Furthermore, in arguing against the majority of Orthodox or intercommunion as a means to unity of the churches, Bulgakov suggested that the means of reunion or reintegration of non-Orthodox into the Orthodox Church is not through complete theological agreement as worked out in detail by appointed committees of theologians from two churches and approved by their respective hierarchs in a reunion council, e.g., Ferrara-Florence (1438–1445). Rather, reunion if it comes will emerge through a gradual 'molecular' process that begins in a common worship that presupposed a basic or essential union in faith. The example of St Basil with the semi-Arians was often utilized in this context.¹²

Sacramental reunion with the Anglicans was based on a 'living Minimum' of dogma (i.e., the central dogmas of the faith including Christology and Trinitarian theology) grounded in the Eucharist.¹³ This position was in contrast to an abstract

¹¹ *The Orthodox Church*, 188.

¹² See Anton Kartashev, 'The Paths Towards the Reunion of the Churches', *The Journal of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius* 26 (1934): 7–13 at 11 [This and other related articles are recollected in Michael Plekon, ed., *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in Our Time—Readings from the Eastern Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Pub. Inc., 2003)].

¹³ Bulgakov, 'Ways to Church Reunion', *Sobornost* 2 (1935): 7–15, at 7–9, 12–13 and at *Collection*, 22–24,

maximalism that simply asserted the particular Eastern Orthodox teaching of the moment without attention to its age or context, and an abstract minimalism that appealed to the lowest common theological denominator.¹⁴ Thus the 'living minimum' of dogma on which the entry into communion would be based was simply Orthodoxy.¹⁵ Bulgakov's proposed episcopal 'sacramental blessing', therefore, for intercommunion was in the service of a gradual reuniting or reintegration of non-Orthodox churches with Orthodoxy through acknowledging that the non-Orthodox were already in some sense Orthodox and tacit members of the Orthodox Church.

Christian sacraments, even if defective, as in the case of the sacraments of Western non-Orthodox, are 'a call to universality',¹⁶ being of the empirical Church, insofar as they are celebrated in it, but are from the invisible Church above. Echoing Augustine, he contends that non-Orthodox sacraments from baptism to ordination are, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the nature of the schism, merely ineffective in schism although most certainly not non-existent. In short, the Church exists outside of its own canonical walls: "*ecclesia extra ecclesiam*" or rather *ecclesia extra muros*.¹⁷ What Bulgakov was doing in proposing limited episcopally blessed intercommunion between Anglican and Orthodox was acknowledging that the baptism, orders, and the Eucharist of the Anglicans as Western Christians were sacramentally defective but basically Orthodox realities which regained their true force in communion with the Eastern Orthodox Church. Communion was both the end or crown of reunion and the means. Here we see that the end of ecumenism, civilization dialogue is the union of the churches in the Church Universal, here understood as Orthodoxy.

St Justin Popović (1894–1979)

Yet let us look at an Orthodox statement which is anti-ecumenist. We will find in it the same civilizational dialogue and its key mode of East facing the West, this time not in encounter but rejection. The figure I want to examine is the Serbian theologian and spiritual father St Archimandrite Justin (Popović) (1894–1979). Popović is not very well known in the West, but he is one of the key ideologues of contemporary Orthodox anti-ecumenists, and he was the teacher of a whole generation of influential theologian hierarchs in the Serbian church, whom he either taught at Seminary in Belgrade or was their spiritual father later in his monastery in

26–27.

¹⁴ *The Orthodox Church*, 188.

¹⁵ Ibid., 188–89 and see Kartashev 'Intercommunion and Dogmatic Agreement', *Sobornost* 4 (1935): 41–8, at 43 and 46.

¹⁶ Bulgakov, 'The Church Universal', *The Journal of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius* 25 (1934), 10–15, at 11.

¹⁷ Bulgakov, 'Outlines of the Teaching about the Church—The Church and Non-Orthodoxy' [Part 1], *American Church Monthly* 30.6 (1931): 411–23, at 418 (and see Part 2 in 31.1 (1932): 13–26 at (1931): 310–4).

Ćelije. Here one notes especially Metropolitan Amfilohije (Radović) of Montenegro (b. 1938), Bishop Atanasije (Jevtić) of Zahumlje and Herzegovina (b.1938) (retired), -Artemije Radosavljević) of Raška and Prizren (b.1935) (retired), and Bishop Irinej (Bulović) of Bačka (b.1947).¹⁸ St Justin the New, as he was named after Justin Martyr, was glorified as a saint by the Serbian Church in 2010 and is revered by Orthodox conservatives throughout the Orthodox world.

In his 1974 book, *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, St Justin attacks (and here we hear in the background the Slavophiles Aleksei Khomiakov (1804-60) and Ivan Kireevsky (1806-56) as well as the rhetoric of ROCOR, which was then in schism from the Moscow Patriarchate but then as now in communion with the Serbian Patriarchate) the European West for its rationalism, individualism and auto-divinization and ‘homo-idolization’ of humanity. He claims that Christianity in the West from Latin scholasticism onwards continuing through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment down to Nietzsche and Darwin ‘gradually transformed into humanism’. In Catholicism, or ‘papism’ as he likes to say, and in Protestantism alike man has been put in the place of the God-man. Catholicism elevated one man in one office, with its affirmation of infallibility, above the God-man as represented by the Apostles, the Fathers and the Councils. Later we see with Luther and his ilk simply a ‘vulgarized papism’ with each believer cloning the ‘infallible man in Rome’ for himself by giving the believer personal infallibility in matters of faith: ‘Papism is actually the first and oldest Protestantism... Protestantism is a vulgarized papism, only stripped of mystery (i.e., sacramentality), authority and power’. (We see these ideas earlier in the Slavophiles, especially Khomiakov).

According to St Justin, there exists in Western Christianity, in its humanism, a ‘*Gleichschaltung* [conformity] of Christianity with the spirit of the times’. The term used is deliberately pejorative, for this was the German term used for Nazification, that is, the process in Nazi Germany which ensured conformity in every sector of society, including the Church. St Justin is comparing Western Christianity to Nazi Germany. The Eastern Orthodox Church, in contrast, is the Body of the God-Man. It lives not by accommodating itself to the spirit of the West but rather by accommodating that ‘spirit of the times to the spirit of Christ’s eternity—Christ’s Godmanhood’. Orthodoxy has never, he argues, ecclesiologically dogmatized any form of humanism and

has preserved, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the wisdom and the chastity of its heart and its soul... The Orthodox Church has proclaimed no poison, no sin, no humanism, no earthly social system as dogma—neither through

¹⁸ Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the present* (London: SPCK, 2015), 147.

Councils, nor through the ‘Body’ of the Ecumenical Church. While the west, alas, does nothing but that. The latest proof: the Second Vatican Council.¹⁹

So far so clear. But what of ‘ecumenism’? Ecumenism, we are told elsewhere, ‘is the common name for the pseudo-Christianity of the pseudo-Churches of Western Europe’. At its heart is European humanism, which we have just heard is the quintessence of evil summarized in papism. Ecumenism is nothing but one heresy after another so it might be referred to as the ‘Pan-heresy’. Moreover, ecumenism, as a sort of summary of ‘European heresies’, removes the God-Man and puts ‘European man’ in the place of Christ. It is the ‘Legion’ Christ cast out of the Gadarene Swine (Mark 5:1–13).²⁰ I think it is possible now get the basic drift of this negative form of anti-ecumenism as a mode of civilizational ‘dialogue’, which seems a misnomer here, for it is more like ‘civilizational hectoring’. But what it shares in common with Bulgakov is that it sees ecumenism as an encounter with a religious Other who has a different vision of Christianity coming from a different culture. Bulgakov felt that this vision was, in its essence, Orthodox and wished to affirm it, but here we see an acknowledgement of difference in order that it might cast out what is Other.

*Georges Florovsky (1893–1979)*²¹

The next figure I want to look at who is an example of ecumenism as civilizational dialogue is the Russian theologian and historian Fr Georges Florovsky (1893–1979). It would not be an overstatement to say that the present identification of Orthodox theology with Patristics is the result of the popularization of ideas Florovsky propounded beginning in the 1930s and carried out by his disciples including Fr John Meyendorff (1926–1992) and Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon (b. 1931). I am referring to the so-called, ‘neo-patristic synthesis’. Theology, for Florovsky, is called *Patristic* because it follows the patristic spirit and vision; *Neo-Patristic* because the Fathers help us face our current problems and queries; and a contemporary *Synthesis* because we respond Patristically to our age. His ecumenical work—he was one of the key architects of the World Council of Churches (WCC)—was decisive and the present Orthodox ecumenical position is working roughly on lines he established.

¹⁹ Blessed Justin (Popovich), ‘Papism as the Oldest Protestantism’, Found at <<http://orthodoxinfo.com/inquirers/papism.aspx>> (last accessed: 26 February 2020). (Taken from *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism* [Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 2000])

²⁰ Blessed Justin (Popovich), ‘Papism as the Oldest Protestantism’, Found at <<http://orthodoxinfo.com/inquirers/papism.aspx>> (last accessed: 26 February 2020). [From the chapter ‘Humanistic Ecumenism’ in *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*, by Father Justin Popovich, trans. by Asterios Gerostergios (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1994), 169]

²¹ See Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur, eds, *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Writings*, Foreword by Kallistos Ware (London: T & T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2019).

Florovsky's essential ecumenical position was forged in the mid-1930s in reaction to Bulgakov's ecumenical work though it has many points of contact with it. Bulgakov believed, as we saw earlier, both that the churches might be led to unity by limited episcopally blessed intercommunion and that, although the Orthodox Church most fully embodied the Church Universal or *Una Sancta*, the Church Universal was not bound by its limits and included to a lesser degree other ecclesial bodies as true churches. Throughout his work, in contrast, Florovsky is clear that he believed that the Orthodox Church is *the true and only* Church which does not witness to a 'local tradition of her own' but witnesses to 'Patristic tradition' or 'the common heritage of the Church universal'.²² Thus Florovsky agrees with Bulgakov that the Orthodox Church is the Church but he disagrees with Bulgakov's affirmation of other Christian churches as having ecclesiality as bodies *in themselves* and speaks more often than Bulgakov of non-Orthodox churches as schismatic or deficient in ecclesiality. Nevertheless, Florovsky argued that not everything that had been held or was even then held by the Orthodox Church was the 'truth of God'.²³ All other churches, he argued, had defected from Orthodoxy as the common tradition of the Undivided Church or were 'schismatic' and were consequently called to return and be healed (i.e., 'conversion') within the unity of the Orthodox Church.²⁴ Intercommunion between the Orthodox and the heterodox, whose faith and life were so radically different, was naturally inconceivable and as a *means* to unity it was 'a blind alley from which there is no escape'.²⁵ Future progress on the road to unity would only come from supplementing an 'ecumenism in space' (the discovery and registry of the various agreements and disagreements amongst the churches) with an 'ecumenism in time', which was the reintegration of the East and the West in their return to their common tradition in Orthodoxy.²⁶ He later would, as we shall see, apply this distinction in his work in the WCC.

He tended, however, to see the common tradition of the Church Universal as essentially 'Eastern', 'Christian Hellenist', and 'Greek' in character.²⁷ Eastern Orthodoxy

²² Georges Florovsky, 'The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement', *Theology Today* 7.1 (1950): 68–79, at 72.

²³ Florovsky, 'Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement' [1950] in Gallaher and Ladouceur, *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Writings*, 285.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

²⁵ Florovsky cited in 'Report of Conference held at High Leigh June 26–28, 1934 on "The Healing of Schism"'. Found in Oxford Archive of The Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. Folder labelled 'The Fellowship Conference Policy Before 1940', 6.

²⁶ Florovsky, 'The Challenge of Disunity', *St Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, 3.1–2 (Fall–Winter 1954–5): 31–6, at 36.

²⁷ See Gallaher, "Waiting for the Barbarians": Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky', *Modern Theology*, 27.4 (2011): 659–91 and 'Mia epanexetasē tēs Neo-paterikēs sunthesēs; Orthodoxē tautotēta kai polemikē ston p. Geōrgio Phlōrophsku kai to mellon tēs Orthodoxēs Theologias [A Re-envisioning of Neo-Patristic Synthesis?: Orthodox Identity and Polemicism in Fr Georges Florovsky and the Future of Orthodox Theology]' (translated by Nikolaos Asproulis, Lambros Psomas and Evaggelos Bartzis), *Theologia* 84.1 (2013): 25–92.

as the common tradition of the undivided Church embodied a Christian Hellenism that embraced not only Sts Basil and Gregory of Nyssa but also St Augustine as a sort of honorary Greek Father: ‘In answer to an enquiry about his attitude to St Augustine, he gave the unexpected reply: “I would say that Augustine is really an Eastern Father”’.²⁸ As late as 1955, Florovsky held to the very strange opinion that there was no such thing as Latin Patristics since its distinctive writers were all actually tacitly Greek:

Here I first of all offer one of my ‘heresies’. I believe that the early period of Christian theology, sometimes described as Patristic, was purely and thoroughly Hellenic, Hellenistic, Greek; and that Latin Patristics never existed. Well, it really may seem to be too much. But actually, and this is so important, actually which names are usually given as Latin Fathers? Hilary of Poitiers—well, modern patrologists classify him under East and not under West, because, except for the Latin language, there was nothing Western in his thought at all; Augustine—well, African, neo-platonic, philosopher. That is not true—African temperament, neo-platonic philosophy. Jerome—the beautiful Latin style, but his heart was in the East always. Ambrose—yes, very Latin; unfortunately, almost all his books are translated from Philo, Basil the Great and some other Eastern writers. How much Latin Patristics is left?²⁹

He continues in this same vein saying that Latin worship was only instituted in Rome at the end of the fourth century under pressure from Ambrose of Milan since Latin was regarded not as a sacred language like Greek. St Gregory the Theologian, he reminds us, said that the Latins cannot understand the Doctrine of the Trinity as their language is so poor it can’t express anything so profound. The disintegration of the common mind in Christendom, he argues, comes from the loss of the Greek language and thought in the West. He dates this loss of the common mind in the West, which he believes probably never began in the East, from the twelfth century and argues that the best way of summarizing it is that the theology of Gregory the Theologian was preached from the pulpit but the treatises of Aquinas were taught in a class. He finishes this line of thought by speaking of the Patristic *ressourcement* in the West: ‘there is a rediscovery of the patristic tradition in the western world, I

²⁸ ‘In answer to an enquiry about his attitude to St Augustine, he gave the unexpected reply: ‘I would say that Augustine is really an Eastern Father’ [E. L. Mascall, ‘Obituary of Florovsky’, *Sobornost* 2.1 (1980), 69–70]. On the influence of Augustine see Christoph Künkel, *Totus Christus: Die Theologie Georges V. Florovskys* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991).

²⁹ Revised Version of ‘Quest for Christian Unity: The Challenge of Disunity’ (1955), Georges Florovsky Papers, Manuscript Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Bx. 3. F. 11, 29.

mean a rediscovery of the Greek Fathers.³⁰ Florovsky, not surprisingly, saw the involvement of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement as a kind of ‘missionary activity’³¹ or as the witness of the truth of Orthodoxy to the whole Christian world:

Christian reunion is just universal conversion to Orthodoxy ... What is beyond [the Church’s norm of the rule of faith and order] is just abnormal. But the abnormal should be cured and not simply condemned. This is a justification for the participation of an Orthodox in the ecumenical discourse, in the hope that through his witness the Truth of God may win human hearts and minds.³²

Note these words by a prominent Orthodox ecumenist for we shall see the very same ideas appearing in an anti-ecumenical statement of Mount Athos 30 years later. Florovsky largely enunciated this vision of ecumenism as what I call ‘civilizational dialogue’ in successive ecumenical meetings of the WCC in the late 1940s and 1950s. Florovsky’s ecumenical theology has since become the core of the present rationale for Orthodox involvement in the ecumenical movement—ecumenism as a sort of tacit evangelism.

Furthermore, although Florovsky believed the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is (not merely, in a weak sense as found in Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*, ‘subsists in’) the Orthodox Church, he did not hold that only Orthodox were therefore Christians. He contended, most famously in the 1933 essay ‘The Limits of the Church,’³³ which itself is dependent on an earlier little known essay of Bulgakov,³⁴ that *individual Christians* in various Western schismatic bodies existed outside of the canonical but inside the spiritual bounds of the Orthodox Church. This quasi-membership of certain Western non-Orthodox in the Orthodox Church is by virtue of such elements as right belief, the preaching of the Word of God, and true devotion. Above all, and here he adapts Augustine (just as we saw Bulgakov doing earlier),³⁵ the heterodox could be said to be Christians due to the ‘validity’ of their Trinitarian baptism whose graciousness and ecclesiality, albeit lacking full efficacy outside the

³⁰ Ibid., 29; Compare Review of L.A. Zander, *Vision and Action* (London, 1952), *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly* 1.2 (1953), 28–34, at 32–3.

³¹ Florovsky, ‘Une vue sur l’Assemblée d’Amsterdam’, *Irénikon* 22.1 (1949): 5–25, at 9.

³² Florovsky, ‘Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement’ [1950] in Gallaher and Ladouceur, *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Writings*, 285–286.

³³ See Florovsky, ‘The Limits of the Church’ in Gallaher and Ladouceur, *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Writings*, 247–56 and ‘The Doctrine of the Church and the Ecumenical Movement’, *The Ecumenical Review* 2.2 (1950): 152–61.

³⁴ Bulgakov, ‘Ocherki ucheniia o tserkvi. (III). Tserkov’ i “Inoslavie”’, *Put’* 4 (1926), 3–26. Abridged translation: ‘Outlines of the Teaching about the Church: The Church and Non-Orthodoxy’, *American Church Monthly* 30.6 (1931): 411–23, and 31.1 (1932): 13–26.

³⁵ See Will Cohen, ‘Sacraments and the Visible Unity of the Church’, *Ecclesiology* 4.1 (2007): 68–87.

canonical bounds of the Church, the mainstream tradition of the Orthodox Church acknowledges by receiving the non-Orthodox believers not by a 'new baptism' but by the sacraments of Confession or Chrismation. The validity of Western non-Orthodox sacraments is the guarantee that God continues to act through the Church even in Christians separated from the true Church, drawing separated Christians back to the fullness of union and communion within herself. Thus, although he is not as bold as Bulgakov in regards to acknowledging other churches' ecclesiality and uses 'schismatic' language more often than Bulgakov in regards to the heterodox, he effectively acknowledges the ecclesiality of non-Orthodox churches insofar as their baptisms are said to be tacitly Orthodox making his position in the end little different than Bulgakov.

For Florovsky, the Cyprianic and Nikodimite view that outside the canonical walls of Orthodoxy there was undifferentiated darkness and that all Western non-Orthodox sacraments are null and void was a late theological distortion and overreaction. In no way, he argued, are the canonical and spiritual bounds of the Church identical. He claimed that this latter opinion emerged in the counter-Reformation when Orthodox were being rebaptized by Roman Catholics and, though it was an understandable overreaction at the time, it was contrary to the explicit teaching of the Fathers who distinguished between the sacraments of different sorts of heretics (e.g., Gnostics from Arians) and heretics from schismatics who had broken from the Church but whose basic teaching was sound and so whose baptism also could be said to be in some sense Orthodox as well. As St Basil explains in his first canonical epistle, 'it seemed good to the ancient authorities to reject the baptism of heretics altogether, but to admit that of schismatics, on the ground that they still belonged to the Church' (Letter 188, to Amphilochius). This is the reason that the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate receives Roman Catholics and Protestants with a Trinitarian Baptism through the Sacrament of Chrismation and not through a repetition of their Baptism which is considered 'valid' though lacking efficacy outside the canonical Church. Florovsky's ecumenical theology is based on the notion that Orthodoxy is encountering with Western Christians those who are the product of another Christian civilization and that it is the vocation of the Orthodox Church to witness to Orthodoxy in the contemporary world to these Western Christians. It is called to ever draw other Western Christians back to the fullness of life in Christ, the Orthodox Church, where their baptism finds its fulfillment.

Mount Athos

It is at this point I want to turn briefly to the Holy Mountain, Mount Athos, renowned for its opposition to ecumenism and critical of the Holy and Great Council of Crete in June 2016 (which affirmed ecumenism). In April 1980, although we see

contemporary statements that echo it as well, we see an anti-ecumenical statement coming from the Sacred Community after a then recent visit of Pope John Paul II to Ecumenical Demetrios in Istanbul and when the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church was just beginning its work. An Extraordinary Conference of the superiors of the twenty ruling Athonite monasteries first affirms in its statement that the Orthodox Church is the Universal Church of the Creed which has a 'spiritual and ontological authenticity' but then distinguishes between the 'churches' and 'confessions' of the West which have, it says, 'perverted the Faith of the Gospel, the apostles and the fathers, are deprived of sanctifying grace, of real mysteries and apostolic succession'.

Now dialogue—and here the Athonites are veritable 'softies' compared with St Justin Popović—in itself with the heterodox West is not necessarily a bad thing from the Orthodox point of view as long as 'the goal is to inform them of the Orthodox Faith and, thus, make it possible for them thereby to return to Orthodoxy when they receive divine enlightenment and their eyes are opened'. There follows in the statement an attack on common prayer and uniatism. It closes with an affirmation of the Holy Mountain's continuing faith in Orthodoxy and that it has 'love' for the heterodox 'to whom real help is given only when the Orthodox show them the vastness of their spiritual sickness and the means of its cure by maintaining a consistently Orthodox position'. Yet we have just seen in Florovsky, the pre-eminent architect of modern Orthodox ecumenism, the very same opinions, albeit couched in much more nuance, which is that Orthodoxy is the true Church of the first millennium and that Ecumenism, while it certainly affirms brotherhood in Christ, ultimately means a witness to the Faith to the non-Orthodox Western churches that all might return to her.³⁶

World Council of Churches (WCC)

It might be thought that I am presenting a selection of idiosyncratic examples which show no larger pattern on the official level. In fact, we see the same different modes of ecumenism as civilizational dialogue in official ecumenism, especially the Orthodox engagements with the World Council of Churches (WCC). The Orthodox have, in fact, always affirmed in the WCC the fact that they are the Church Universal. This can be seen in the 1950 Toronto Statement (Florovsky was one of its drafters) where it is said that the WCC is not the *Una Sancta* or a super-church. The WCC, we read in the Toronto Statement, is not there to negotiate union between the churches and that 'membership does not imply that each church must regard the other member

³⁶ 'Announcement of the Extraordinary Joint Conference of the Sacred Community of the Holy Mount Athos [April 9/22, 1980]', Found at <<http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/athos.aspx>> (last accessed: 26 February 2020).

churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word'.³⁷ This statement was a compromise draft from the earlier much blunter position: 'The member churches do not necessarily recognize each other as true, healthy or complete churches but they consider the relationship of other churches to the *Una Sancta* as a question for mutual recognition'.³⁸

The Toronto Statement goes on to say '[t]he member churches of the World Council recognize in other churches elements of the true Church' and on this basis enter into dialogue with one another.³⁹ We see this line of thinking once again in an Orthodox section report on Unity from the New Delhi Assembly of 1961. Florovsky's fingerprints can once more be seen. The statement says that for Protestants the main ecumenical problem is 'denominationalism', which is only solved by interdenominational agreement or reconciliation. The Orthodox, we are told, reject this approach as for them the basic problem is 'schism'. It is not said so explicitly in this context but it is clear that what is implied is that the schism is from the Church which is Orthodoxy. We see this is the case because the statement then says that the Orthodox

cannot accept the idea of a 'parity of denomination' and cannot visualize Christian Reunion just as an interdenominational adjustment. The unity has been broken and must be recovered. The Orthodox Church is not a confession, one of many, one among the many. For the Orthodox, the Orthodox Church is just the Church.

It then affirms the fact that the Orthodox Church

is aware and conscious of the identity of her inner structure and of her teaching with the Apostolic message (kerygma) and the tradition of the ancient undivided Church. She finds herself in an unbroken and continuous succession of sacramental ministry, sacramental life, and faith.

It sees itself as having 'a special and exceptional position in the divided Christendom, as the bearer of, and the witness to, the tradition of the ancient undivided Church, *from which all existing denominations stem, by the way of reduction and separation [i.e., schism]*'. What is needed is not, the statement says borrowing Florovsky's distinction we mentioned earlier, 'ecumenism in space' but

³⁷ 'Toronto Statement, 15 July 1950', Found at <<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/1950/toronto-statement>> (last accessed: 26 February 2020).

³⁸ Konrad Raiser, 'Orthodox contribution to the WCC', Public lecture at an international symposium on Orthodox theology and the future of ecumenical dialogue: perspectives and problems, Thessaloniki, Greece, 1–3 June 2003, Found at <<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/orthodox-contribution-to-the-wcc>> (last accessed: 26 February 2020).

³⁹ 'Toronto Statement, 15 July 1950', Found at <<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/1950/toronto-statement>> (last accessed: 26 February 2020).

‘ecumenism in time’ understood as agreement in faith with all ages as prerequisite for unity. Unity will be recovered by the denominations returning to their common past, which, as was just affirmed, is borne by the Orthodox Church.⁴⁰

This basic ecumenical position continues to be reiterated in the WCC by the Orthodox Church: Orthodoxy is the Universal Church and it engages in dialogue with the Western non-Orthodox churches certainly to affirm all that they share in common of Christ but they do so primarily as a witness to the unbroken tradition of the ancient undivided Church which Orthodoxy embodies. To quote the May 1998 Thessaloniki Statement, which was a Pan-Orthodox Ecclesial Statement calling for a ‘radical restructuring’ of the WCC to make it more Orthodox-friendly: ‘We have no right to withdraw from the mission laid upon us by our Lord Jesus Christ, the mission of witnessing the Truth before the non-Orthodox World’.⁴¹ In the late 1990s, what I am arguing is the basic Orthodox ecumenical position, which I am calling civilizational dialogue, comes to the fore after a Special Commission was created to respond to serious ‘Orthodox Concerns’ that they were being marginalized in the WCC. There were many factors involved, including Orthodox being regularly outvoted in the Assembly and asked to vote on issues at odds with their theology like women’s ordination, the May 1997 pulling out of the Georgian Church from the WCC and, as Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, then moderator of the Central Committee said at the Harare Assembly of December 1998, ‘the ethos and the agenda of the Council, which remained Protestant and Western in spite of the Orthodox presence and participation of churches from different regions’.⁴² The difficulty of this issue was reiterated at a Central Committee session in August 1999 dedicated to deeper more productive Protestant-Orthodox dialogue:

⁴⁰ ‘Orthodox contribution to New Delhi Assembly - Section Report on Unity, New Delhi, India, 1961’, Found at <<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/first-plenary-meeting-documents-december-1999/orthodox-contribution-to-new-delhi-assembly>> (last accessed: 26 February 2020). Compare ‘New Valamo Meeting--New Valamo, Finland, September 1977’, Found at <<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/first-plenary-meeting-documents-december-1999/new-valamo-meeting>> (last accessed: 26 February 2020).

⁴¹ ‘Thessaloniki statement-Thessaloniki, Greece, May 1998’, <<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/first-plenary-meeting-documents-december-1999/thessaloniki-statement>> (last accessed: 26 February 2020).

⁴² Aram I, ‘Excerpts from moderator’s report to the eighth assembly, 01 December 1998, Harare, Zimbabwe, December 1998’, Found at <<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/first-plenary-meeting-documents-december-1999/excerpts-from-moderators-report-to-the-eighth-assembly>>, (last accessed: 26 February 2020). Compare Aram I, ‘For a Creative Orthodox-Protestant dialogue, 1 December 1999’, Found at <<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/first-plenary-meeting-documents-december-1999/for-a-creative-orthodox-protestant-dialogue>>, (last accessed: 25 February 2020).

East-West dynamics vs the Universality of the Church

The Orthodox-Protestant divide can possibly be understood along the lines of an East-West divide, particularly if ‘East’ and ‘West’ are understood not geographically but historically and doctrinally. Can there be a universality which embraces both East and West?⁴³

All the texts from this period reflect the very same elements of ecumenism understood as civilizational dialogue I have identified. They affirm, as we saw at New Delhi, that the Orthodox Church sees itself as the Church Universal, that it is called to witness to Orthodoxy to the non-western churches for, as Prof Peter Bouteneff, now of St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, put it, in October 1998 when he was working for the WCC (just before the Harare Assembly of December that year):

It isn’t that we limit all truth, all church reality, or all activity of the Holy Spirit, to the Orthodox Church. But we do believe that the historical splits, because of which world Christianity is now so visibly divided, were splits from the ‘right beliefs’ of Orthodoxy.

Following the position of Bulgakov and Florovsky before him, Bouteneff affirms that the mystery of the Church which is embodied in its fullness in Orthodoxy cannot be contained within its canonical walls:

Even as we Orthodox locate the Universal Church within the communion of our Church, it would be impious not to look outside our church boundaries to see, to affirm, and to engage with all that is real and true and beautiful there – all that is of Christ.⁴⁴

The difficulties the Orthodox had with their role in the WCC were eventually partially resolved by a new voting system by consensus, but the unease the Orthodox feel towards the WCC has remained and it has been publicly criticized for

⁴³ ‘Towards a Protestant-Orthodox dialogue within the WCC-Minutes from a Central Committee “Padare” session, 27 August 1999’, <<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/first-plenary-meeting-documents-december-1999/towards-a-protestant-orthodox-dialogue-within-the-wcc>> (last accessed: 26 February 2020)

⁴⁴ Peter Bouteneff, ‘The Orthodox churches, the WCC, and the upcoming assembly, 01 October 1998’, Found at <<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/first-plenary-meeting-documents-december-1999/the-orthodox-churches-the-wcc-and-the-upcoming-assembly>> (last accessed 26 February 2020).

its Protestant and Western ethos by high level Orthodox clerics who are committed to ecumenism.

*The Holy and Great Council of Crete-June 2016*⁴⁵

I want to close this study of Orthodox ecumenism and anti- ecumenism as civilizational dialogue with one last example of how both Orthodox parties, pro-ecumenist and anti-ecumenist, share a common understanding of the ecumenical movement as an encounter of Orthodoxy with a cultural-religious western Other. The Holy and Great Council of Crete of June 2016 was historic for many reasons, not least because it was the first universal Orthodox Council, despite the absence of four local churches, in the modern period. It acknowledged, with much rancour of some churches, the long-time Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement as a veritable good. Much of the debate in the Council focused on Paragraph 6 of the document ‘Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World’ and whether it was permissible to call other Christian bodies and confessions ‘churches’. The initial pre- conciliar wording of the draft document approved in October 2015 at the 5th Pre-Conciliar Conference was the following:

*According to the Church’s ontological nature, her unity can never be shattered. The Orthodox Church acknowledges the historical existence of other Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her and believes that her affiliation with them should be based on a speedy and objective elucidation of all ecclesiological topics, most especially their general teachings on sacraments, grace, priesthood, and apostolic succession. Accordingly, for theological and pastoral reasons, Orthodoxy has viewed dialogue with various Christian Churches and Confessions, as well her participation, in general, in the present-day Ecumenical Movement in a favorable manner. She is hopeful that through dialogue she will bear dynamic witness to the fullness of Christ’s truth and to her spiritual treasures to those who are separated from her. Her objective purpose, therefore, is to tread upon the path that leads to unity. (§6).*⁴⁶

Some hierarchs, principally from the Church of Greece but joined by the Church of Serbia and a few from the Church of Cyprus led by the noted conservative Greek theologian Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos (b. 1945), attacked the

⁴⁵ See Brandon Gallaher, ‘The Orthodox Moment: The Holy and Great Council in Crete and Orthodoxy’s Encounter with the West: On Learning to Love the Church’, *Sobornost*, 39.2 (2017): 26-71.

⁴⁶ ‘Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World, 5th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference, Chambésy, 10–17 October 2015’, <<https://www.holycouncil.org/-/preconciliar-relations>> (last accessed 26 February 2020).

use of *ekklesia* (church) for the ‘heterodox’ which is a common proxy for Western Christians and Western Christianity by Orthodox zealots. Vlachos is known in the Orthodox world for his attacks on ecumenism and his opinion that Western Christians subscribe to various heretical teachings departing from the Faith of the Fathers, Orthodoxy, including the *Filioque*, *actus purus*, *analogia entis*, and *analogia fidei*, and thus are ‘sects’ not ‘schismatic churches’.⁴⁷

These hierarchs, following in the line of Vlachos, said that it was dogmatically and historically impossible to refer to the non-Orthodox by the name (‘church’) which was solely reserved for the Orthodox Church which is the true and only Church. After much extended debate, Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon (b. 1931) intervened. Along with Metropolitan Emmanuel (Adamakis) of France (b. 1958), one of the most dynamic Orthodox bishops in the Church today (perhaps best known for his historic role in the (controversial) founding in January 2019 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine but also a leader in ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue), Zizioulas was sitting side-by-side with HAH Patriarch Bartholomew I (Arhondonis) of Constantinople (b. 1940). Zizioulas showed in Patristic literature from pre-schism times down to the writings of modern ‘fathers’ that the Orthodox Church has always referred to the bodies of those Christians who are not Orthodox as ‘churches.’ *Ekklesia* is not a magic word that makes heterodoxy into Orthodoxy. He then paused and asked those who were attacking the use of this term for the non-Orthodox:

The question now is whether those who have attacked the use of ‘church’ for the [Western] heterodox are willing to take the next rational step in their argument: ‘Will you anathematize the Holy Fathers?’ for it is they who use this term of ‘church’ for the non-Orthodox.’

There was dead silence in the Council chamber and the Patriarch called for a pause to the proceedings. After this stand-off between Metropolitans Hierotheos (Vlachos) and John (Zizioulas), Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew requested the two to come up with a compromise wording the following day. The result of the discussions between the churches after this debate is the following somewhat strange wording, which is arguably intentionally ambiguous:

In accordance with the ontological nature of the Church, her unity can never be perturbed. In spite of this, the Orthodox Church accepts the historical name

⁴⁷ See ‘Oikoumenismos: Mēropolitēs Naupaktou Kai Agiou Vlasiou Ierotheos Vlachos--Ta “Schismata Tōn Ekklēsiōn”’, Found at <<https://orthodoxia.online/%ce%b1%cf%80%cf%8c%cf%88%ce%b5%ce%b9%cf%82/%ce%bf%ce%b9%ce%ba%ce%bf%cf%85%ce%bc%ce%b5%ce%bd%ce%b9%cf%83%ce%bc%cf%8c%cf%82-%ce%bc%ce%b7%cf%84%cf%81%ce%bf%cf%80%ce%bf%ce%bb%ce%af%cf%84%ce%b7%cf%82-%ce%bd%ce%b1%cf%85%cf%80%ce%ac%ce%ba%cf%84/>> (last accessed 10 November 2017).

of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her [Παρά ταῦτα, ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία ἀποδέχεται τήν ἱστορικὴν ὀνομασίαν τῶν μὴ εὕρισκομένων ἐν κοινωνίᾳ μετ' αὐτῆς ἄλλων ἑτεροδόξων χριστιανικῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ Ὁμολογιῶν], and believes that her relations with them should be based on the most speedy and objective clarification possible of the whole ecclesiological question, and most especially of their more general teachings on sacraments, grace, priesthood, and apostolic succession. Thus, she was favourably and positively disposed, both for theological and pastoral reasons, towards theological dialogue with other Christians on a bi-lateral and multi-lateral level, and towards more general participation in the Ecumenical Movement of recent times, in the conviction that through dialogue she gives a dynamic witness to the fullness of truth in Christ and to her spiritual treasures to those who are outside her, with the objective aim of smoothing the path leading to unity (§6).⁴⁸

This sentence, '[T]he Orthodox Church accepts the historical name of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her' can mean that a) the Orthodox Church has always accepted that other (Western) Christian bodies are called and are in some sense 'churches' (as Zizioulas argued as a pro-ecumenist following the lead of such Orthodox pioneers as Bulgakov and his teacher Florovsky); but b) it can also mean that the Orthodox Church accepts that other (Western) Christian bodies have and continue to call themselves 'churches' although this in no way means that it accepts them as such (so Vlachos and those traditional Orthodox who like him are anti-ecumenical). This is Orthodoxy's *subsist in* moment. This is a crucial moment and passage in contemporary Orthodoxy because the debate manifested here is really about the fact that Orthodoxy now finds itself in a different world, a western world, and whether *or not* this world includes within it Western Christians who implicate Orthodoxy and are in some sense in communion with her. There are some in the Church who acknowledge the West but reject it as corrupt and barbarian and refuse to accept that there is anything within it that is unalloyedly good and which touches their internal being as Eastern Orthodox Christians. Others wish to say that the bounds of the canonical Church (=Orthodoxy) do not coincide with the bounds of its spiritual reality and that there is much in this new world of the West in which Orthodoxy finds itself that speaks to its most intimate life and being. Both see ecumenism as the encounter with a religious Other, as what I have called 'civilizational dialogue' in its different modes, but one rejects it and the other embraces it.

⁴⁸ 'Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World', <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/rest-of-christian-world> 26 February 2020

Conclusion

But what are we to make of the fact that the Orthodox, whether they be pro-ecumenist or anti-ecumenist, see ecumenism in terms of civilizational dialogue with a religious Other? Is this for Orthodoxy a creative or a sterile antinomy? I want to propose something paradoxical, which is that the perpetual tension between ecumenism and anti-ecumenism in the contemporary Orthodox Church is a creative one. Both sides are united in affirming that Orthodoxy when it meets other Christian groups from the West is encountering something different, a religious Other informed by a narrative of the faith that, while it may arguably ultimately be of one piece with Orthodoxy, is not identical and the same story or faith as Orthodoxy. The way this is articulated differs but I have shown that it is often done through the East-West dialectic, the Church and the churches or confessions opposition and the idea that the Orthodox Church is a perpetual witness to the non-Orthodox of the first unbroken millennium of faith of the Church. This is simply stating a fact.

Yet why would I think that the antinomy of ecumenism and anti-ecumenism might actually be a creative tension? It is creative as both sides keep the other from collapsing into a self-identical isolated extremism. The ecumenists are often in a very great hurry, like Bulgakov with his eccentric ideas for intercommunion. They see that the world has now become wholly Western and, though they wish to affirm the pre-modern Easternness of Orthodoxy, they believe that the disunion of the churches is an enduring scandal in an increasingly secularized world and so why not simply focus on a royal minimum of essentials of the Faith rather than always emphasizing that unity is based on the present full package of beliefs and practices of the Orthodox Church.

Yet this neglects what Florovsky called the 'cross of patience', which is essential to ecumenism. Orthodox anti-ecumenists (to use a colloquial expression) keep Orthodox ecumenists 'real', always reminding them that they are guardians of the deposit, those who are called to a high calling, not because of their behaviour or any self-worth, but out of free grace, to be the Church and to witness to the dynamism of salvation breaking into the world, the new creation growing in the midst of the nations. This keeping within sober bounds the hopes for unity of the pro-ecumenists by the anti-ecumenists has meant that Orthodoxy, despite itself, has preserved many pre-modern practices, liturgical and ascetic, pointing to core teachings that have not been covered up but remain vital, which other churches in their zeal for *aggiornamento* have lost and are now attempting to recover. Crete, for example, in some ways was successful in preserving Orthodoxy precisely because it failed. Had it been the Orthodox Vatican II then there would have been the risk that a modernizing spirit would have been set loose in the Orthodox Churches that would have led to the sapping of the pre-modern vision of Orthodoxy, its salt and light, which is what makes it so unique amongst all Christian communions.

Yet the creative tension goes both ways. The zeal for unity of the Orthodox ecumenists also keeps the anti-ecumenists 'real'. The pro-ecumenists remind those who would close up Orthodoxy into a hermetically sealed bubble, a *Reinraum*, that this sectarian path is the very contradiction of Orthodoxy as the abiding Spirit of Christ in our midst. Its tradition is vital precisely because it is unafraid to meet the religious Other and to acknowledge him and embrace him as a brother in Christ, not in spite of but because of the difference.

Orthodoxy now finds itself in a different world, a western world. Westernization is not only an historical process but also above all an interior process, which defines the malaise of the Orthodox theologian drowning in the totalizing horizon of this age with its individualism, rationalism and essentialism exemplified by Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Descartes. Yet this means the Orthodox thinker is also Western and that his Orthodoxy is split down the middle by the West. We all are Western now. The West is in us and is us. It is not elsewhere and outside, for it is the modern. The critique of the West by the Orthodox is self-critique.⁴⁹ One is compelled, therefore, as an Eastern Orthodox to respond to this Western world as it includes within it Western Christians who (as was said earlier) implicate Orthodoxy and are in spiritual communion with her. And this is why many Orthodox ecumenists, in the aftermath of Crete, bearing in themselves an Eastern ecclesial tradition but very much in their upbringing, education, and work lives existing in a wholly Western mode of life, have become emboldened and are beginning, albeit cautiously and critically, to respond to a host of contemporary challenges from the West to the East from sexual diversity to technology.⁵⁰

Orthodox ecumenism is a strange bird. It finds its roots in a civilization that has long ceased to exist except as it is maintained in the liturgical self-consciousness of the Orthodox liturgy but it is inspired and intellectually formed by a fundamentally Western movement for the reunion of the Churches and this is because it is in itself a sort of living antinomy of East and West. But to be a unity of opposites, of two realities inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably united is the quintessence of what it is to be Orthodox, it is to find oneself conformed to Christ in His

⁴⁹ Brandon Gallaher, 'Orthodoxy and the West—The Problem of Orthodox Self-Criticism in Christos Yannaras' in *Polis, Ontology, Ecclesial Event: Engaging with Christos Yannaras' Thought*, ed. Sotiris Mitralixis (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2018): 206-225.

⁵⁰ See for example the attempt to respond as Orthodox to LGBTQ+/sexual diversity: Brandon Gallaher, 'Tangling with Orthodox Tradition in the Modern West: Natural Law, Homosexuality, and Living Tradition', *The Wheel*, 13/14 (Spring/Summer 2018), 50-63 (forthcoming 2020 in Greek in *Synaxis*) and the British Council Bridging Voices joint Exeter-Fordham project led by Brandon Gallaher; Aristotle Papanikolaou and Gregory Tucker, 'Contemporary Eastern Orthodox Identity and the Challenges of Pluralism and Sexual Diversity in a Secular Age' (<https://www.fordham.edu/orthodoxy/bridgingvoices> (last accessed: 26 February 2020)); Brandon Gallaher and Gregory Tucker, eds, *Eastern Orthodoxy & Sexual Diversity: Perspectives on Challenges from the Modern West* (Washington, DC: British Council, 2019): https://www.fordham.edu/download/downloads/id/14010/BV_Report.pdf (last accessed: 26 February 2020)). Also see the contemporary critique of transhumanism in Brandon Gallaher, 'Godmanhood vs Mangodhood: An Eastern Orthodox Response to Transhumanism', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 32.2 (2019): 200-215.

Church now in this age and for this age but looking towards the ages of ages, the unfading light of the Spirit of Christ who calls us all to unity in His Kingdom.