

ON ECUMENOCCLASM: ANTI-ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY IN ORTHODOXY

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
*“No one can say that Jesus is Lord
except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3)*

Ecumenoclasm in Orthodoxy

The Holy and Great Council (HGC) of the Orthodox Church held in Crete from June 16 to 26, 2016, brought to the forefront the long-smoldering controversy in Orthodox circles between ecumenists and anti-ecumenists. Conflict between pro- and anti-ecumenists revolved mainly around the Council document on “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World.”² The initial draft of this document was approved by senior representatives of the local (national) Orthodox Churches at the Fifth Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference held in Chambésy, Switzerland, from October 10 to 17, 2015. But already prior to the Council, there was serious opposition within several Orthodox Churches to some formulations in the document. This opposition has to be seen in the light of long-standing criticism, especially since about 1970, of the involvement of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement, which goes back to the 1920s—the first important Orthodox participation in a major ecumenical gathering was at the Faith and Order Conference held in Lausanne in 1927.³

- 1 I am grateful to Professor Peter Bouteneff (St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary) for his comments on this article, and to Dr David Wagschal for comments on portions of this article dealing with canon law. Some material in this article appeared in an earlier version on the Public Orthodoxy website of the Center for Orthodox Studies at Fordham University. See <<https://publicorthodoxy.org/tag/paul-ladouceur/>> (3-Oct-16).
- 2 This and other official documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church of June 2016 (HGC) may be accessed at <www.holycouncil.org> (3-Oct-16).
- 3 For key texts to 1992, see Gennadios Limouris, ed., *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*:

Orthodox opposition to ecumenism is closely associated with a conservative tendency in Orthodoxy, whose adherents are variously referred to as “fundamentalists,” “rigorists,” “zealots,” “sectarians,” and “neo-traditionalists.”⁴ For our part, we prefer to call this tendency in Orthodoxy neo-traditionalism.⁵

The main sources of neo-traditionalism in Orthodoxy, including anti-ecumenism, over the last half-century have been the conservative faction in the Russian Orthodox Church in exile after the revolution, represented especially by the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia (ROCOR); the Greek “-calendarists,” who oppose the use of the Gregorian or “new” calendar for the celebration of liturgical feasts falling on fixed days of the year; certain monastic figures, especially some, but not all, of the monasteries and important personalities of Mount Athos; and individual hierarchs, clergy and theologians.⁶ The starting point of neo-traditionalism is

Statements, Messages and Reports on the Ecumenical Movement, 1902–1992 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994). For a vast collection of documents, biographies of key figures, and essays on wide range of themes relating to Orthodox involvement in ecumenism, see Pantelis Kalaitzidis et al., eds., *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education* (Volos: Volos Academy Publications; Geneva: WCC Publications; Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014), 962 pp.

- 4 Two documents of the HGC refer to fundamentalism, the “Message” (§ 4) and the “Encyclical” (§ 17). In addition, the document on ecumenism (“Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World”) contains this statement: “The Orthodox Church considers all efforts to break the unity of the Church, undertaken by individuals or groups under the pretext of maintaining or allegedly defending true Orthodoxy, as being worthy of condemnation” (§ 22).
- 5 The appellation “traditionalist” is inappropriate because all Orthodox appeal to tradition, whereas “neo-traditional” implies a novel approach to tradition, which is in tension with long-standing approaches to tradition. See our paper “Neo-Traditionalism in Contemporary Orthodoxy,” Conference of the Orthodox Theological Society in America, “Crete 2016: Post-Conciliar Reflections,” Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary (Brookline, MA), September 29 to October 1, 2016 <<https://utoronto.academia.edu/PaulLadouceur/Ecclesiology-and-Ecumenism>> (21-Nov-16).
- 6 For more detailed overviews of the origins of modern anti-ecumenism in Orthodoxy, see our paper “Neo-Traditionalism in Contemporary Orthodoxy”; and Vasilios Makrides, “Orthodox Christian Rigorism: Attempting to Delineate a Multifaceted Phenomenon,” *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 3 (2016).

typically a systematic or even strident anti-westernism, highlighting the historical, cultural, theological, and socio-political factors which distinguish “the East” and “the West,” and Eastern and Western Christianity, while typically ignoring factors which East and West share in common, and which distinguish the “Christian world” from the non-Christian world. The usual conclusion of this historiographic and theological perspective is that Orthodoxy should minimize its contacts with the West, lest it be further affected by unhealthy western values, including secularism, materialism, philosophical, theological and ethical relativism, and of course ecumenism.⁷

Western converts to Orthodoxy typically take one of two attitudes vis-à-vis western Christianity and ecumenism. Many prominent western converts to Orthodoxy maintained an open attitude toward western Christianity, recognizing both its strengths and its weaknesses, and were and are often active participants in the ecumenical movement. Examples include Fr Lev Gillet (1893–1980), Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (1907–2005), Olivier Clément (1923–2009), Metropolitan Kallistos Ware (b. 1934), and Fr. Andrew Louth (b. 1944). But many converts to Orthodoxy are found at the other pole, characterized by an unrelenting critique of western Christianity and a rejection of Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement. Fr Seraphim Rose (1934–1982) and Fr Peter Heers are representatives of this attitude, while the French theologian Jean-Claude Larchet (b. 1949) represents a more moderate view, though he nonetheless shares much of the anti-ecumenical theology, if not its frequently extreme rhetoric.

7 This perspective finds its fullest expression in the writings of Justin Popovich and of the Greek Old Calendarists, and, with more nuances, in John Romanides and Christos Yannaras. See Justin Popovitch, *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism* (Birmingham, UK: Lazarica Press, 2000); Chrysostomos of Etna and Auxentios of Photiki, *The Roman West and the Byzantine East* (Etna, CA: Center for Orthodox Traditionalist Studies, 2002); John Romanides, *Franks, Romans, Feudalism, and Doctrine: An Interplay between Theology and Society* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1981); Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West: Hellenic Self-Identity in the Modern Age* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006).

Early anti-ecumenical literature was often characterized by denunciatory rhetoric, conspiracy theories and apocalyptic visions of evils that would befall Orthodoxy as a result of ecumenism, with a paucity of sound theology. This is evident in the 1967 report on ecumenism by Archbishop Vitaly (Ustinov) (1910–2006), primate of ROCOR, to the assembly of bishops. The report is singularly lacking in theological argumentation against ecumenism but abounds in accusations and denunciations, including the characterization of ecumenism as the “heresy of heresies”:

Ecumenism is the heresy of heresies, because until now every separate heresy in the history of the Church has striven itself to stand in the place of the true Church, while the ecumenical movement, having united all heresies, invites them all together to honor themselves as the one true Church. Here ancient Arianism, Monophysitism, Monothelism, Iconoclasm, Pelagianism, and simply every possible superstition of the contemporary sects under completely different names, have united and charge to assault the Church.⁸

In this light, truth is present only in those Orthodox Churches which reject the heresy of ecumenism. As for other religions and other Christian Churches (and by implication Orthodox Churches which participate in ecumenical endeavors):

All other religions, so-called Christian, monotheistic or pagan, all without the slightest exception, whether it be Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam or Buddhism—all are obstacles placed by the devil as his traps between the Church of Christ and the whole human race ... in principle they all without exception belong to falsehood, having nothing in common with truth.⁹

Orthodox ecumenists, together with other Christian ecumenists, would reject the notion that the ecumenical movement—and, for

8 Archbishop Vitaly of Montreal and Canada, “Report to the Sobor of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia” (1967–1968). <<http://www.roca-sobor.org/eng/ecumenism—a-report>> (4-Aug-14). In a similar vein, see Metropolitan Philaret, “The First Sorrowful Epistle of Metropolitan Philaret” (1969) <<http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/sorrow.aspx>> (4-Aug-14).

9 Archbishop Vitaly of Montreal and Canada, “Report to the Sobor of Bishops.”

that matter, the World Council of Churches—represents the “one true Church.”

Objections to ecumenism from the monasteries of Mount Athos are typically more reserved in tone and contain more historical and theological substance than statements from ROCOR or the Old Calendrists. One of earliest anti-ecumenical actions originating from Mount Athos occurred in 1980, when the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church was getting under way. A conference of the Sacred Community on Mount Athos (which brings together the superiors of the twenty sovereign Athonite monasteries) issued a statement which, while not openly objecting to Orthodox-Catholic theological discussions, saw these in a narrow context of witness with an aim toward conversion to Orthodoxy:

Dialogue with the heterodox is not reprehensible from the Orthodox point of view if its 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.¹⁰

Despite a generally more moderate tone, the Athonites, like ROCOR and the Old Calendrists, also have recourse to conspiracy theories and apocalyptic rhetoric in their anti-ecumenical statements: “A Fifth Crusade is unfolding before our very eyes, the goal of which is a new conquest of the Orthodox peoples.”¹¹

The principal bones of contention raised by anti-ecumenical Orthodox groups are an apparent acceptance of the “two lung” theory of the Church advanced by Pope John Paul II; implicit recognition of the presence of divine grace in other Churches, capable of granting salvation; a perceived weakening of Orthodox

10 “Announcement of the Extraordinary Joint Conference of the Sacred Community of the Holy Mount Athos [April 9/22, 1980]” <<http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/athos.aspx>> (21.11.2016).

11 “Open letter from the Athonite Monks to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew” (11 May 1999), <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/athonite_bartholomew.aspx> (9-Oct-16).

opposition to the Greek-Catholic Churches established in the Ukraine and elsewhere (and especially Orthodox acceptance of the communiqué of the June 1993 Balamand Conference of the Orthodox-Catholic Joint Commission);¹² theological objections to the 1989 and 1990 Agreed Statements with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, with recommendations for the lifting of the historic anathemas and the re-establishment of communion between the two families of Churches;¹³ visits of the ecumenical patriarch to Rome and of the pope and other Vatican representatives to Constantinople and other countries of Orthodox tradition (which appear to treat the two Churches as equal in status, thereby, it is thought, undermining the Orthodox position on deficiencies in the Catholic Church); and Orthodox participation in common prayers with non-Orthodox and even with non-Christians.

The main theological focus of neo-traditionalist thinking is ecclesiology, with important ramifications in sacramental theology and soteriology, typically set in generalized anti-modernism and anti-westernism. The main line of neo-traditionalist ecclesiology runs something like this:

The Orthodox Church is *exclusively* the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ on earth. Since there is but One Christ and One Church, there can be no other church and those Christian bodies which call themselves “church” are in fact not church at all. Having separated themselves from the Orthodox Church by heresy or schism, these bodies no longer possess the sacraments, which subsist only in the Orthodox

12 See the “Communiqué of the Seventh Plenary Session of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church” (Balamand, Lebanon, June 17–24, 1993) <www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/ch_orthodox_docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19930624_lebanon_en.html> (31.03.2015).

13 See the “Second Agreed Statement” (1990), “Recommendations on Pastoral Issues” (1990), and “Proposals for Lifting Anathemas” (1993) of the Joint Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches at: <<https://orthodoxjointcommission.wordpress.com>> (31-Mar-15). See also our article “Orthodox Critiques of the Agreed Statements between the Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches,” *STQ* 60.3 (2016): 333–68.

Church. Thus the rituals carried out by non-Orthodox in imitation of true sacraments are without grace or effect, or (following Augustine) at best they may be valid but not effective, that is, they are not rendered instruments of grace by the action of the Holy Spirit. Thus the baptism administered by non-Orthodox is an empty ritual and does not make its recipients members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, but instead signifies their membership in some sect or pseudo-church. Their eucharistic rituals may mimic Jesus' Last Supper with his Holy Apostles, but the bread and wine are not changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, so there is no communion with the risen Lord.

Outside the Orthodox Church, there are only heresies and schisms. The Orthodox Church has never united herself with heresies and schisms but condemns them and prays for the repentance and conversion of heretics and schismatics. Thus the only valid objective of Orthodox contacts with non-Orthodox is to urge them to recognize their errors, to repent and to return to the true Church of Christ, the Holy Orthodox Church.

Christian unity has never been broken, nor could it, because Christ is the one Head of the Church and his Body, the Orthodox Church, cannot be divided. The Orthodox Church has always remained united with her Head, Jesus Christ, as his Body, in keeping with the teachings of the Holy Fathers, the ecumenical councils, the sacred canons and the saints throughout all ages. Thus there is no question of seeking a "lost" unity of the Church, only the return of heretics and schismatics to the Orthodox Church.¹⁴ And it follows that any institutional

14 As examples of this line of argumentation, see the pre-conciliar letters of Met. Hierotheos Vlachos: "[First] Letter to the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece on the texts proposed for approval by the upcoming Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church" (January 18, 2016) <www.pravoslavie.ru/english/90896.htm> (05.09.2016); "[Second] Letter to the Holy Synod of Greece Concerning Preparations for the Upcoming Great and Holy Council" (January 20, 2016) <www.pravoslavie.ru/english/90812.htm> (05.09.2016); "[Third] Letter to the Holy Synod of Greece Concerning the Draft Documents Prepared for the Upcoming Pan-Orthodox Council" (March 5, 2016) <www.pravoslavie.ru/english/91319.htm> (05.09.2016). And also: Met. Athanasios of Limassol: "What unity are we talking

contact between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians, or participation with them in a so-called “council of churches,” is the same as full union with them and a betrayal of Orthodox ecclesiology and of Christ as the Head of the Church.

Few neo-traditionalists carry their thinking to its logical conclusion, although a meeting of Bulgarian clergy and monastics in February 2016 did carry the argument this far:

Since non-Orthodox (including of course non-Christians) are not members of the Church, and only the Church possesses and transmits the means of salvation, non-Orthodox are deprived of the means of salvation and thus they cannot enter the Kingdom of God, but are destined for hell unless they join the One, Holy Orthodox Church.¹⁵

This neo-traditionalist ecclesiology is usually presented with sufficient scriptural and patristic proof texts to convince many Orthodox and, as became obvious, the Holy Synods of several local Orthodox Churches, to the point that they not only criticized the pre-conciliar documents, but refused to attend the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held in Crete in June 2016, on the

about? Those who departed from the Church are heretics and schismatics” (February 11, 2016) <www.pravoslavie.ru/english/90619.htm> (05.09.2016); “Open letter of the Holy Mount Athos Kinot to the Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I” (May 25, 2016) <<http://katehon.com/article/open-letter-holy-mount-athos-kinot-patriarch-constantinople-bartholomew-i>> (03.09.2016); Peter Heers, “The Mystery of Baptism and the Unity of the Church: The Idea of ‘Baptismal Unity’ and Its Acceptance by Orthodox Ecumenists” (2004) <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/ea_ecclesiology.aspx> (5-Oct-16); and Peter Heers’ book, *The Ecclesiological Renovation of Vatican II: An Orthodox Examination of Rome’s Ecumenical Theology Regarding Baptism and the Church* (Simpsonville, SC: Uncut Mountain Press, 2015).

- 15 See “Des prêtres et moines de l’Église orthodoxe bulgare, soutenus par des laïcs, ont fait part au patriarche de Bulgarie Néophyte de leurs inquiétudes au sujet du document préconciliaire concernant les ‘Relations des Églises orthodoxes avec l’ensemble du monde chrétien’” [Priests and monks of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, with the support of laity, have brought to the attention of Bulgarian Patriarch Neophyte their concerns over the preconciliar document ‘Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World’], posted February 23, 2016 at: <<http://orthodoxie.com/category/actualites/reliations-ocumeniques/>> (5-Sep-16). Russian text: <<http://agionoros.ru/docs/2257.htm>> (8-Apr-2016).

grounds that the documents, especially the ecumenism document, did not contain their views grounded in neo-traditionalist theology.¹⁶

Who Can Be Saved? Anti-Ecumenism and Soteriology

Orthodox ecumenists and anti-ecumenists both start from the same fundamental ecclesiological principle, succinctly expressed in an anti-ecumenical statement of the Sacred Community of Mount Athos in April 1980: “We believe that our holy Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, which possesses the fullness of grace and truth.”¹⁷ But pro-ecumenical and anti-ecumenical Orthodox draw radically different conclusions from this one principle. Orthodox ecumenists such as Fr Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944) and Fr Georges Florovsky (1893–1979), focusing on the notion that the Orthodox Church possesses “the *fullness* of grace and truth,” conclude that other Christian churches *also* possess grace and truth, if not in their fullness.¹⁸ This realization opens the door to considering non-Orthodox Christians as true brothers and sisters in Christ and hence to the possibility of dialogue in love, growth in mutual understanding of each other’s faith and traditions, and discovery of common elements which unite Christians of different denominations. This does not mean that all Christian communities are equal in matters of faith and doctrine, since Orthodox ecumenists agree with anti-ecumenists that the Orthodox Church *alone* possesses the *fullness* of the Christian faith and is the *true* visible Church of Christ.

16 For an overview of the Council of 2016, see Paul Ladouceur, “The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (June 2016),” *Oecuménisme/Ecumenism* (Montreal) 51 (2016): 198–99.

17 “Announcement of the Extraordinary Joint Conference of the Sacred Community of the Holy Mount Athos [April 9/22, 1980.]”

18 See Sergius Bulgakov, “By Jacob’s Well” (1933), in Michael Plekon, ed., *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in Our Time* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003); and Georges Florovsky, “Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement” (1950), in Donald Baillie and John Marsh, eds., *Intercommunion* (London: SCM and New York: Harper, 1952), and in Brandon Gallaher & Paul Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Theological Writings* (London: Bloomsbury/T and T Clark, forthcoming 2017).

For Orthodox anti-ecumenists, the presence of the fullness of grace and truth found only in the Orthodox Church typically means that grace and truth are *absent* in non-Orthodox Christian churches and communities, that their members are heretics and are hence deprived of the means of salvation. The declaration of Bulgarian clergy and monastics in February 2016 states for example that “the apostolic and millennium-old patristic tradition unequivocally considers that heretics are outside the ship of the Church and as a consequence, beyond salvation.”¹⁹ Anti-ecumenists equate the presence of errors in non-Orthodox Christian churches with the *total* absence of grace and truth, which is a simplistic reductionism of the subtleties of human existence and of faith.

The theology behind these affirmations reposes on a rigorist interpretation of St Cyprian of Carthage’s famous dictum *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*—“No salvation outside the Church.” Cyprian held that salvation is possible only in the visible Catholic (Universal) Church and that those outside, even in other nominally Christian bodies, could not be saved.²⁰ Modern retention of this doctrine, which is not at all sustained in Orthodox Tradition, constitutes a misreading of the main body of patristic theology and of the history of the early Church. As Fr Georges Florovsky points out, the strength of Cyprian’s dictum is that it is a tautology: “salvation” and “Church” are seen as one and the same.²¹ The question is then, What is the Church? Florovsky concludes from the practice of the early Church in not systematically re-baptizing Christians (or even at times re-chrismating them or re-ordaining clergy) returning to the Catholic Church from schismatic and heretical groups, that the Church considered that sacramental grace exists in Christian communities other than the Catholic Church herself. In other

19 “Des prêtres et moines de l’Église orthodoxe bulgare ...”

20 Cyprian’s exact phrase is *Salus extra ecclesiam non est*, but it is typically rendered *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. See *Epistula* 4, 4 and *Epistula* 73, 21, 2. A less categorical expression of this notion occurs in Cyprian’s *The Church Is One*: “He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother” (*The Church Is One*, 6).

21 Georges Florovsky, “Sobornost: The Catholicity of the Church” (1934), in Gallaher and Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky*.

words, the sacramental, charismatic or mystical boundaries of the Church do not correspond with the visible canonical boundaries of the Orthodox Church, but go well beyond.²² Florovsky demonstrates that Orthodoxy follows Augustine's sacramental theology and the practice of the early Church of seeing in the recognition of the validity of sacraments outside the Catholic Church the continuation of links of heretics and schismatics with the Church of Christ. But the precise nature of these links remains indefinable, in the mystery of the divine plan for the salvation of the world.

The theological consequences of asserting that non-Orthodox Christians are deprived of the means of salvation are monumental. Even assuming, generously, that all baptized Orthodox (realistically, perhaps 150 million people) will be saved, this means that the remaining two billion Christians will be condemned to eternal damnation, basically for not being Orthodox. And presumably, extending this reasoning to its logical conclusion, salvation is impossible for all non-Christians as well. Thus of the current world population of some 7.4 billion, only some 150 million (about 2%) are even eligible for salvation.

A doctrine which denies the possibility of salvation to the bulk of humanity (98%) violates several fundamental principles of Orthodox theology. In the first place, it denies that God is a good and loving God who seeks the salvation of all humans, but rather turns God into a cruel divine caricature who creates humans whose only final destiny can be eternal torment. This is not at all the Orthodox notion of God as the Lover of Humankind (*philanthropos*), the Merciful One (*eleémón*), the Benefactor (*energetēs*), the Most Compassionate (*panoiktírmōn*).

The denial of all possibility of salvation outside the Orthodox Church also violates several other basic tenets of patristic anthropology. The *a priori* condemnation of most of humanity to damnation is a form of predestination, a doctrine which the Orthodox Church has consistently rejected over the centuries, especially since Orthodoxy

22 Georges Florovsky, "The Limits of the Church" (1933), in Gallaher & Ladouceur, eds., *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky*.

came into contact with those branches of the Reform which profess forms of predestination.

The denial of salvation to those outside the Orthodox Church is also contrary to the fundamental teachings of patristic anthropology that all humans are ontologically equal, created in the divine image, and that all possess free will and are each and every one responsible for his or her own destiny, in cooperation with or in resistance to divine providence and mercy. The ancient Fathers of the Church and the main body of Orthodox Tradition have steadfastly upheld human freedom and responsibility of each person before God. As in the parable of the talents, each person is responsible for the measure of divine light and truth freely offered to him or her (Mt 25:14–30).

Finally, in affirming that divine grace—the presence and action of the Holy Trinity—is not and cannot be present beyond the visible Orthodox Church, this theology seeks to impose human-devised limits on divine action—it amounts to telling God what to do, who can be saved and who cannot be saved. On the contrary, Orthodox Tradition steadfastly maintains that God is indeed a God of love and mercy, who freely provides the means of salvation for Orthodox, non-Orthodox, and non-Christians in the context of the existence of each person, in ways that may be unknown or incomprehensible to human understanding. The Incarnation of Christ means that all men and women, throughout all time, can be saved, not only those who know Christ and actively believe in him and who belong by birth or conversion to the Orthodox Church.

The recognition that God acts beyond the boundaries of the visible Orthodox Church constitutes the basis, the prime justification, and the imperative for Orthodox participation in ecumenical endeavors. Goodness, divine presence and salvation are found not only where we think that they should be, but where the Holy Spirit, in absolute divine freedom, blows throughout all time for every person, who thus has the possibility of being born of the Spirit (Jn 3:8; 1:3).

What Is Church? The Status of Non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Communities

Orthodox ecumenists and anti-ecumenists both agree that salvation is available only in the Church. As we saw above, the parting of the ways comes on the crucial question of what is the Church, with some taking the high road of a wide vision of the Church whose limits are unknown, and some taking the low road of a narrow, canonical definition of the Church. On April 22, 2016, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church issued a decision outlining its objections to the draft document of the Holy and Great Council entitled “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World.”²³ The brief decision, which contains no theological justification for its positions, rejects the use of the appellation “church” to refer to non-Orthodox Christian denominations; it also objects to the inference that Christian unity has been “lost”; and it deplors the absence of affirmation that the only way to Christian unity is the return of “heretics and schismatics” to the Orthodox Church. The decision of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church does not go as far as the earlier declaration of Bulgarian clergy and monastics, which postulates that “heretics are outside the ship of the Church and as a consequence, beyond salvation”—but the practical conclusion is the same. References in documents of the Orthodox Council of June 2016 to non-Orthodox Christian ecclesial bodies as churches was the most hotly-debated issue at the Council.

Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, former head of the Department for the Cooperation of Church and Society of the Moscow Patriarchate (2009–2015), proposed that instead of using the word “church” to refer to non-Orthodox ecclesial bodies, the Council document should refer to “communities that call themselves Christian.”²⁴ Not

23 “Bulgarian Orthodox Church: Outside the Orthodox Church ‘there are no other churches, only heresies and schisms’” (April 22, 2016). <www.pravoslavie.ru/english/92763.htm> (21.11.2016).

24 Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, *Некоторые замечания к проекту документа всеправославного собора* [Some Comments on the Draft Document of the Pan-

only does this deny the appellation “church” to non-Orthodox denominations, but it also implies that their adherents are not even Christians. Another suggestion initially advanced by the Church of Greece was that non-Orthodox ecclesial bodies be referred to as “Christian confessions and communities,” which at least recognizes that such bodies and their adherents are Christian.²⁵

Concerning the term “church,” the Bulgarian statement reads: “Besides the Holy Orthodox Church there are no other churches, but only heresies and schisms, and to call the latter ‘churches’ is theologically, dogmatically and canonically completely erroneous.” The Bulgarian statement thus identifies the Church entirely and exclusively with the current Orthodox Church. As pointed out above, this theology reposes implicitly on a rigorist and narrow interpretation of St Cyprian of Carthage’s dictum “No salvation outside the Church.” Orthodoxy has never accepted an interpretation of Cyprian’s dictum which limits the Church to a visible institution, but instead recognizes that Christ and the Holy Spirit act outside the visible limits of the Orthodox Church.

By limiting the Church to a visible institution, the Orthodox (Byzantine rite) Church, the Bulgarian approach negates the Pauline notion, taken up by many Fathers of the Church, of the Church as “the Body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:12–31; Eph 4:11–13; Col 1:24 etc.). Christ is “the Way and the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6). The three characteristics form one whole. Thus wherever there is Truth, there also are the Way and Life—the Way and Life that are Christ Jesus. The essence of Church is possession of Truth, witness to Truth, and access to the means of salvation. While non-Orthodox Churches and communities do not possess the *fullness* of the Truth found only in the Orthodox Church, they nonetheless possess *elements* of the Truth, to the degree to which they witness to Jesus Christ and manifest his

Orthodox Council] (Moscow, April 30, 2016). <<http://pravoslav-pol.livejournal.com/48495.html>> (25.11.2016).

25 See the discussion in “Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos describes problems with documents adopted on Crete” (Athens, July 1, 2016) <<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/94908.htm>> (4-Aug-16).

teachings. They thus participate in the Church of Christ and hence are indeed members of the Body of Christ, which entitles them to refer to themselves and to be referred to as “Church.”

Orthodox anti-ecumenists insist in effect that only the possession of the fullness of the truth—in the Orthodox Church—entitles an ecclesial body to be called “church.” This maximalist, black-and-white approach to ecclesiology does not correspond with the richness of the ecclesial experience of the Church, even that of the Orthodox Church over the centuries and the millennia. Again, it seeks to limit the Church, and hence Christianity, to a single earthly institution. By seeking to define the Church on the basis of rational and empirical criteria as a visible institution, this ecclesiology is an abstract and scholastic approach to the mystery of the Church. It rejects St Paul’s statement that the relationship of Christ and the Church is a mystery, as the mystery of marriage (Eph 5:32). The main line of ancient and modern Orthodox teaching on the Church remains faithful to Paul’s metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ, whose precise definition and limits remain a mystery.

The declaration of the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria also complains about the absence of affirmation in the draft document of the Pan-Orthodox Council that the only way to Christian unity is the return of heretics and schismatics to the Orthodox Church. Georges Florovsky, a leading Orthodox ecumenist for some four decades, expresses this more delicately: “For me, Christian reunion is just universal conversion to Orthodoxy.”²⁶ Both Florovsky and Bulgakov, who disagreed on many issues, were united in affirming that only the Orthodox Church possesses the fullness of the truth of Christ—but they did not resort to hitting fellow Christians over the head with insulting epithets such as “heretic” and “schismatic,” which may in some cases be technically accurate, but are far removed from Christian charity.

Is the Orthodox Church to refuse to consider as truly Christian those who suffer imprisonment, loss of home and livelihood, exile,

26 Florovsky, “Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement.”

torture and execution in the name of Christ? It is one thing to sit in the secure comfort of one's home in Greece, Russia, Bulgaria, Great Britain, or the United States and solemnly declare that non-Orthodox are not part of the Church and cannot be called Christians; it is another to witness to Christ in the face of the Taliban and the Islamic State and suffer the wrath of anti-Christian fundamentalists. Most Christian martyrs in recent decades are not members of the (Byzantine) Orthodox Church, but belong to the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and Protestant denominations. Are the Orthodox to refuse to recognize their witness to Christ, even unto death?

The declaration of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and other similar anti-ecumenical statements seek to derail the engagement of the Orthodox Church to dialogue with other Christians. Orthodoxy must stand firm in an unqualified commitment to act in accordance with Christ's priestly prayer: "That they may be one just as we are one" (Jn 17:22). Witness to the truth of the Orthodox Church must not proceed by proffering insults and manifesting hostility toward fellow Christians, but by humble witness to the Orthodox tradition in sincere Christian love and respect toward all seekers of Truth.

Christian Unity: Reality, Aspiration or Chimera?

Since pro-ecumenists and anti-ecumenists agree that the Orthodox Church alone possesses the fullness of the true Church of Christ and that hence the only way to universal Christian unity lies in the Orthodox Church herself. But anti-ecumenists conclude that ecumenical striving for unity outside the Orthodox Church is a chimera, pointing out that in the early Church, there was never any question of "unity" between the Catholic Church and heretics and schismatics—the only way to unity was the return of the heretics and schismatics to the true Church.²⁷ This legalistic approach

27 See for example the two Bulgarian references cited above: "Des prêtres et moines de l'Église orthodoxe bulgare ..." (February 23, 2016); and "Bulgarian Orthodox Church: Outside the Orthodox Church 'there are no other churches, only heresies

disregards the possibility of different levels or types of unity, but insists that only one type of unity is possible, membership in the Orthodox Church, ignoring the wide range of experience and wisdom in the Church over two millennia, let alone the diversity of global human religious experience. To take an example, membership in the World Council of Churches (WCC) requires adherents to subscribe to the definition or basis of the WCC: "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."²⁸ This formula includes the doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation and the divinity of Christ, dogmas which were the principal theological outcomes of centuries of discussion and dispute within Christianity and the subject of most of the ecumenical councils. Subscription to this formula is already one form of Christian unity, indeed the most important one, since it includes the basic dogmas which distinguish Christianity from other religious traditions. Clearly higher forms of unity are possible, for example explicit adherence to the Nicene Creed and the dogmatic pronouncements of the seven ecumenical councils, apostolic succession, the sacraments, veneration of the Mother of God and the saints, on the way toward Orthodoxy. Adherence to some or many such characteristics of the Orthodox tradition constitutes higher degrees of Christian unity, both between the Orthodox Church and other Churches, and among non-Orthodox Churches. Despite its minimalist nature, the WCC formula nonetheless excludes certain groups which call themselves Christian, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, but which reject notably the divinity of Christ and the consubstantiality of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

and schisms" (April 22, 2016).

- 28 "Constitution of the World Council of Churches (as amended by the 10th Assembly of the WCC in Busan, Republic of Korea, 2013)" <www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/wcc-constitution-and-rules> (21-Nov-16).

The statement of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church mentioned above also repeats the affirmation in the earlier document of Bulgarian ecclesial figures to the effect that “‘Christian unity’ has never been lost, because the Holy Orthodox Church has never lost its unity and never will.” The statement cannot be refuted as such because it, like Cyprian’s dictum, is a tautology: here, the “Holy Orthodox Church” is identical to “Christian unity.” By implication too, not only are non-Orthodox ecclesial bodies not “Church,” but their adherents are not Christians, since they do not figure in Christian unity.

In a broader context, the statement is, of course, historical nonsense. The ancient Coptic Church of Egypt and the Armenian and Syriac Churches, and indeed the Church of Rome, were all part of the Catholic (Universal) Church up to the Council of Chalcedon (451) for the first group, and until the beginning of the second millennium for the Church of Rome. These Churches are no longer in communion with what became known as the Orthodox Church. Where is the continuous unity of the Orthodox Church so confidently proclaimed in the Bulgarian statement? Were these Churches and their faithful not part of the Orthodox Church prior to their separation from it? If they were part of the true Church prior to their separation, then visible Church unity has indeed been fractured as a result of their separation.

The statement that “the Holy Orthodox Church has never lost its unity” is an idealized vision of Orthodoxy which also conveniently disregards recent ruptures in the Orthodox Church itself. These include the 1996 break in communion between the Churches of Constantinople and Russia over jurisdiction in Estonia, not to mention the current squabble and break in communion between the Churches of Antioch and Jerusalem over jurisdiction in Qatar. During the period when Constantinople and Russia were not in communion, was the Church of Russia no longer in the Orthodox Church? Or was it the Ecumenical Patriarchate? Are the Churches of Jerusalem or Antioch, or both, no longer “Church”? Or are they still part of the Orthodox Church despite breaks in communion among them?

Who Are Heretics and Schismatics?

One of the preferred weapons of Orthodox opponents of ecumenism is to call ecumenism a heresy and to refer to non-Orthodox, and indeed often Orthodox who support ecumenism, as heretics. Examples abound, for example in documents emanating from the Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia (ROCOR) and in the writings of St Justin Popovich. For ROCOR's Metropolitan Philaret, Catholics and Protestants are "modern preachers of heresy," and the World Council of Churches is the union "of all possible heresies."²⁹ In a 1974 letter Justin Popovich refers to all non-Orthodox Christians as "heretics."³⁰ But the ultimate weapon of Orthodox anti-ecumenists is to describe ecumenism as "the heresy of heresies."³¹

In the Orthodox tradition, "heresy" and "heretic" have very precise and long-standing historical meanings. A heresy is an erroneous doctrine held and expounded by a Christian, while a heretic is the person who holds and expounds such a teaching. For a doctrine to be considered heretical, it must be proclaimed such by the Church, not simply by an individual, be he bishop, priest, or monk, who thinks that his brother or sister in the Church is wrong about something or another. The essential criterion for heresy is thus a formal finding and denunciation of an erroneous doctrine by an ecumenical council of the Church which has been received by the body of the Church herself. Few teachings of the Orthodox Church have been proclaimed formal dogmas by an ecumenical council or other major council of the Orthodox Church—the most important being those contained in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Christological formulations of the Fourth Ecumenical

29 "The First Sorrowful Epistle of Metropolitan Philaret" (July 27, 1969) <<http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/sorrow.aspx>> (11.06.2016).

30 St Justin Popovich, "Letter to the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Serbia" (November 26, 1974) <www.synodinresistance.org/Theology_en/E3a4012Popovic.pdf> (11-Jun-16).

31 Archbishop Vitaly of Montreal and Canada, "Ecumenism: A Report to the Sobor of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia" (1967–1968) <www.roca-sobor.org/eng/ecumenism—a-report> (11-Jun-16).

Council. Similarly, only a certain number of erroneous teachings have been declared heretical.

Some modern-day teachings held by non-Orthodox Christians can be found to be heretical on the basis of the criteria set out above. Most obvious are teachings of groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and others which reject the Nicene faith in the Holy Trinity and the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. But no ecumenical or local council of the Orthodox Church has ever declared ecumenism a heresy. On the contrary, the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held in Crete in June 2016 strongly endorsed the continued participation of the local Orthodox Churches in both bilateral and multilateral ecumenical undertakings,³² "with the aim of seeking the unity of all Christians on the basis of the truth of the faith and tradition of the ancient Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils."³³

Even Fr Seraphim Rose, otherwise a strong opponent of ecumenism, takes a subtle approach to ecumenism as a heresy. "Ecumenism' is a *heresy*," he writes,

only if it actually involves the denial that Orthodoxy is the true Church of Christ. [...] One cannot call [Orthodox who participate in the ecumenical movement] "heretics," nor can one affirm that any but a few Orthodox representatives have actually taught ecumenism as a heresy.³⁴

Unfortunately, many contemporary Orthodox anti-ecumenists are not as nuanced as Seraphim Rose.

Despite the existence of heretical teachings in certain non-Orthodox Christian communities, it is nonetheless necessary to distinguish between a *heresy* and the *heretic*. Are contemporary

32 See the "Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church" (Crete, June 2016), § 20; the "Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church," § 3; and "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World," §§ 4–7 & 23. <<https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents>> (27.06.2016).

33 "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World," § 5.

34 Seraphim Rose, "In Defense of Father Dimitry Dudko," *Orthodox Word*, no. 92 (1980): 130. <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/fsr_99.aspx> (11.06.2016).

non-Orthodox Christians “heretics” in the historical sense of the word? To condemn other Christians as heretics is to pass judgment on them. Jesus warns us against hypocrisy in judging others (cf. Mt 7:1–5). A theological examination of card-carrying members of the Orthodox Church would undoubtedly reveal that many Orthodox hold beliefs that would be deemed heretical by those who freely accuse non-Orthodox Christians of heresy.

True heretics are those who possessed the proclaimed Truth of the Church of Christ, but who willfully put it aside in favor of another teaching not consistent with the Truth of the Church and who willfully divide the Church on this basis. Few modern-day non-Orthodox Christians meet the criterion of willfully putting aside doctrines held by the Orthodox Church. By and large they have inherited these doctrines from those who preceded them in their churches, typically parents, pastors, teachers, who in turn inherited their doctrines from their predecessors etc.—just as “cradle Orthodox” inherit and accept the teachings of their predecessors. Yes, at some point, the buck stops somewhere. Those who knowingly put aside the Truth of the Church to follow a teaching that the Church declares erroneous are true heretics, not their far-removed descendents. Contemporary non-Orthodox Christians are typically separated from the originators of the heresies and schisms by several centuries, or even, in the case of the Oriental Orthodox, by well over a millennium and a half. Is it proper to refer to contemporary Christians separated from the Orthodox Church as “heretics” and “schismatics,” when as individuals they bear no personal responsibility for having voluntarily separated themselves from the Orthodox Church?

To call the descendents of those who deliberately broke away from the Church “heretics” is to visit the sins of the parents on the children. The Orthodox tradition consistently rejects this doctrine. Rather, the Orthodox Church teaches that sin is personal, not inherited. Ancient and modern Fathers of the Church constantly defend human freedom against all comers, including Orthodox who promote deterministic doctrines of all sorts, such as inherited guilt.

It is also, of course, disrespectful and uncharitable toward the persons in question, a transgression against the second commandment, a needless affront to them as Christians. Jesus taught that: "Whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire" (Mt 5:22). It is one thing to think that so-and-so (who may happen to be my next-door neighbor) may hold a heretical belief; it is quite another to hurl the epithet "Heretic!" in his or her face.

Anti-ecumenical Orthodox often preach that non-Orthodox must repent for their errors and that they are in need of prayers. Are Orthodox also not in need of repentance and prayers when they insult and verbally assault fellow Christians, if not face to face, but in publications, at conferences and in internet writings, such as blogs and chat sites? There is more than a little smugness, self-satisfaction, hypocrisy, and pride manifested in an attitude of deprecation toward other Christians.

In Peace Let Us Pray? Prayer in Common

Another common concern regarding ecumenism involves prayer and services in common. Against prayer with other Christians, opponents to ecumenism usually cite canons of ancient councils, especially the Apostolic Canons (Canons 10, 11, 45, 65 and 71). Apostolic Canon 10, for example, says: "If one who is not in communion prays together, even at home, let him be excommunicated"; and 45: "Let any Bishop, or Presbyter, or deacon that merely joins in prayer with heretics be suspended, but if he had permitted them to perform any service as Clergymen, let him be deposed."³⁵ The point is relevant, but several major qualifications are in order.

Firstly, the ancient interdictions against prayers with heretics are canons or rules relating to the organization and discipline of the

35 See Anastasios Gotsopoulos, "One Must Not Pray Together with Heretics or Schismatics: An Approach to the Precise Practice (*akriivia*) of the Church" (http://oodegr.co/english/oikoumenismos/ou_dei.htm) (15.05.2016). The dating of the Apostolic Canons is unknown, but the oldest canons subsequently collected under the appellation Apostolic Canons are certainly not earlier than the late second century.

Orthodox Church. As with many other such canons, they may be revoked or modified, formally or informally, in the light of changed circumstances and requirements of the faithful and the Church. In practice, many organizational and institutional canons, even of ecumenical councils, have fallen by the wayside or otherwise been superseded in practice even in the absence of formal decisions to rescind them by a later council.

In the case of prayers with non-Orthodox, there is now almost a century of precedents set by canonical Orthodox hierarchs and their representatives of some forms of prayers with non-Orthodox, in certain circumstances, both by those authorized to do so in ecumenical fora, and in broader contexts such as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Prayer with non-Orthodox is now an established relaxation of the ancient canons, a part of the long tradition of the Orthodox Church maintaining various lines of communication with non-Orthodox, for the purpose of bringing others back into unity with Orthodoxy. To oppose this now is to run up against an established canonical practice and to attack hierarchical decisions and precedents of the last century.

A classic case of a senior Orthodox hierarch praying with non-Orthodox occurred in 1930. In 1921, Saint Tikhon (Belavin) (1865–1925), Patriarch of Moscow, appointed Metropolitan Evlogy (Georgievsky) (1868–1946) to head the Provisional Administration of Russian Parishes in Western Europe and to represent the Patriarchate of Moscow in Western Europe. The Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the French Protestant Churches and the Orthodox Churches in Western Europe initiated a week of common prayer for the victims of religious persecution in the Soviet Union. In February 1930, Metropolitan Evlogy participated in ecumenical prayer services at Saint Paul's Cathedral (Anglican) in London and L'Oratoire du Louvre (Protestant) in Paris. At that time, Evlogy's archdiocese was still affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate, which declared in response to the ecumenical initiative that there was freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) (1867–1944), then *de facto*

head of the Moscow Patriarchate, attempted to remove Evlogy from office, not for participating in ecumenical prayer services, but for being disloyal to the Soviet regime. In 1931, as a result of Moscow's attempted disciplinary measures against Evlogy, Evlogy, with the support of most of the clergy, parishes and faithful of his administration, placed himself and his diocese under the omophorion of the Ecumenical Patriarch.³⁶

The example of Metropolitan Evlogy's participation in ecumenical prayers for the suffering Russian Church, and that of numerous other Orthodox hierarchs in prayer services in many ecumenical contexts over the past century, must be weighed into any assessment of the current relevance of the ancient canons against praying with "heretics and schismatics." In contrast with a reductionist and modernist view which restricts the Orthodox canon law tradition by insisting solely on the letter of these canons, must be posited a dynamic notion of the canonical tradition as the gradual building of a wide consensus within the Church, articulated by canonical hierarchs, concerning the achievement of the Church's mission and pastoral responsibilities in the present age. In this case, we now have almost a century of canonical hierarchs who decided that in certain circumstances, and mostly by those specially authorized to do so (notably official Orthodox representatives at ecumenical gatherings), some forms of prayer with non-Orthodox are permitted. Jesus says unequivocally "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).

This relaxation, or rather adaptation, of the ancient canons is an aspect of a long tradition of the Orthodox Church to maintain contacts with non-Orthodox Christians. The Orthodox Church acts under the ecclesiological imperative that she must always seek to bring others back into unity with it, and the assessment of hierarchs over the past century has been that this can best be achieved by

36 On this incident and its aftermath, see Daniela Kalkandjieva, *The Russian Orthodox Church, 1917–1948: From Decline to Resurrection* (London: Routledge, 2015), 44–48; and Evlogy Georgievsky, *My Life's Journey: The Memoirs of Metropolitan Evlogy* (Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 2014), Vol. II, Chap. 22.

participating in the ecumenical movement and in common prayer services, including the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, rather than boycotting them. In the tradition of Orthodox canon law, those advocating boycott would be required to demonstrate that their approach would better promote unity, and indeed better exercise Orthodox pastoral concern for non-Orthodox, than participation in the ecumenical movement and common prayers.

A rigorous, rigid, literal and rationalist interpretation of Orthodox canon law is a modern novelty which does not correspond with Orthodox tradition. Ancient canons forbidding common prayer, and indeed many other types of contacts with “heretics and schismatics,” are important historical testimonies of how the Church assessed that she could best achieve its missions of witness, pastoral responsibility and unity at the time of their adoption, especially in the context of the official status of Orthodox Christianity in the Byzantine Empire. The judgment of leading Orthodox hierarchs over the last century has been and continues to be that the application of these canons is no longer the best means for the Orthodox Church to carry out her mission in the contemporary world. The simple invocation of ancient canons is insufficient to outweigh the judgment and practice of the Church over the past century.

Secondly, in practice there are clear limits to common prayer and services in ecumenical gatherings. Prayers are focused around elements which all accept, with the Our Father, the Nicene Creed (without the *filioque*), psalms and readings from the Bible usually featuring as major components. There is no question of intercommunion or the partaking of other sacraments. Typically the services which feature at ecumenical meetings are those of one church, with members of other churches participating especially in prayers and hymns normally recited by the members of the Christian community in question. Orthodox are steadfast in maintaining that there is and must be no “sacramental hospitality.”

The limits of Orthodox participation in common worship were highlighted in the debate over “limited intercommunion” in the context of the Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius in the

mid-1930s.³⁷ After six years of meetings between Anglicans and Orthodox, at the Fellowship's annual meeting in June 1933 Sergius Bulgakov advanced a novel and audacious proposal for "partial intercommunion" in the context of meetings of the Fellowship: with the blessing of Anglican and Orthodox bishops, Anglicans could take communion at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy by Orthodox clergy and vice versa. For Bulgakov, there was a true Christian encounter among the Anglican and Orthodox members of the Fellowship, already a "partial reunion" of the Churches, which should be marked by "partial intercommunion." Without denying the relevance of canonical authority in Orthodoxy, Bulgakov appeals to another authority, that of spiritual experience, according to which, and with the approval of the canonical authorities—bishops of both Churches—, partial intercommunion in the context of the Fellowship should be permitted. Bulgakov saw partial intercommunion as a stage in the "molecular process" of restoring unity between the Churches: "The final aim of intercommunion, however, is the achievement of full corporate reunion between the Orthodox and the Anglican Churches."³⁸

Georges Florovsky was the principal critic of the limited intercommunion proposal. Florovsky questioned whether the points of doctrinal agreement that Bulgakov suggested were sufficient justification for intercommunion and he doubted that partial intercommunion would effectively lead to Church reunion. Behind

37 On the "limited intercommunion" dispute, see especially Brandon Gallaher, "Bulgakov and Intercommunion," *Sobornost/ECR* 24.1 and 24.2 (2002); and his essay "'Great and Full of Grace': Partial Intercommunion and Sophiology in Sergii Bulgakov," in William C. Mills, ed., *Church and World: Essays in Honor of Michael Plekon* (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2013); Sergei Nikolaev, "Spiritual Unity: The Role of Religious Authority in the Disputes between Sergii Bulgakov and G. Florovsky concerning Intercommunion," *SVTQ* 49.1–2 (2005); A. Arjakovsky, *The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration*, 368–371; and my article "'Aimons-nous les uns les autres': Serge Boulgakov et Georges Florovsky," *Contacts*, 64, 237 (2012): 66–70.

38 Nicholas Zernov, "Some Explanations of Fr Sergius Bulgakov's Scheme for Intercommunion," Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius Archives, cited by Nikolaev, "Spiritual Unity," 111.

Florovsky's specific critiques of the proposal was the conviction that the only basis of Church unity lay in global dogmatic agreement. Bulgakov, thought Florovsky, was playing on the positive psychological tone of Fellowship meetings to seek support for his proposal, to the detriment of dogmatic and canonical norms. Florovsky's objections to intercommunion flowed from his ecumenical vision, which attached the greatest importance to dogmatic questions. Because significant dogmatic differences separate the Orthodox and Anglican Churches, there can be no question of intercommunion. For Florovsky, full dogmatic agreement (and not merely a "dogmatic minimum" as Bulgakov proposed) must take precedence over the experience of unity before the altar, over common prayer shared in the Fellowship; "unity in truth" (that is, dogma) and canonical authority are more important than "unity in love" and the shared experience of worship. Florovsky also appealed to the therapeutic role of the absence of intercommunion, which serves as a painful reminder of the fragmentation of Christianity and an incentive toward the healing of rifts.

In the end, faced with Orthodox objections and hesitations on the part of the Anglicans—although the Anglican bishops finally approved the proposal—Bulgakov retreated in 1935, falling back on the notion of "spiritual intercommunion" in the ecumenical context of the Fellowship. The outcome of this debate clearly re-affirmed the limits of Orthodox participation in common worship services in ecumenical gatherings.

The actual practice of Orthodox representatives at ecumenical gatherings is in accordance with the principle set forth in 1952 by Patriarch Athenagoras I (Spyrou) of Constantinople (1886–1972):

Orthodox clergymen as representatives must, as much as possible, show hesitation in worship meetings between them and the heterodox—which meetings are contrary to the sacred canons and which blunt the confessional sensitivity of the Orthodox—by striving to perform, if possible, purely Orthodox services and rites, thus evidencing the splendor and the majesty of Orthodox worship before the eyes of the heterodox.³⁹

39 Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople, "Encyclical to all the Primates of the

Athenagoras recognizes the canonical situation but nonetheless does not rule out common worship meetings, favoring instead the celebration of Orthodox services and rites. In practice, Orthodox clergy attending ecumenical meetings are often asked to celebrate Orthodox services, such as Vespers, portions of Matins or other services such as the Moleben, precisely because representatives of other denominations are well aware of the richness of Byzantine rite services.

Toward a Super-Church?

Anti-ecumenists frequently accuse the World Council of Churches (WCC) of being or aspiring to be a “super-church” above all the existing Christian Churches and communities.⁴⁰ While there may have been some ambiguity on this issue at the WCC founding conference in Amsterdam in 1948, the idea of the WCC as a “super-church” was completely discarded less than two years later, in July 1950, with Toronto Statement of the WCC Central Committee on “The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches.”⁴¹ The Toronto Statement proceeds by both “apophatic” and “cataphatic” statements about the WCC. The principal apophatic statements, under the general heading “What the World Council of Churches is not,” are the following:

1. The World Council of Churches is not and must never become a super-church.
2. The purpose of the World Council of Churches is not to

Orthodox Churches” (January 31, 1952). Cited in Gotsopoulos, “One Must Not Pray Together with Heretics or Schismatics” (n. 41) (from John Karmiris, *The Dogmatic and Symbolic Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church* (in Greek) (Athens, 1953), 962–63).

40 See for example Bishop Artemije (Radosavljević) of Raska and Prizren, “The Serbian Orthodox Church vis-à-vis Ecumenism” <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/artemije_thess.aspx> (25-Nov-16).

41 This and subsequent citations: Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, “The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches: The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches” (Toronto, July 9–15, 1950). <www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/1950/toronto-statement> (20-Nov-16).

- negotiate unions between churches, which can only be done by the churches themselves acting on their own initiative.
3. The World Council cannot and should not be based on any one particular conception of the Church.
 4. Membership in the World Council of Churches does not imply that a church treats its own conception of the Church as merely relative.
 5. Membership in the World Council does not imply the acceptance of a specific doctrine concerning the nature of Church unity.

The emphasis in the cataphatic or positive statements about what the WCC is on “conversation, cooperation and common witness of the churches,” “common recognition that Christ is the Divine Head of the Body,” belief “on the basis of the New Testament that the Church of Christ is one,” that “the membership of the Church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of [one’s] own church body,” the need for mutual consultation, solidarity and assistance among member churches, and refraining “from such actions as are incompatible with brotherly relationship. The purpose of mutual assistance is “in order that the Body of Christ may be built up and that the life of the churches may be renewed.” These statements remain a permanent challenge to the Christian community as a whole, including Orthodox, to work toward the fulfillment of Christ’s prayer “that they may be one, even as we are one” (Jn 17:11).

The Toronto Statement also leaves open the question of how its members consider the ecclesial status of other member Churches: “membership [in the WCC] does not imply that each church must regard the other member churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word.” The explanation which follows expands on this:

There is a place in the World Council both for those churches which recognize other churches as churches in the full and true sense, and for those which do not. But these divided churches, even if they cannot yet accept each other as true and pure churches, believe that they should not remain in isolation from

each other, and consequently they have associated themselves in the World Council of Churches. They know that differences of faith and order exist, but they recognize one another as serving the one Lord, and they wish to explore their differences in mutual respect, trusting that they may thus be led by the Holy Spirit to manifest their unity in Christ.

These points of the Toronto Statement are directly relevant to the current discussion within Orthodoxy on the significance of the appellation “church” outside the Orthodox Church. These principles were very likely influenced by the principal Orthodox representatives at this meeting, Archbishop Germanos (Strenopoulos) of Thyateira and Fr Georges Florovsky.

In short, it is no longer accurate, nor has it been for many decades, to consider that WCC pretends or aspires to be a “super-church.” This accusation cannot be sustained.

Witness in Love

The core of anti-ecumenism in Orthodoxy resides not so much in ecclesiology in the first instance as in soteriology, as we suggested above: Who can be saved? From the answer to this question flows the consequential ecclesiology. Orthodox anti-ecumenists seek to deny the status of “Church” to non-Orthodox Christian ecclesial bodies. Behind this stance, we argued, is a refusal to recognize that those who confess Christ outside the Orthodox Church are well and truly members of the Church of Christ. In the light of such a narrow interpretation of St Cyprian’s dictum (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), it follows that even if they confess Christ to their deaths—and many do—they cannot be saved. Alternatively, if we reject St Cyprian’s dictum by admitting that salvation is possible outside the one Church of Christ, then we are obliged to account for how this is possible, since such a position would undermine the universal nature of the Church. In other words, there would be another “church,” another means of salvation unknown to patristic theology and the thinking of the Church, by which non-Orthodox can be saved. Both of these positions are totally untenable in the Orthodox Tradition.

The main body of Christian thinking from the early centuries is that salvation is possible for those who do not belong to the visible One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church fully manifested only in the Orthodox Church. If such persons can be saved, then, in keeping with St Cyprian's dictum, they are in some fashion unknowable to human understanding members of the Church and their ecclesial institutions are entitled to be called Churches.

This is not to say that the ecumenical movement is perfect. It is not, and has known its share of disappointments and failures over the decades. From the beginning, the Orthodox representatives felt overwhelmed by the large number of Protestant Churches in the WCC, especially since many decisions were made by voting. The situation reached a boiling point in the mid- and late-1990s. The other members of the WCC recognized that there was indeed a problem and at the WCC Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, established a Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC to examine the situation and come up with recommendations. The Commission's recommendations moved WCC decision-making from voting to a consensus system on major issues (except personnel and finances), more in keeping with the conciliar tradition of Orthodoxy, and also clarified the nature of worship services at WCC gatherings, especially by clear distinction between "confessional" and "interconfessional" common prayer.⁴²

Bulgarian Orthodox opponents of the draft document on ecumenism of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church express the concern that in rejecting proselytism, the document would constitute an obstacle to the "predication of the

42 See the "Final Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC," especially § 42 and Appendix A (on common prayer) and § 47–49 and Appendix B (on consensus decision-making) <www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/final-report-of-the-special-commission-on-orthodox-participation-in-the-wcc> (25-Nov-16). For an assessment, see Bp Hilarion Alfeyev, "Orthodox Participation in the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches" (March 8, 2006) <<http://orthodoxeurope.org/print/14/90.aspx>> (25-Nov-16).

Orthodox faith to all types of heretics.”⁴³ This concern confuses and confounds witness and proselytism. Witness to one's own tradition is desirable in ecumenical fora: in discussing theological, moral, liturgical and other matters, participants speak from the standpoint and experience of their own church. It is on this basis that points of convergence and divergence can be ascertained. Proselytism, on the other hand, refers to the use of undue means of pressure to “convert” other Christians to one's own church.

Orthodox have long been the victims of proselytism, in modern times from the Union of Brest in 1595 and the establishment of the Greek Catholic Churches in the Ukraine and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. The Orthodox Church of Russia and those of other countries of Orthodox tradition cried “foul” when Christian missionaries from the West invaded their countries after the fall of communism, often resorting to methods of proselytism far beyond witness or preaching, blatantly disregarding adherence to the Orthodox Church. To counter the influence of unscrupulous missionary bodies in post-communist countries, the local Orthodox churches urged their governments to pass laws restricting the activities of “non-traditional” religious bodies. Such laws flirted with the other extreme of interfering with religious freedom.

It is in this context that Orthodox should indeed condemn proselytism while continuing to witness to the truth of the Orthodox faith. The document on ecumenism of the Council of Crete in June 2016 speaks of the necessity of conducting inter-Christian theological dialogue:

It therefore believes that this dialogue should always be accompanied by witness to the world through acts expressing mutual understanding and love, which express the “ineffable joy” of the Gospel (1 Pet 1:8), eschewing every act of proselytism, uniatism, or other provocative act of inter-confessional competition.⁴⁴

The ecumenical movement is based on witness, not proselytism. Bilateral and international ecumenical undertakings provide

43 “Des prêtres et moines de l'Église orthodoxe bulgare ...”

44 “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World,” § 23.

unparalleled opportunities for Orthodox to bear witness to the bi-millennium Orthodox tradition, in contexts where each party is favorably disposed to listen and to learn from the other. This is witness in love, love of one's tradition in the spirit of love for one's brothers and sisters in Christ, recognizing that they too love Christ and his Church.