

The Future of Orthodox Ecumenical Engagement: Traditionalist, Mainstream or Prophetic?¹

John A. JILLIONS

Abstract

The assumption is often made that the Orthodox Church has a unified approach to ecumenical engagement with other churches. This paper argues that while there is a ‘mainstream’ model (reflected especially in the thought of Georges Florovsky), there is also a minority ‘traditionalist’ model. While having radically different attitudes towards the modern ecumenical movement (traditionalists are vehemently opposed), both of these accept the premise that the historical Orthodox Church alone is the fullness of the Christian Church and that doctrinal agreement and incorporation into the Orthodox Church must precede sacramental communion. A more open alternative model (‘prophetic’) reflects proposals made in the 20th c. by theologians such as Sergius Bulgakov, Nicholas Afanasiev, Anton Kartashev and Nicholas Zernov. These were not taken up at the time but it is argued that they deserve to be studied again as fresh ways for the Orthodox to think about other churches and the possibilities of Christian unity.

Key words: *ecumenism, ecumenical theology, orthodox position on ecumenism, Florovski, Bulgakov, Afanasiev, Kartashev, Zervov*

Introduction

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ‘Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.’ So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the LORD came to me: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? says the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel’ (Jer. 18.1-6).

¹ This is modified version of a paper that appeared as “Three Orthodox Models of Christian Unity: Traditionalist, Mainstream, Prophetic,” in *The International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9:4 (2009), 295-311.

I am very grateful for this opportunity to be with you in Sibiu, with faculty members of theological schools here in Romania and representatives from many Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, to reflect on “The Future of Ecumenical Studies and the Ecumenical Engagement in Orthodox Churches.” You all know that ecumenism remains a very controversial topic among us Orthodox. In my opinion, the seeds of rapprochement Orthodox ecumenists have been sowing for the last one hundred years have borne much fruit on the levels of official dialogues, but almost none among the clergy and lay people of our own churches. There remains a lot of misunderstanding and hostility, often coming from monks, nuns and those most piously committed to the Orthodox tradition. Are these just birth pangs, as Orthodox come to terms with the changes and diversity in the Christian world? Or does this mean that the Orthodox church has yet to work out its own mind on Christian unity? With all the changes that have engulfed the Orthodox world in the last twenty-five years perhaps we need to admit that we are just at the start of reassessing how we relate to the much wider world outside our canonical boundaries. In this paper I would like to look at some of the past and present approaches before turning to some neglected proposals by a few Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century that may help us rethink our approach to other churches in the 21st century.

A common concept of ecumenism?

In 1973 the Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in the America (SCOBA) published its *Guidelines for Orthodox Christians in Ecumenical Relations*. This is still in force and it makes the claim that there is an unbroken, unified Orthodox approach to Christian unity throughout the 20th century. ‘A consistent ecumenical policy, based upon the ecclesiological and evangelical doctrines of the Orthodox faith, has been achieved. This policy has remained constant in the flux of the evolving ecumenical movement.’²

The same assumption is found in one of the standard reference works on Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement, Gennadios Limouris’ *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Statements, Messages and Reports on the Ecumenical Movement, 1902-1992* (Geneva: WCC, 1994). Despite the plural ‘visions’ in the title, there is little reference here to more than a single view of Orthodox ecumenism. Stated most baldly the argument is set out almost exclusively in the following terms: the historical Orthodox Church is identified with the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and therefore its participation in the ecumenical movement is based on its missionary duty to witness to the fullness of the Christian faith

² http://www.scoba.us/assets/files/guide_for_orthodox.pdf

John A. Jillions

in hope that other churches will eventually converge around this teaching and become Orthodox. Until there is complete doctrinal agreement there can be no intercommunion, because sharing in the Eucharist is the final sign of restored unity.

Non-Orthodox have heard this view repeated so often since the 1920s that they accept it as one of the givens of the ecumenical scene. But are the Orthodox as single-minded on this as it appears? In fact, although this is the mainstream Orthodox ecumenical approach (and I will label it **mainstream**), there are two other Orthodox models for the restoration of Christian unity, one much more exclusive and oriented to the past tradition (**traditionalist**), the other much more inclusive and oriented to future possibilities (**prophetic**). I will deal only briefly with the traditionalist model because it is at the fringes of contemporary Orthodox life and thought, then at greater length with the mainstream model, focusing on its main architect, Fr Georges Florovsky. In tone and method these first two models are very different, but in content there are four fundamental features they share in common. Both insist that the historical Orthodox Church is the one true Church, that sacramental communion is the final goal which seals restored unity, that this restoration of sacramental unity can only occur on the basis of full doctrinal agreement, and that this doctrinal agreement must be faithful to the divinely given Tradition of the past.

I will then give most attention to four prophetic Orthodox voices from the 20th century—Bulgakov, Afanasiev, Kartashev and Zernov—who proposed alternative approaches that were not accepted at the time but deserve, in my opinion, a hearing once again.³

The Traditionalist Model

The traditionalist view declares that there is no problem of Christian unity because the Church, as the living Body of Christ, is the same yesterday, today and forever, and is found in the historical Orthodox Church and its unbroken Tradition. The Orthodox Church is the only True Church and has never lost its God-given unity. All other Christian bodies are defective and thus cannot properly be called churches. They have fallen away from the unity of the Church and therefore all their sacraments are without effect. The only proper solution for them to be restored to unity with the Church is to set aside their heretical or schismatic teachings, accept the Orthodox Faith and be baptized. This is the only legitimate ‘ecumenism’. Indeed, if incorporation into the canonical Orthodox Church is not the explicit goal, then dialogues and other forms of ecumenism risk deluding both

³ For more on these and other important Orthodox contributors to contemporary ecumenical thought see John A. Jillions, ‘Ecumenism and the Paris School of Orthodox Theology,’ *Theoforum* 39:2 (2008), 141-174.

the Orthodox and non-Orthodox participants. Hence, traditionalists are vehement opponents of the modern ecumenical movement.

For example, *An Anti-Heretical Manual* denounces Jehovah's Witnesses, Freemasons and 'the Ecumenistic Movement.' Ecumenism is dangerous because it 'embraces in the name of "love" all denominations that have something good to offer and thus diminishes the truth of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.' This poses a threat to the integrity of the 'unadulterated teachings of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.' In this way the ecumenical movement 'has become the world altar upon which the Truth has been sacrificed.'⁴

Another anti-ecumenical tract develops the idea that the ecumenical movement is an especially pernicious pan-heresy because its goals of unity and brotherly love seem so admirable. Those who are involved 'while wearing the mask of the friends of God, are actually his enemies.' Indeed, ecumenists 'are the Church's most dangerous enemies, the false prophets of the Gospel.'⁵

Constantine Cavarnos has the same message, but insists that he is not motivated by 'hatred towards the heterodox.' Dialogue is dangerous, and the orthodox must simply avoid contact with persistent heretics. The message of the heterodox is spiritually damaging poison, the venom of snakes, and there is 'clearly the danger of being infected spiritually by heretical ideas' which can only lead to 'spiritual death.'⁶

Although these views represent an extreme minority, it would be a mistake to dismiss them too quickly. There are people of intelligence, sincerity and deep Orthodox faith who hold these views and are opposed to ecumenical contacts of any kind. And even in those Orthodox churches that do participate actively in the ecumenical movement there are many individuals—clergy, monastics, laity—who would support this model.⁷

The Mainstream Model

The second model is reflected in the SCOBA guidelines, the Limouris book and official statements emerging from the various dialogues. This model, like the traditionalist approach, also makes the claim that the Orthodox Church is the his-

⁴ (No author given), *A Guide for Every Orthodox Christian: An Anti-Heretical Manual*

(Melbourne, Australia: Greek Orthodox Youth Association of Oakleigh, 1997), 68.

⁵ Alexander Kalomiros, (tr. George Gabriel) *Against False Union: Humble thoughts of an Orthodox Christian concerning the attempts for union of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church with the so-called Churches of the West* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1967), 28.

⁶ Constantine Cavarnos, *Ecumenism Examined: A Concise Analytical Discussion of the Contemporary Ecumenical Movement* (Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1996), 52.

⁷ For more on Orthodox approaches to theological enemies see John A. Jillions, 'The Language of Enemies,' *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 50:3-4 (2009) [in press].

John A. Jillions

torical fullness of the Church, but unlike the traditionalists is willing—in varying degrees—to work, pray and study with other Christians toward the goal of full Christian unity. Respectful dialogue and collaboration with other Christians are key aspects of this approach. Mainstream Orthodox ecumenists are willing to admit that the Orthodox do not have a monopoly on truth and that the historical life of the Orthodox Church has been fraught with sins, including sins against the unity of the Church. These historical faults on the part of its members, however, do not touch the inner purity of its life and holiness, which depends on God, not on human beings. The Orthodox Church, therefore, remains ‘the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church’ and the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement remains the same as in the traditionalist model: restoration of Christian unity through incorporation of the heterodox into the fullness of the Orthodox Church. Theologically, other churches cannot be identified as Church. In that sense they are all equally outside the Church. But the mainstream approach also recognizes that the Spirit continues to work in some measure among other Christians and that in God’s providence the Church extends mysteriously, in an indefinable way, beyond the canonical boundaries of the Orthodox Church.

Theologically, for the Orthodox Church, there is no essential difference between the various communions which have been separated from it by historical circumstances over the ages. Culturally, liturgically and dogmatically, however, these bodies are more or less proximate to the Orthodox Church, as the means used to reconcile individual members of these demonstrates. Among communions which resemble the Orthodox Church are the ancient and venerable pre Chalcedonian Churches (Coptic and Jacobite), the Assyrian Church of the East, the Roman Catholic Church, the Old Catholic Church and the Anglo-Catholic portions of the Anglican Communion. The communions and denominations of the Protestant Reformation form a grouping less similar to the Orthodox Church, particularly in ethos, ecclesiology and life style.⁸

Hence, in receiving non-Orthodox back into the fullness of the Church mainstream ecumenists will use a variety of methods, depending on how close the other Church is to the Orthodox experience, according to canon 95 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (though how this is applied in practice varies widely). For those whose baptism and confirmation (chrismation) are recognized, confession of faith is all that is required. Those whose baptism alone is accepted must be received by chrismation. All others require baptism by triune immersion.

The Orthodox must be especially on guard against ‘the rapidly spreading dangers of relativism, secularism, radical anti-institutionalism and ideological

⁸ SCOBA, ‘Orthodoxy and Other Churches’, *Guidelines for Orthodox Christians in Ecumenical Relations*, 1973, par. 1.

utopias which are sometimes present and active in current ecumenism. They must realize that it is their Orthodox and ecumenical duty to oppose and fight these false teachings and tendencies.⁹ Connected with this is the insistence that restoration of full sacramental Christian unity depends fundamentally on restoring a common mind on Christian doctrine through patient study and dialogue. Indeed, without this, there can be no joint sacramental communion and only limited common prayer of any kind.

Christian unity is grounded and expressed in the unity of the Apostolic Tradition, and [the] divisions among Christians, complicated as they might be by ‘non-theological’ (cultural, historical, socio-psychological, etc.) factors, are ultimately rooted in deviations from the one faith. These divisions cannot be healed by compromise or doctrinal minimalism. Differences should be overcome through reference to the very sources of Revelation in patient and honest study of each particular controversial issue.¹⁰

Georges Florovsky (1893 -1979)

One of the main architects of what has become the mainstream model of Orthodox ecumenical engagement was Georges Florovsky. His view could be called an all-or-nothing, doctrine-first policy. He was convinced that full doctrinal agreement must precede reunion, that dialogue between theologians was the best process to eliminate the deficiencies of other churches, and that the explicit goal must be ‘universal conversion to Orthodoxy.’

I believe that the church in which I was baptized and brought up is in very truth *the Church*, i.e., *the true Church* and the *only true Church*. I believe this for many reasons: by personal conviction and by the inner testimony of the Spirit which breathes in the sacraments of the Church and by all that I could learn from Scripture and from the universal tradition of the Church. I am therefore compelled to regard all other Christian churches as deficient, and in many cases I can identify these deficiencies accurately enough. Therefore, for me, Christian reunion is simply universal conversion to Orthodoxy. I have no confessional loyalty; my loyalty solely belongs to the *Una Sancta*.¹¹

Florovsky recognized that his understanding of the Church would be ‘disavowed by other Christians’, and that it would seem to be an ‘arrogant and futile

⁹ Ibid., ‘General Ecumenical Principles,’ par. 13(j).

¹⁰ Ibid., par. 11.

¹¹ ‘The True Church,’ in *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Vol 13 in the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Richard Haugh, ed.), Belmont, Ma.: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989, 134. From ‘Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement,’ *Student World*, XLIII, No. 1 (1950), pp 59-70.

John A. Jillions

claim'.¹² But in accepting the truth of the Orthodox Church he in no way claimed that it was historically perfect.

This does not mean that everything in the past or present state of the Orthodox Church is to be equated with the truth of God. Many things are obviously changeable; indeed, many things need improvement. The *true* Church is not yet the *perfect* Church.¹³

Yet in spite of the obvious failings of the Orthodox Church throughout history, and despite the changes that can be seen in its theological and liturgical expression and its outward shape over the centuries, the Orthodox Church did not fail to guard 'integral and intact' the original deposit of faith. It did this ultimately under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the councils, fathers and sacramental life of the Church. And, based on his reading of this evidence, Florovsky concludes that the Orthodox Church is the only church to have remained entirely faithful to the teaching of the undivided church. This, said Florovsky, is not a biased confessional conclusion but a 'theology of facts' soundly built on the rock of hard historical evidence.

Florovsky realized that there was a huge chasm between his Orthodox view and the Protestant majority in the WCC. This became clearer and clearer the longer the dialogues continued. Every conversation seemed to uncover new layers of misunderstanding that made the goal of coming to a common mind a constantly vanishing horizon. But this was at least a sign that the ecumenical movement was coming to grips with the facts of reality, that Christian division was much deeper than many had optimistically believed. Much more troubling to Florovsky was the tendency to dismiss these differences as inconsequential. Florovsky was one of the founders of the WCC, but he became increasingly disillusioned as the WCC moved away from what he perceived as its original purpose—to reunite the churches on the basis of a theological dialogue that would overcome the doctrinal differences that had produced the divisions in the first place. Ignoring those differences, in favor of what he felt was a sentimental approach based on friendly feelings and fellowship would only give the illusion of unity.

One of the reasons Florovsky so adamantly opposed such 'romantic' ecumenism is that it broke faith with the Christian witnesses of the past, who are equally members of the Church, alive in the risen Christ. Florovsky's main contention is that today's ecumenism in *space* between churches across the globe must be accompanied by an ecumenism in *time* that remains faithful to the unbroken teaching of the undivided church. There is no point in proclaiming unity today, if that unity is based on breaking faith with the cloud of witnesses from the past.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

This should not be interpreted as narrow conservatism. Florovsky allowed that there is a mystery to the existence of the Church that takes it beyond the limits of its canonical and historical boundaries. Why else would the Church in past ages have recognized the baptism conducted by heretical and schismatic groups?¹⁴ The church must be prophetic, listening to the Spirit in every age, and surely the Ecumenical Movement was part of God's word to the present age, throwing together nations and voices that had long been isolated. But he insisted that the truly prophetic word could never be at odds with the word of God spoken in the past. And therefore any 'prophetic' words spoken in the ecumenical movement had to be properly discerned by checking them against the Holy Spirit's words in the past through the tradition—above all in the scriptures—accepted, preached, interpreted, prayed and sanctified by generations. This insistence on keeping faith with the Christian Tradition could often appear as Orthodox intransigence. But weren't the prophets of the past also viewed as inflexible, as those unwilling to move with the times, to go along and get along?

In 1937 Florovsky felt that it was the theologians who would be the prophetic vanguard of a church unity built by the Lord on the bedrock of doctrinal agreement.

We are now in the new phase of our existence, and this phase is a theological one. For the modern generation, theology is not vain speculation but rather quite the opposite. Sound theology is the only safe basis of Christian unity; it is the only means by which to create real understanding. Missionaries, prelates and ecclesiastical diplomats have said their word. It is now the turn of theologians to raise their voice. It will be a voice of discrimination.

And above all it is important to always remember that the will of God alone can bring us peace and unity. 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.'¹⁵

This point needs to be underlined, because it's all too easy to accuse Florovsky of being too conservative, too cautious, too focused on the minutiae of doctrinal debate. True, only precise and well-trained theologians could navigate the doctrinal subtleties that had divided the churches. But Florovsky knew that this wasn't enough to overcome the divisions. Church life in general, and the ecumenical movement especially, needed a 'band of spiritual firebrands'. Indeed, this was his main point in the opening editorial he wrote for the first issue of the first academic journal of Orthodox theology in North America.

¹⁴ See his influential article, 'The Limits of the Church,' *Church Quarterly Review* (1933), <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/crete-01-e.html>.

¹⁵ 'The Need for Patience,' *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Vol 13 in the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Richard Haugh, ed.), Belmont, Ma.: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989, 21. Originally appeared in *Christendom*, II, No. 4 (1937), pp 556-559.

John A. Jillions

We need today more than ever before, precisely a ‘band of spiritual firebrands’ who can inflame minds and hearts with the fire of a loving knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. God calls us, in our generation, to be his witnesses and messengers. How can men believe if they do not hear the quickening Word? Even if we are men of unclean lips, let us respond to the Divine call, and the fire of the Spirit will cleanse us for the ministry of the Word.¹⁶

The Prophetic Model: Bulgakov, Afanasiev, Kartashev, Zernov

As Florovsky’s approach to ecumenism was developing and becoming the most widely accepted Orthodox model, there were a number of other voices that suggested a different way of looking at the issues, especially as the heady expectations of swift progress in theological dialogue began to wane. Florovsky had put all his hopes in the prophetic calling of theologians, but to others, the meager results called for a reexamination of the model, and called into question its excessive dependency on academic dialogue. He had rejected mere ecclesiastical diplomacy, but wasn’t he giving too much weight to academic negotiation? This was more properly scribal and not prophetic. Were the past and Tradition to dominate discussions? What role was being given to prayer and the action of the Holy Spirit? And what about the experience of Christian fellowship, the sense of unity in Christ through common prayer and collaboration that many were recognizing as a critical part of the ecumenical movement? Was there no possibility of anything new? Surely God was capable of refashioning the broken clay pieces of His Church in unexpected ways, and not only through patient dialogue?

Chief among these alternative voices was Fr Sergius Bulgakov, Florovsky’s older colleague. Three other important contributors to this stream also deserve attention here: Anton Kartashev, Nicholas Afanasiev and Nicholas Zernov.

Sergius Bulgakov (1877-1944)

Fr Sergius Bulgakov was a leading Orthodox representative in the emerging Ecumenical Movement and was a vigorous participant at the Faith and Order conferences at Lausanne (1927) and Edinburgh (1937). But he also became controversial for pushing the boundaries of ecumenism by floating a proposal in 1934 for partial intercommunion among members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. His basic argument was that the Anglican and Orthodox members of this fellowship consciously shared a common Nicene faith, and should therefore—as a vanguard of future full communion between the churches—be able, with episcopal approval, to share communion. Indeed, he argued that the certainty of this

¹⁶ SVSQ 1:1 (1952), 5.

common faith among Fellowship members was much greater than might be found in any congregation of either church, since one could never be sure what exactly any individual Orthodox or Anglican might actually believe about Christian dogma. And yet in their own congregations this did not prevent everyone from sharing communion. *A fortiori*, when the common faith of Fellowship members could be attested, shouldn't they be able to share communion? At the time this was deemed too radical by all sides and the idea was rejected.¹⁷

This proposal should not be taken as evidence that Bulgakov held other than a traditional Orthodox position on ecclesiology. In his 1932 book *The Orthodox Church*¹⁸ he underlines at several points the standard view that the Orthodox Church is the fullness of the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. For example, in his chapter on 'Orthodoxy and Other Christian Confessions' he writes:

Note at once that the Orthodox Church is aware that she is the true Church, possessing the plenitude and purity of the truth of the Holy Spirit. Hence proceeds the attitude of the Orthodox Church toward other confessions, separated, immediately or not, from the unity of the Church; it can desire but one thing, that is to make Orthodox the entire Christian world, so that all confessions, may be grounded in universal Orthodoxy. This is not a spirit of proselytism or imperialism; it is the inherent logic of the situation, for the truth is one and cannot be measured by half truths. Neither is it a mark of pride, for the guardianship of the truth is entrusted to a recipient, not because of its merits, but by election, and the history of the chosen people, as well as that of Orthodoxy, shows that the guardians of the truth may be little worthy of their calling. But truth is inflexible and inexorable, and will not suffer compromise...

Only an agreement between the Churches, founded on the maximum of their common inheritance, can lead the Christian world to real union. This maximum is Orthodoxy.¹⁹

Bulgakov was quite serious that the goal is to 'make Orthodox the entire Christian world,' but he also wanted to be realistic. Given the present state of the Orthodox Church he did not envision a mass conversion of the churches and their incorporation into existing Orthodox bodies. Instead, in keeping with the Orthodox pattern of national autocephalous churches in communion with each other, he could foresee that the various Christian churches would preserve their historical character, but would gradually become increasingly Orthodox in doctrine and life

¹⁷ See Brandon Anastassy Gallaher, 'Bulgakov's Ecumenical Thought,' *Sobornost* 24:1-2, 2002.

¹⁸ *The Orthodox Church* (Trans. Revised by Lydia Kesich), Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press [1932] 1988.

¹⁹ *The Orthodox Church*, 187, 188.

John A. Jillions

and become autocephalous churches in their own right, in communion with the Orthodox.

The only solution would be the following: these communities, while preserving intact their historical, national and local characters, would draw near to Orthodox doctrine and life and would become capable of joining forces in the unity of the ecumenical Church, as autonomous or autocephalous churches. Such an exterior reunion presupposes, of course, a corresponding interior movement. But such a movement is not impossible, for all ecclesiastical communities, even those whose road is farthest from that of the Orthodox Church, preserve a considerable part of the universal tradition, and, as a result of this, share in Orthodoxy. They all have 'a grain' of Orthodoxy.²⁰

Bulgakov did not accept the standard Orthodox view that full doctrinal agreement necessarily had to precede Eucharistic communion. For Bulgakov, ecumenical discussions have been important, but on their own they cannot give the breakthrough that will resolve the antithesis. This God alone can do this through a new inspiration. 'The Spirit of God actually transcends it through a new kind of synthesis that is brought about, not by means of a new agreement or compromise, but by a new inspiration.'²¹ The way to this new inspiration must be a common spiritual life: common prayer, common devotion to the Word of God and above all common participation in the sacraments.

He argues that this is not so radical as might appear at first, because there is already a wide swath of united sacramental life. Churches which have preserved a priesthood have also preserved true sacramental life, despite whatever dogmatic differences have arisen in the course of history. So, while divided doctrinally, there is still mutual recognition that their faithful are truly participating in Christ through the sacraments.

Churches that have preserved their priesthood, although they happen to be separated, are not actually divided in their sacramental life. Strictly speaking, a reunion of the Church is not even necessary here, although generally this is hardly realized... The churches that have preserved such a unity in sacraments are now divided canonically in the sense of jurisdiction, and dogmatically, through a whole range of differences; but these are powerless to destroy the efficacy of the sacraments.²²

In other words, if we can agree that we are communing in the same Christ—albeit in different churches—that should be a huge factor in overcoming our re-

²⁰ *The Orthodox Church*, 188.

²¹ 'By Jacob's Well,' 57.

²² 'By Jacob's Well,' 64.

maining differences. This leads him to make a proposal that he admits goes against the stream of contemporary ecumenical practice (that was 1933, though today this proposal remains radical even for many Orthodox ecumenists). Why can't the weight of our mutually recognized participation in sacramental communion with Christ overcome the weight of our dogmatic differences?

What is required for a complete reunion, and where do we start? The predominant formula runs: sacramental fellowship must be preceded by a preliminary dogmatic agreement. But is this axiom so indisputable as it appears? Here on one scale of the balance we have a difference in certain Christian dogmas and theological opinions, and an estrangement that has been formed through centuries; on the other we have the unity of sacramental life. May it not be that a unity in the sacrament will be the only way toward overcoming this difference? Why should we not seek to surmount a heresy in teaching through superseding a heresy of life, such as division? May it not be that Christians sin now by not heeding the common Eucharistic call? And, if this is so, then for Orthodoxy and Rome there still remains a way to their reunion on the basis of a fellowship in sacraments.²³

Bulgakov insists that this is no shortcut to avoid dogmatic divisions. On the contrary, it is an eminently practical way to address them directly and to overcome them through mutual love and shared life. It is time to reexamine this approach because it is clear that the 'tournaments of theologians' have proved incapable of erasing the divisions, and have indeed reinforced them.

[The] way toward the reunion of East and West does not lie through tournaments between theologians of the East and West, but through a reunion before the altar. The priesthood of the East and the West must realize itself as one priesthood, celebrating the one Eucharist; if the minds of the priests could become aflame with this idea, all barriers would fall. For in response to this dogmatic unity will be achieved, or rather a mutual understanding of one another in our distinctive features. *In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*—'In what is necessary unity, in what is of lesser importance freedom, in all things, love.'²⁴

"The priesthood of the East and the West must realize itself as one priesthood, celebrating the one Eucharist." This is where Bulgakov's thinking on ecclesiology appears to have developed further as he grew older. He was less and less inclined to think of the Orthodox and the other Christian churches as separate. Instead, they were all part of a much larger, cosmic, divine whole, which for him was the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, the *Una Sancta*. When *The*

²³ 'By Jacob's Well,' 64. Elsewhere he speaks as well of the Anglicans, as in the proposal he made the next year (1934) for partial intercommunion in the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius.

²⁴ 'By Jacob's Well,' 65.

John A. Jillions

Bride of the Lamb (Nevesta Agntsa) was published posthumously in 1945 he was much more bold in speaking about the ecumenical movement's aim as making visible, sacramental and institutional the unity that already exists mystically and invisibly among Christians. He accepts that the historical development of the Orthodox Church has been guided by the Spirit of God. But the precise forms it has taken—indeed *all* forms of historical ecclesiastical existence—are contingent and temporary, because no single form can encompass the fullness of divine life in Christ.

Therefore, the Church as a society, an institution, an organization, the 'visible' or empirical Church, does not wholly coincide with the Church as Divine-humanity, with its noumenal depth, although the empirical is connected with, based on, and permeated by the Church as Divine-humanity... The visible has outer limits, belongs in history, but within these limits the "invisible," noumenal being is revealed.²⁵

This cosmic, invisible, noumenal dimension is what makes the Church "the all-sacrament".

And this all-sacrament, which does not have any limits, is accomplished in the world and in humanity upon the whole world and upon all of humanity, always, now and forever.... The Church is the mystery of the world, which is manifested as sacrament.²⁶

If the Spirit's life in the world is seen as the life of the Church, in this invisible, noumenal sense, then its limits are boundless. "The Spirit breathes here unfettered by the limits of the ecclesiastical organization. A depth of the Church that remains beyond these limits operates here; the partitions of the historical Church do not reach heaven."²⁷ For Bulgakov, this has direct consequences for ecumenical understanding. "This lays the foundation for the special being of the Church as an ecclesial reality that is not subject to or regulated by hierarchy. This is the *Una Sancta*, the ever-continuing Incarnation and the ever-continuing Pentecost, the effective presence of God in the world and in humanity. This is the Divine Sophia: the 'invisible' Church (that is, the Church that transcends direct knowledge) whose action, nevertheless is manifested visibly as a mystery that is in the process of being revealed."²⁸

This intuition of already being invisibly united in Christ is what draws Christians together in the effort to secure the visible unity of the churches, "to overcome

²⁵ Sergius Bulgakov, (Boris Jakim, tr.), *The Bride of the Lamb*, Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2002, 271.

²⁶ *Bride*, 273.

²⁷ *Bride*, 273.

²⁸ *Bride*, 292.

in the confessions the spirit of confessionalism that supplants the universal unity with ecclesiastical provincialism.”²⁹

Bulgakov realizes this understanding of the Church is a huge challenge to those who are tied too closely to hierarchical forms of church life inherited from the past. “It is obvious that there is no place for this idea in the notion of a Church that consists solely of hierarchical organizations, which can be divided and disputed among one another concerning their reality or their substance.” But these divisions, he says, are only of “relative” and “pragmatic” significance. The “supra-empirical, noumenal *unity* of the Church”, which already exists, calls the churches to look beyond their earthly divisions and work toward “sacramental-hierarchical unification.” Indeed, the Church in this widest, invisible sense encompasses far more than the Christian churches, says Bulgakov. Christ, through the Spirit of God, is present everywhere and is known everywhere. Only on this basis can He judge “all the nations” (Mt 25:32). In judging all the peoples of the world, “He will witness to His own presence, that is their participation in the Body of Christ.”

Here the humankind that communes with Christ cannot fit within the limits of even all the Christian confessions put together. Nor can such other New Testament figures of the Church as the woman clothed in the sun, the bride, and the body of Christ be encompassed within the limits of the “confessions.” Rather, they refer to the *Una Sancta*.³⁰

Fr Nicolas Afanasiev (1893-1966)

Afanasiev’s name is most associated with Eucharistic ecclesiology. He taught canon law at St Sergius Institute in Paris and zealously defended Bulgakov’s freedom of theological inquiry. Very active ecumenically, he was an official observer at Vatican II and was seated next to Pope Paul VI, on Dec 8, 1965 for the closing of the Council.³¹

In his essay *Una Sancta*,³² Afanasiev proposed a model of autonomous churches, each gathered around a bishop and self-organized, who share a unity that is not imposed, but emerges from mutual recognition or ‘reception’ of the

²⁹ *Bride*, 293.

³⁰ *Bride*, 293.

³¹ See ‘Nicolas Afanasiev: Explorer of the Eucharist, the Church and Life in Them,’ ch. 8 in Plekon, *Living Icons, op. cit.; The Church of the Holy Spirit* (Michael Plekon ed., Vitaly Permiakov, tr.), University of Notre Dame, 2007. Russian edition: *Tserkov’ Dukha Sviatago* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1971). French edition: *L’Eglise du Saint Esprit* (Marianne Drobot, tr.), Paris: Cerf, 1977.

³² Nicholas Afanasiev, ‘Una Sancta,’ in Michael Plekon, *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in our Time: Readings from the Eastern Church*, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp 3-30. First published in *Irénikon* 36 (1963):436-75. Plekon’s collection also includes two other important articles by Afanasiev: ‘The Church’s Canons: Changeable or Unchangeable?’ origi-

John A. Jillions

faith and life of the others. With this model he accepts that it is possible to have disagreements and still be in communion. But this is not new, because ‘history knows no period in which there was absolute dogmatic harmony’³³. Similarly, it is also possible to have a break in communion, but still recognize that this is a break *within* the One church. A break in communion therefore ‘does not involve the deepest part of ecclesial life’. All who continue to participate in the Eucharist, in both churches, are still partaking of one Eucharist, since there can only be one Eucharist eternally offered in Christ. ‘There are not different Eucharists.’³⁴

What happened in 1054 was a break in communion, therefore, but not a break in ecclesial unity. The Orthodox and Catholics remained as part of the one Church of Christ. The sacraments of each remain of the Church, but they are not received by the other. Unfortunately, the polemics after 1054 were used to legitimate the separation rather than to heal it. This, in Afanasiev’s view, is proof that the break in communion was not a pastoral decision inspired by devotion to the will of God and motivated by desire for ultimate healing. Instead, it was on both sides ‘the sinful will of human beings acting out of consideration of ecclesiastical politics.’³⁵ It is no surprise that the following centuries of increasing mutual isolation and acrimony that festered from this lack of love produced further deformities in both churches. The fruit of this separation was not healing, but ‘isolation of one church from the other and the impoverishment, and later the total end to the bonds of Love that ought to unite the churches.’³⁶ Some churches lost their doctrinal truth, but others lost the truth of love. The reunion of the churches in love will lead to their reunion in dogma (exactly the reverse of the current Orthodox position).

Despite post-1054 divergences, Afanasiev believes that an effort in love could produce renewed communion between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. But this would mean accepting each other *as is*, without placing demands on the other. Doctrinal disagreements (over papal authority for instance) would remain for the time being, and debate would continue, but these disagreements, as in the ancient church, would cease to be church dividing. Afanasiev recognized the difficulties this poses, but everything should be secondary to following the commandment of love. ‘In the face of the intransigence in which we live, Love ought to be the strongest feeling, for only love can conquer such hardness of heart’.³⁷

nally published in *Zhivoye Predaniye* (1937; SVSQ 11:2, 1969); ‘The Eucharist: The Principal Link Between the Catholics and the Orthodox’, *Irenikon* (1965:3), 337-39.

³³ ‘Una Sancta,’ 28.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 25.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 27.

Anton Kartashev (1875-1960)

A graduate of the St Petersburg Theological Academy, he was appointed minister of religious affairs in Alexander Kerensky's Provisional Government and participated in the 1917-18 All Russian Church Council. Arrested in 1917 by the Bolsheviks he managed to leave Russia in 1919 and settled in Paris, where he continued to be active in Russian émigré politics as well as in ecumenical work, particularly with the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. He taught church history at St Sergius Institute (1925-1960) and published a two volume *History of the Russian Church* in 1959.³⁸

Kartashev believed that the ecumenical way forward begins with preparing the people in our churches to be conscious of their mystical unity with other Christians 'within the fold of the one, invisible and only universal Church of Christ.'³⁹

Like Bulgakov and Afanasiev, he was convinced that it is possible to restore communion without first having full doctrinal agreement. The Eucharist is a sacrament of unity, not of division, and we have not put enough trust in God's action in the Eucharist. Instead we have looked to the slow, diplomatic, evolutionary and all-too human route of dialogues to get us across the ecumenical chasm. However, 'no tragedy has even been resolved along evolutionary paths.'⁴⁰ Indeed, churches in dialogue resist absorption and loss of identity and will therefore find ways to forever prevent this. Thus, argues Kartashev, the only way out of this dead end must be entirely different. What is needed is a creative act of spontaneous and prophetic 'anarchy' that begins in some tiny corner of the church and spreads in a 'molecular' process from one parish, diocese and church to others. This creative way forward is not imposed on those who resist, but spreads gradually and organically. He cites Vladimir Soloviev's decision to receive communion from an Eastern Catholic priest and before his death from an Orthodox priest as the type of anarchic act that in 'our day' (1934) might be dared.

Kartashev admits that Eucharistic communion requires a measure of common faith, but for him the content of that faith is defined by the Divine Liturgy: can a given person accept the faith implied in sharing the liturgy? If so, then communion should be possible. This still presents significant stumbling blocks, especially for many Protestants. But if communion can be shared once again, then Kartashev is convinced that the discussions and debates over many other areas of faith and practice will take on a completely different character in the light of re-

³⁸ See Plekon, 'Anton Kartashev,' in *Tradition Alive*, 203-220. Includes two important essays on ecumenism: 'The Paths Toward Reunion of the Churches (1934),' and 'Intercommunion and Dogmatic Agreement (1935).'

³⁹ *Tradition Alive*, 207.

⁴⁰ *Tradition Alive*, 207.

John A. Jillions

newed communion. This is not a concession to liberalism, he argues, but eminent good sense, a recognition that restoring trust and unity after so many centuries of suspicion and alienation will be a gradual pastoral process. So much in church life is about process, about incomplete people deepening their life in Christ, so why shouldn't this be the case with restoration of communion? He believes that reunion on this minimal basis will lead to 'mutual enrichment', a deepening of the faith of others, a growing into the maximalism of Orthodox fullness. In arguing for such a process that takes time to restore full unity, Kartashev calls on evidence from the past. 'The church from the beginning, in spite of the declared unity of its dogmatic faith, actually combined and embraced within itself different types of understanding and spiritual experience of the faith.'⁴¹ He admits that this is not yet perfect unity, but starting with a realistic federation of churches would give a good foundation to build upon. To put the maximal demands at the very start, as the Orthodox have so far insisted, is a subtle way of ensuring that union will never occur, because it is unrealizable and therefore a deliberate evasion of unity.⁴²

Instead, he challenges, why not encourage some ecumenical heroism? He can only imagine the possibilities if a few bishops from two separated churches could be found to bless such steps.

If groups of people of two Churches were to dedicate themselves to a heroic feat and so complete church communion in the sacraments, having first agreed as to the identity of their faith, the only thing they would lack for their work so that it could be recognized as fully of the Church and Catholic, would be the consent and blessing of the respective bishops from both sides. If such bishops were to be found, then the line separating the two churches would be broken, a kernel of unity would be formed, one which might attract others to itself.⁴³

Nicholas Zernov (1898-1980)

After leaving Russia in 1921 Zernov studied theology in Belgrade where Nicholas Afanasiev, Vasili Zenkovsky, Kyprian Kern and other Russian refugees of the future Paris School were his classmates and together discovered the work of Vladimir Solovyev and Sergius Bulgakov. Zernov became a founder of the Russian Student Christian Movement. On a scholarship from the Anglican Church he studied at Oxford and received his D Phil in 1932 for a dissertation on 'The Unity of the Church and the Re-union of the Churches.' After a brief period in Paris he returned to England and eventually was named first Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Studies at Oxford. He was active ecumenically and was one

⁴¹ *Tradition Alive*, 217.

⁴² *Tradition Alive*, 218.

⁴³ Anton Kartashev, *Sobornost* Dec 1934, 12, in Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter*, 127.

of the founders of the fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. He documented the flowering of Orthodox theology in pre-Revolutionary Russia and Paris and beyond in *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton & Longman 1963). Two of his books are directly related to the ecumenical debate: *The Reintegration of the Church: A Study in Intercommunion* (1952) and *Orthodox Encounter: The Christian East and the Ecumenical Movement* (1961).

Zernov proposed the most comprehensive Orthodox plan for Christian reunion. By the late 1950's, like many early participants in the ecumenical movement, he had become disappointed by the slow progress and wondered if there wasn't something fundamentally wrong with the dialogue approach.

Building on the insights of Bulgakov and others, Zernov advocated a prophetic approach that would submit the ecumenical impasses to 'Divine arbitration'. By this he meant permitting ecumenical Christians to have communion together and asking God to unite them into one mind. The most hopeful place to begin this experiment, he argued, is in relations between Orthodox and Catholics.

It is obvious that under current conditions neither side is able to appreciate the viewpoint of the other, and no amount of theological discussion can bring them closer together. The only solution of this conflict is to submit it to Divine arbitration by allowing those Christians who are working for reunion to enter into communion with one another. By sanctioning this step for those who are willing to undertake it, the Church authorities on both sides would manifest their willingness to present their age-long disputes to God's judgment and would express their trust in the power of the Divine wisdom to illuminate the hearts and minds of the divided Christians and to guide them towards the solution of unresolved oppositions in their teaching and discipline.⁴⁴

Zernov points out that 'It is a difficult decision to make for both sides, so convinced are they of the truth of their own position and the errors of their opponents'. And he admits that such a sanction 'is bound to raise strong protests in some quarters'. But once the churches have become tired of the stalemate Zernov hoped that his proposal might 'elicit warm support from those Eastern and Western Christians who believe that with God's help the seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the Orthodox and Roman versions of Catholicity can be solved.'⁴⁵

Such a movement could eventually embrace other churches as well. 'The hope of reintegration rests not so much on the return to some arbitrarily chosen point in the past, but on a generous forward movement inspired by confidence

⁴⁴ Nicholas Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter: The Christian East and the Ecumenical Movement*, London: James Clarke, 1961, 176.

⁴⁵ Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter*, 177.

John A. Jillions

in the guiding and healing power of the Holy Spirit which makes all things new.⁴⁶

He advocates the same process with Anglicans, because here too he is skeptical that theological discussions alone, however useful, 'can bring these two churches into organic unity.'

A properly sanctioned intercommunion between those Anglicans and Orthodox who reciprocate doctrinal agreement would seem to be here, as in the case of Rome, the only constructive answer to the present predicament. Intercommunion might be able to illuminate from a new angle those stumbling blocks which at present obstruct the road to reconciliation.⁴⁷

The World Council of Churches could also take this as its new point of departure instead of leaving progress in unity up to theological debate.

There is no more glaring example of the present predicament of the Ecumenical Movement than the place in it of Holy Communion. Instead of being the source of oneness, it is kept in the background as a cause of contention. The leaders of the World Council hope to restore unity by their own efforts; trusting in the common sense and good will of their members whilst the contesting confessions rely upon the learning and eloquence of their authorized spokesmen.⁴⁸

He knows that the conventional view is that there can be shared communion only with complete agreement in faith and in episcopacy, or to put it bluntly 'the only way of reconciliation open to lapsed Christians is submission to the true Church.' But there must be another way through the transforming power of the Eucharist. Assuming that complete intercommunion between all churches is still unrealistic, as a first step he would open the doors of communion in the Orthodox Church.

Christians who profess the Orthodox faith, but are members of the heterodox Churches, could be strengthened in their desire for reconciliation by being admitted as communicants to the Orthodox Eucharist without being separated from their own Churches. Such an action might accelerate the process of the reintegration of the Church, and the same results are likely to be achieved if some Orthodox were authorized by their bishops to participate in the communion services of those separated confessions which seek unity with their Mother Church.⁴⁹

Zernov is afraid that the movement toward Christian unity had stagnated and that Christians have become so accustomed to their divisions that they don't see what impact this has on their mission in an increasingly hostile or skeptical world for whom such divisions are a sure sign of Christianity's pettiness and parochial-

⁴⁶ Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter*, 174.

⁴⁷ Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter*, 178.

⁴⁸ Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter*, 125.

⁴⁹ Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter*, 187.

ism. The various Christian churches need each others' gifts and strengths, and to accomplish this, it's time for the Church to restore its true catholicity and become once again 'a universal Eucharistic fellowship.'

The future Christian civilization depends on the revival of the church, which once more must become a universal Eucharistic fellowship consisting of people who are drawn to the encounter with the living God. Christians of east and west need each other. They are complementary in their achievements and limitations.⁵⁰

Contemporary Christians are so accustomed to identifying the Church with a single confessional expression that they are reluctant to participate in a richer and more varied sacramental life; yet the Church needs the discipline and universality of Rome, the depth and richness of Orthodox worship, the ecumenical generosity of the Anglicans, the warm fellowship of the Methodists and the sense of personal responsibility and freedom of other Protestants. Christians as a whole no longer understand the true catholicity of the Church.⁵¹

Conclusion

In his family memoirs, Zernov ends the long account with a reflection on the church and ecumenical commitments that have woven through the decades of his life. Throughout, it is clear what deep love he has for the Orthodox Church and all that it has given him through years of revolution, war and exile. Indeed, its profound spiritual life flowered most in times of stress and persecution. Miraculous icons, extraordinary pastors and preachers, the intelligentsia returning to faith. Even so, Zernov is not convinced that the Orthodox tradition alone, even at its best, is sufficient to encompass the full universality of the Christian church. The churches need each other.

In the days of my youth, when I first found the church, I was impatient in my zeal for the truth. I was convinced that only we, the Orthodox, and the Russians in particular, had preserved the authentic apostolic tradition and had the fullness of the sacraments. I wanted to save everyone else by bringing them into Orthodoxy. But gradually I became convinced that we don't have a monopoly on truth.

My acquaintance with the non-Orthodox gave me the possibility of meeting a stream of leading western Christians—deeply thoughtful people with sacrificial hearts and holiness of life. They placed before me the mystery of the church's division. I came to be convinced that it was no accident that the Providence of God allowed the members of the Church to lose their agreement. Right now, throughout the world the ecumenical movement has begun to reunite the broken pieces of

⁵⁰ Nicholas Zernov, 'The Russian Orthodox diaspora and its effect on the west,' in Derek Baker (Ed.), *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976, 322.

⁵¹ Nicholas Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter*, 168.

John A. Jillions

the Church. This is a difficult but necessary schooling to lead us all to a fuller understanding of truth than was accessible to us as divided Christians on our own.⁵²

Zernov's successor as Spalding Lecturer at Oxford was Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia. He was at the Lambeth Conference in 2008 as an observer representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate and was interviewed about the controversial topics then being addressed. He remarked that when facing decisions on any new issue the Church must be attentive to keeping a balance between 'catholic consensus' and 'prophetic action'. If the Orthodox have stressed consensus in the past, they must nevertheless remain open to the possibility of Spirit-inspired change coming from the most unexpected places.

I've spoken about the need for catholic consensus on issues like the ordination of women or the blessing of homosexual relations. These are departures from Church order and from accepted moral teaching of major importance, and therefore there ought to be some consensus not just within the Anglican Communion but with the other Churches, especially those that preserve the historic apostolic faith and order, the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox. That is one side of the matter, the need for consensus.

But then we might also say, should there not also be the possibility for a prophetic action? Will you ever have change unless some people are willing to stand up and say, this is what we ought to be doing? And even if their testimony is highly controversial, who will nonetheless stand by their position. It could be argued that perhaps the Anglican Communion was guided by the Holy Spirit to lead other Christians into new paths. Now I can see that as a valid argument and I want to balance that against the point that we need to act with catholic consensus.

How can we do both these things together - preserve catholic consensus, and yet allow grace for freedom in the Holy Spirit? Christ did not tell us that nothing should ever be done for the first time. The whole witness of the early Church points in a different direction. So how do you balance these two things - the need for consensus with the need for freedom in the Spirit, the need for loyalty to holy tradition, with the need to be open to new initiatives?⁵³

'Christ did not tell us that nothing should ever be done for the first time.'

Zernov spent most of his life in Europe, but his highest hopes for Christian unity were based on what he saw in North America. He was impressed by its

⁵² Nicholas and Militsa Zernov (Eds.), *Za Rubezhom: Belgrad, Parizh, Oksford:; Chronika cem'i Zernovykh* [Abroad: Belgrade-Paris-Oxford (a Chronicle of the Zernov family)], Paris: YMCA press, 1973,

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⁵³ Fr. George Westhaver, 'LAMBETH: Interview with the Most Rev. Kallistos Ware, Archbishop of Gt. Britain for the Ecumenical Patriarchate,' [sic] <http://www.prayerbookatlambeth.org/interviews/2008/7/28/an-interview-with-the-most-revd-kallistos-ware-archbishop-of.html>.

sense of initiative, risk-taking, its pluralism and its ability to integrate hierarchy with commitment to openness, freedom, fairness and democracy. These made North America precisely the right soil for the growth of Christian unity. Perhaps he was too romantic on this point and underestimated the conservative dimension in North American life that reinforces all manner of fundamentalisms. But the idea that North America may be a unique laboratory for the working out of Christianity's ecclesial future also finds echoes today. Metropolitan Phillip (Saliba) of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America recently expressed a similar confidence at the Orthodox Episcopal Assembly in New York City:

The Mother Churches must realize that Orthodoxy in America is the best gift to the world. And instead of being crushed by the burdens of the past, let us formulate a clear vision for the future. Thomas Jefferson, one of the fathers of our American revolution, once said: "I love the visions of the future rather than the dreams of the past." (Metropolitan Phillip, May 26, 2010)

My primary aim in this paper has been to show that there is as yet no single, fully agreed upon Orthodox approach to the reality of Christian diversity and division. It is my hope that as the Orthodox work together to "begin developing a common concept of Ecumenical studies for the Orthodox theological institutions," that these different Orthodox approaches will be considered and debated in theological schools, clergy gatherings and conferences of students and lay people as part of the much larger project of discerning together in the 21st century "what the Spirit is saying to the Churches" (Rev 2:7).

Will the "visions of the future" include a new and more inclusive way of thinking about the Church and about our brothers and sisters, Christians in other churches and people everywhere who in some way are responding to the Logos, "the true light who enlightens every human being" (John 1:9)? Perhaps Bulgakov and the other 'prophets' presented here will prove to be as out of step with the mainstream Orthodox ecumenical consensus today as they were in the 20th century. But we should at least consider the possibility that these voices have something prophetic to tell us from beyond the grave.⁵⁴ And perhaps, like Israel in Jeremiah's famous image of the potter, we should be prepared to consider the possibility that God is refashioning the form of the church, for a future that we cannot yet begin to imagine. "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? says the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."

⁵⁴ For a brief general introduction to Orthodoxy and ecumenism see 'Orthodox Christianity in the West: the Ecumenical Challenge,' in Mary Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Orthodox Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 276-291. Also includes suggestions for further reading.