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An Orthodox Understanding of Ecumenical Dialogue: Missiology and Ecclesiology in the Thought of Fr. George Florovsky

Abstract: Father George Florovsky based his theological thought on the return of the Orthodox Christian theology to its sources — the Patristic tradition. His position is ecclesiological in that theology should be defined by the Church tradition. He created and developed his understanding of Orthodox Christian missiology on the same basis. Thus, Fr. Florovsky's missiology springs from his ecclesiological theology. In his Christocentric ecclesiology we find theological elements, which create motives and aims for missiology. These elements drive as their practical implementation through one new missionary method — dialogue. For this reason, Fr. Florovsky saw and understood the participation of the Orthodox Church in the interreligious dialogue as a new possibility to witness and present Patristic Tradition, which is, despite being the source of Christian theology, mostly forgotten or rejected by many Christian denominations in the contemporary time.

Fr. Florovsky's missiology includes two aspects: the practical or external and the theological or internal. The practical aspect of his missiology includes two methods: traditional and modern. Developing the modern method of missionary work, Fr. Florovsky stayed loyal to the Orthodox Patristic Tradition and at the same time, offered the Orthodox Church the possibility to fulfill one of her primary duties — to witness the Lord's word in the modern time.

This year the Eastern Orthodox Church commemorates the forty year anniversary of Father George Florovsky's death.¹ He was one of the most influential modern Orthodox theologians.² As he was born and educated in Russia, and lived and served in the West, Father George Florovsky³ could incorporate both Eastern and Western viewpoints and

¹ In this paper I will use the word Father any time I mention George Florovsky in order to follow traditional Orthodox way of showing respect for the priestly ranks. Since, Father Florovsky was an archpriest, according to the Orthodox tradition his name should be preceded by the word Father, which indicates his priesthood.

² Saint Serge's Institute for the Orthodox Christian Studies in Paris, the theological school where Father George Florovsky mostly worked until his arrival in America in 1948, organized on the fortieth anniversary of the repose of Father Florovsky the international conference dedicated to the works and life of this important Orthodox Scholar, on 27–28. November 2009. For more information about the conference and the Orthodox theological Institute in Paris visit the Institute's web site: http://www.saint-serge.net/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=68 (accessed December 9, 2009)

³ Since the paper is focused on specific aspects of his theological work I will not be able to observe the whole life and work of Father Florovsky. However, because of his great influence and importance for the modern Orthodox theology, I would like to introduce to readers some relevant data from Father Florovsky's rich biography. Father George Florovsky was born near Odessa, in today's Ukraine in 1893. He went to the classical gymnasium in Odessa winning the customary testimonium matuitatis in 1911 with distinction in history and a golden medal. Then he went to the University of Odessa where he studied history and philology. During his undergraduate studies he also was interested in mathematics, chemistry, and psychology. After his undergraduate studies, which he completed in 1916 he continued his education, being more and more interested in theology. In 1919 he obtained his master degree then called Philosophiae Magister. His teaching career began during the Imperial Russia period at the same university as a docent in the field of philosophy. In 1920 he left his homeland and first settled in Sofia, Bulgaria where he was involved in a small Russian academic circle. In 1921 he went to Prague and joined to the Russian University center where he taught philosophy of law. In 1925 Russian intellectual emigres opened the first theological school outside of Russia in Paris, named Saint Serge Ort-

perceptions in his work. Thus, he was able to present to modern people, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, his inherited Orthodox faith and beliefs in an intellectually understandable and academic way.

In order to present the richness of Orthodoxy to modern people, Father Florovsky based his entire work⁴ on the ideas of returning Orthodoxy to its sources — the Church fathers — and liberating Orthodoxy from any heterodox elements and influences that had been integrated in Eastern Christianity for centuries making Orthodoxy, as Father Florovsky liked to say, “a captive of the Western theology.”⁵ This theological view, as Father Alexander Schmemmann points out, moves Father Florovsky back to Hellenism as the mode in which to present the Orthodox position toward modern challenges, because the permanent and eternal values of the Orthodox theological mindset are based on Hellenic categories and thus must go through a strict school of Christian Hellenism.⁶

On this theological base, Father Florovsky also builds his understanding of mission and its practical implementation. In the patristically-based ecclesiological teaching of Father Florovsky, I find the sources of his theological understanding of the motives and ultimate goals of mission, which may be practically implemented through a

hodox Theological Institute. A young scholar, Father Florovsky moved to Paris in 1926 in order to take a professorial position at the school, teaching patristics and systematic theology. Later on, in 1932 Father Florovsky was ordained in the holy priesthood in Paris. His Paris career was interrupted by the World War II when he went to Yugoslavia where he spent most of the war years. After the war he returned to France, where he stayed until 1948. At that time he asked to come to St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary in New York to teach dogmatics and patristics. Besides teaching in the seminary, Father Florovsky held lectures at Columbia University between 1950–1955, at Union Theological Seminary between 1951–1955, and at Boston University 1954/1955. Also in 1955 he started to teach at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological School in Brookline, Massachusetts. The next year he started to teach at Harvard Divinity School. In 1964 he was retired from Harvard and at the age of seventy as a professor emeritus, Father Florovsky took a new position as visiting professor at Princeton University where he taught history and slavic studies. Father Florovsky passed away in Princeton in 1979 in the age of eighty-six. About the life and work of Father Florovsky read Andrew Blane, *George Florovsky, Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman*. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993. George Huntston Williams, “George Vasilievich Florovsky: His American Career (1948–1965),” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 11 (1965): 1–107.

⁴ In 1989 the final and fourteenth volume of the collected works of Father George Florovsky in English was published by Buchervertriebsanstalt in Vaduz, Liechtenstein. The other publisher of Father Florovsky's collected works in English is Nordland Publishing Company in Belmont Massachusetts. The printing of all fourteen volumes had been done in 1989 as well. The collected works published by both companies are: 1. Bible, Church and Tradition; 2. An Eastern Orthodox View; 3. Christianity and Culture; 4. Creation and Redemption; 5. Aspects of Church History; 6. Ways of Russian Theology, Part One; 7. Ways of Russian Theology, Part Two; 8. The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century; 9. The Eastern Fathers of the Fifth Century; 9. The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century; 10. The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers; 11. Theology and Literature; 12. Philosophy: Philosophical Problems and Movements; 13. Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach; and 14. Ecumenism II: A Historical Approach.

⁵ See *Ways of Russian Theology*, Parts I and II (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1979).

⁶ See Alexander Schmemmann, “Russian Theology: 1920–1972, An Introductory Survey,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 16 (1972): 172–194. The author of one of the necrologues dedicated to Father George Florovsky, when writing about the idea of returning back to the fathers explicitly says: “Devoid of any temptation to submit a better interpretation of salvific truths of faith by means of presenting their essence and meaning in a new and original manner, he had but one aim: taking into account all positive elements in theological insights to rid them of distortions and obstacles that have accumulated through the centuries and to find the only correct way of solving all the problems of faith and life, as it shown by the Savior and begun in the Church He had founded by the Apostles and continued by their successors, the martyrs, the Holy Fathers, and the confessors, so had defended the Church of Christ against heresies.” One more interesting point about this necrologue is that it was published in the official journal of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1980, when the Communist regime still had a negative attitude toward him as a critic of the regime. On the other hand, because of Father Florovsky's great ecumenical involvement and world wide recognition, the regime could not ignore this mournful occurrence testifying their “desire” to participate in the ecumenical and pacifical movements and showing practical implementation of the “religious freedom” in the USSR. Anatoliy Vedernikov, Archpriest Professor George Florovsky (1893–1979) in Memoriam, *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 2 (1980): 55.

new missionary way — dialogue. Father Florovsky is known in the Orthodox Church as one of the pioneers who involved the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement and through it challenged Eastern Christianity to encounter other Christians and to present its rich Eastern Orthodox theological inheritance and lived experience to a Western audience.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding of this conception of ecumenical dialogue as for example a potential way of forced conversion or proselytism I have to emphasize that the Orthodox Christian perception of missionary work was founded on *martiria* — witnessing to Christ and the Orthodox faith by one's mind, words, and acts, avoiding any kind of force on a person's free acceptance or refusal of the Orthodox confession of the faith and the Orthodox way of life.⁷ However, this does not negate the fact that Father Florovsky saw the ecumenical movement as a new way to witness to and introduce Orthodox Christianity and its positions toward various problems that have been challenging modern people, especially in the West, since the period of the Enlightenment. The witnessing to Orthodoxy among other Christians at ecumenical meetings, according to the theological position of Father Florovsky, especially his ecclesiology, included the possible free acceptance of Orthodoxy. Thus, the interdenominational and interfaith dialogue as the new way of practical implementation of theological missionary goals, introduced by Father Florovsky as a pioneer among Orthodox theologians, connects his ecclesiology with his perception of ecumenism.

Father Florovsky's understanding of missiology has two aspects: practical or external and theological or internal. The practical or external aspects of his missiological perception include two ways of implementing missionary work. On the other hand, the theological or internal aspects of his missiology are based mostly on his Christocentric ecclesiology, which has been reconstructed and tied to the patristic sources through his strategy of returning to the Fathers of the Church.

The two ways of practical or external implementation of missionary work are the traditional one and the modern one. Both ways represent the practical fulfillment of missionary tasks given to the Church by Christ Himself. The idea of going back to the Fathers influenced his practical or external perception of missiology as well. In this way, Father Florovsky, reflecting on the historical missionary activities of the Russian Orthodox Church, emphasizes that a modern understanding of the practical implementation of missiology has to be based on traditional Orthodox missionary work. Thus, Father Florovsky says:

"It is not given to us to foresee the future or to make guesses with regard to the fate of the Christian Faith among the native tribes of Russia; but we can, and it is necessary that we should, look back, so as to understand and consider well the lessons of the past which bear on the words: "Whosoever shall do and teach them the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mat. 19).⁸

According to Father Florovsky, traditional Orthodox missionary work includes strategies and tactics that have been implemented since the first centuries of Christianity. The practical missionary model was inherited by the Russian Orthodox Church from the

⁷ The Greek term *martiria* indicates the Orthodox understanding of mission as witness until death. Also, in Orthodox missiology this term indicates witnessing that includes crucifixion of individual and collective egoism, as well as selfless love. See Anastasios Yannoulatos, "Emerging Perspectives on the Relationships of Christianity to People of Other Faith," *International Review of Mission* 77 (1988): 346.

⁸ George Florovsky, "Russian Missions: An Historical Sketch," in *Aspects of Church History*, vol. 4, (Belmont, MA: Nortland Publishing Company, 1975),

Eastern Roman Empire. As Father Florovsky writes, "it was from Byzantium that the Russian Church received the request of carrying on this missionary work and to this end it adapted Byzantine methods."⁹

One of the traditional missionary methods of the practical missiology that Father Florovsky mentions is the use of the vernacular in preaching and the translating of books. This Byzantine practical missionary method was used successfully by the Sainly brothers Cyril and Methodius, who evangelized the Slavic tribes in the 9th century.¹⁰ The same methods have been used by Russian missionaries through the centuries in various areas such as Siberia and the southern Russian lands, China, Japan and Alaska. For instance, St. Innocent (Veniaminov), who translated liturgical and Scriptural texts in the Aleut, Inuit and Tlingit languages.

Father Florovsky states that the second important method of practical missiology is the education and training of indigenous people for the priesthood. Also, he states that the Orthodox Church from the first centuries of Christianity has emphasized the importance of missionaries being immersed in a native culture, to know a particular people's language, history, and ways of living that lead to an understanding of their soul. Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church in Kazan in 1854 opened a special ecclesiastical seminary with a primary focus on missiology and missionary work where students learned, beside Orthodox theology of mission, native languages and native cultures.¹¹

Father Florovsky in his historical survey of the traditional practical missiological methods of the Russian Orthodox Church, notes one more important feature that is directly related to a missionary's personality. He observes that the most important aspect of missionary work is one's willingness to witness to Christ, to witness one's faith by one's life and acts. As Father Florovsky writes:

"Missionary work does not lend itself well to schemes of management and organization issued from the center. It is, above all, the work of pastoral creative power and inspiration. Therefore it depends much more upon the personality of the individuals who are the active workers than upon plans and programs, and that is why the history of a mission is bound up closely

⁹ Ibid., 140.

¹⁰ The Russian scholar S. A. Ivanov citing a primary source — The life of Saint Pankratios — enumerates the texts that were first translated into the Old-Slavonic language. In his list of sources, he writes that when Constantine the Philosopher (Saint Cyril) arrived to Moravia he had most of the texts for worship translated in order to instruct the Slavs about how to serve orthros (morning service), hours service, small compline service. Based on primary sources Ivanov concludes that, at that time, they also had translated the Psalter book, the Gospels, and Acts. Sergey A. Ivanov, "Vizantiskoe Missionarstvo: Možno li Zdelat iz "Varvara" Hristianina?" (Byzantine Missiology: Is it possible to create a Christian from a Barbarian?), (Moskva: Yaziki Slavyanskoy Kulturi, 2003), 316. More about the use of the vernacular in the practical aspect of Orthodox missiology see Anastasios Yannoulatos, "Orthodoxy and Mission," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 8 (1964): 139–148. Vasil T. Istavridis, "The Missionary Work of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Europe and Elsewhere based on the Principles of the Saints Cyril and Methodios, in *Aksum Thyateir*, ed. George Dragos (London: Thyateira House, 1985): 455–463. Alexander Veronis, "Orthodox Concepts of Evangelization and Mission, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (Spring, 1982): 44–57. Michael Oleksa, *Orthodox Alaska: A Theology of Mission* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), Remortel Van Michael and Chang Peter, ed. Saint Nikolai Kasatkin and the Orthodox Mission in Japan, A collection of Writings by an International Group of Scholars About St. Nikolai, his Disciples, and the Mission (California: Divine Ascent Press, 2003)

¹¹ George Florovsky, "Russian Missions: An Historical Sketch," in *Aspects of Church History*, 152. The Russian Orthodox Church in 1840 in Alaska opened a seminary in order to train indigenous Alaskan clergy. See Michael Oleksa, *Orthodox Alaska: A Theology of Mission* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), Mark Stokoe, Leonid Kishkovsky, *Orthodox Christians in North America 1794–1994* (Orthodox Publication Center, 1995). James Stamoolis writes about the successful work of the Japanese Orthodox Seminary, also established by the Russian Orthodox Church in the second half of the 19th century. See James J. Stamoolis, "The Historical Background; The East Asian Missions" in *Eastern Orthodox Mission Today* (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Pub., 1996), 39.

with names. Therefore, too, missionary work often progresses spasmodically and stops altogether at intervals.”¹²

This willingness to witness to Christ by one's life and acts bridges the gap between traditional practical or external aspects of missiology with modern ones. Father Florovsky lived in three different socio-political, cultural, even historical contexts, Russia, Western Europe and the United States.¹³ Precisely, these different socio-political and cultural contexts influenced Father Florovsky's missiological perception. After his departure from his homeland Father Florovsky found himself in a new, and for him foreign, Western European context. Also, the Orthodox Church, her theology¹⁴ and tradition were not well known in the West at that period.

Father Florovsky having in himself inherited the Orthodox missiological perception that he must witness to Christ by his mind, words, and acts opened himself toward non-Orthodox society and people. On the other hand, in the new context there was not any place for implementation of practical missionary strategies in the traditional ways, as there was in the cases of Siberia, Eastern Asia or Alaska. First of all, the West was already Christianized and had organized ecclesiological structures. Also, there was not any previously organized missionary work among non-Orthodox people in the West after the Russian Revolution in 1917. After the fall of royal Russia and the Czar's tragic death, the autocephalous Orthodox Churches all over the world lost their great protector and benefactor, and thus financial support and protection for organizing a mission were not available.

However, Father Florovsky along with many other Russian theologians and scholars as well as countless Russian refugees presented the Orthodox faith and tradition to their Western neighbors through the example of their own lives. In this way, they proved the claim of Father Florovsky that the predominant Orthodox practical missiological strategy is the living witness of individuals and their willingness to witness to Christ and the faith of the Orthodox way.¹⁵

As an influential Orthodox theologian and Churchman living in Western society, Father Florovsky introduced the interdenominational dialogue as one of the new ways for Orthodox missiology to present Orthodoxy to modern people in Western society. Being in frequent correspondence and meetings with Western theologians and scholars, Father Florovsky saw that the Orthodox Church, through her contacts and dialogues with other Christians, can introduce her faith and tradition to modern people.

At the same time, the Orthodox Church in the twentieth-century West, being in a new socio-political and cultural context, tried to incorporate many methods from its

¹² George Florovsky, “Russian Missions: An Historical Sketch,” in *Aspects of Church History*, 151.

¹³ During his life time, the global geopolitical situation changed three times; first he lived in royal Russia, then, after the communist revolution he predominantly lived in Western Europe. The period between the two wars was socio-politically and culturally much different than after the Second World War. Finally, after WW II, living in the States, Father Florovsky experienced one more new socio-political and cultural context.

¹⁴ I have deliberately followed the Orthodox tradition of associating the word Church with a feminine pronoun.

¹⁵ One of the examples of personal witnessing of Christ and Orthodox faith in modern Western society is that of the former Russian bishop of Shanghai and San Francisco, John Maximovich (1896–1966), who was canonized in the Orthodox Church in 1994 and whose relics are presented for veneration in the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in San Francisco. Saint John of San Francisco is well known and respected by both Orthodox and non-Orthodox people for his ascetic and strict style of life, for his humbleness, chastity, and charitable works. Also, the Orthodox community considers him as a great spiritual leader and wonderworker. See Father Seraphim Rose and Abbot Herman, *Blessed John the wonderworker: A preliminary account of the life and miracles of Archbishop John (Maximovich)*, 3th revised ed., (Platina, CA: St. Herman Brotherhood, 1987). Peter Perekestov, *Man of God, Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco*, ed. Peter Perekestov (Redding, CA: Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, 1994).

traditional practical missiology, such as the use of native languages, in this case mostly French and English. The other method used was the establishment of theological schools for training of native clergy. The first Orthodox theological school in modern Western Europe was Saint Serge Orthodox Institute, which opened in 1925 in Paris. Even though the school was opened in order to train Russian émigrés for service in the Church, the faculty had a vision to create an academic theological center for future students who come from Western roots to serve as Orthodox theologians and priests to their people.¹⁶

Father Florovsky began his ecumenical involvement through his dialogues with other non-Orthodox Christian theologians in the 1920s. Nicholas Berdyaev organized meetings between the St. Serge Institute's faculty and Catholic and Protestant theologians. These informal gatherings continued during the 30s as well.¹⁷ Also Father Florovsky kept up a correspondence with the well-known Western theologian Karl Barth. His friendship and dialogue with Karl Barth began in 1931 when Barth invited Father Florovsky to give a lecture at the University of Bonn in 1931.¹⁸

Father Florovsky also was one of the first members of the newly established Anglican-Russian Fellowship of Saint Alban and Saint Sergius in 1929.¹⁹ Father Florovsky, as a

¹⁶ Only one year after the opening of the Institute, in 1926 Father Florovsky came there to teach Patristics. The other Orthodox school, Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary was opened by the Russian emigre in New York in 1938. Father Florovsky came to the Seminary after his arrival to the States in 1948 where he was teaching Patristics and dogmatic theology. His personal interest in Patristics with the idea of returning to the Fathers or "patristic renaissance" and theological work in this area influenced, as Bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev, then as abbot) writes, many outstanding Western and non-Orthodox patristic scholars who have succeeded in uncovering the great Eastern Fathers of the Church for the Western world such as Irene Hausherr, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, Walther Volker, Werner Jaeger, Johannes Quasten, John Kelly, Biles Prestige, Jaroslav Pelikan, Cardinal Cristoph Schonborn, Hieromonk Gabriel Bunge, and Sabasitan Brock. See Hegumen Hilarion (Alfeyev), "The Patristic Heritage and Modernity," *Ecumenical Review* 54 (2002): 92–93. The context in which Father Florovsky worked, allowed him to have encounters and dialogues with other theologians and to introduce Orthodox theology and tradition to the Westerners, who borrowed many of his patristic theological insights for their work. The example of Father Florovsky shows that the Orthodox missiological perception of the witnessing of Christ, in any cases, excludes any forcible and imposed conversion to Orthodoxy. Father Florovsky emphasized the one more advantage of having an Orthodox theological school in the West is that it will unite the nationally divided Orthodox diaspora. Having one theological center under the temporary patronage of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the future Orthodox clergy educated in this center can cross over these national differences and unite them on the base that is built on the common Hellenistic patristic tradition. Father Florovsky saw that the idea of Pan-Orthodoxy lies in the rich Orthodox patristic tradition, which for centuries has been forgotten in the East. Thus, one of the first goals of the Institute was to emphasize the renewal of the patristic tradition and Father Florovsky paid special attention to fulfill this task. See Aidan Nichols, OP, "George Florovsky (1893–1979) in *Theology in the Russian Diaspora, Church, Fathers, Eucharist in Nikolai Afanas'ev (1893–1966)* ed. Aidan Nichols, OP (Cambridge, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 155. Initially, the lectures in both of these theological schools were given in Russian, but gradually it was changed to French in Paris and English in Crestwood, New York.

¹⁷ Among the Orthodox theologians at these informal ecumenical meeting were: Nicholay Berdiaev, Basil Zenkovsky, Sergius Bulgakov, Boris Vyacheslavtsev, and Myrra Lot-Borodina. Among the Western theologians were: Marc Boegner, Winrid Monod, Auguste Lecerf, and Pierre Maury. See George Huntston Willimas, "Sacred Tradition: Its Sources and its Task in the Church," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 11 (Summer 1965): 32. Father Florovsky writing about these informal meetings gives the following list of the participants: "The most active participants in the discussion were Jacques Maritain, Gabriel Marcel, Marc Boegner, Winifred Monod, and Sergey Bulgakov...Occasionally Pere Lebreton, Etienne Gilson and Edouard Leroy." See George Florovsky, "My Personal Participation in the Ecumenical Movement," in *Ecumenism II, A Historical Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 169.

¹⁸ George Huntston Willimas, "Sacred Tradition: Its Sources and its Task in the Church," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 11 (Summer 1965): 32.

¹⁹ The Fellowship of St. Alban and Sergius was established in 1928 as the product of the Anglo-Russian Student conference that was held in January of the year 1927. The Anglican Bishop Walter Frere was elected the first President of the Fellowship. The fellowship organized and supported various meetings, conferences ecumenical activities and common programs between two wars. Some of the programs were the exchange of the professors and students, lectures about Eastern Christian tradition, common publishing, and some level of the common participation in the Orthodox or Anglican worship. The last gathering was in Amsterdam in 1939,

major representative of the Orthodox Church, had a very active role during the Fellowship's second Faith and Order conference in Edinburgh in 1937. He was also a member of the Committee of Fourteen that was to become the base for the future World Council of Churches. Thus, during the first Assembly of the WCC in 1948²⁰ Father Florovsky was involved in a number of sections and played a very active role in discussions about the nature and task of the Church,²¹ for example, in the Section I on the Universal Church and God's design. During the conference, Father Florovsky was working with several well-known theologians such as, Karl Barth and Hanns Lilje.²² After this first Assembly of the WCC, Father Florovsky served on the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the WCC. Also, from 1946 Father Florovsky served on the Continuation Committee of Faith and Order that in 1952 had been transformed into the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC.²³

After his arrival in the States, Father Florovsky continued his activism in the ecumenical dialogue as the way of Orthodox witnessing to Christ and the faith, on various levels: first of all, through his involvement in ecumenical gatherings, then through his academic career at several Protestant universities and through his private contacts with many great Western theologians and ecumenical leaders.

Hence, in July 1950, Father Florovsky together with Archbishop Germanos of Thyateira attended the Third Meeting of the Central Committee of the WCC in Toronto, when he pushed the Central Committee to accept his position toward the ecclesiastical structure of the WCC, which produced many discussions and critiques from the Protestant Churches. During the 1950s Father Florovsky attended several important ecumenical gatherings such as in August 1952 the third World Conference of Faith and Order in Lund, Sweden. In 1954 in Evanston, Illinois, the WCC organized its Second General Assembly.

because World War II ended cooperation. See Nicholas Zernov, "The Eastern Churches and the Ecumenical Movement in the Twentieth Century" in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517–1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1967), 662–664.

²⁰ WCC is an abbreviation for the World Council of Churches, which I will use for further references of this organization instead of using its full name.

²¹ George Huntston Willimas, "Sacred Tradition: Its Sources and its Task in the Church," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 11 (Summer 1965): 40.

²² Karl Barth was born in Basel, Switzerland in 1886, where he also died in 1968. He was one of the most influential Protestant theologians in the 20th century and a critical challenger of the ecumenical movement. He thought "that authentic unity of the Church would come about only if the church dared to be itself and to leave behind all self-righteous manifestations of the power." Hanns Lilje was born in Hanover, Germany in 1899 and passed away in the same city in 1977. He was one of the pioneers of the ecumenical movement. He worked on the reconciliation of the relationships between the churches in Germany and those of other countries. Hanns was a very active person in various areas. For example, he was the Lutheran Bishop of Hanover, the Presiding Bishop of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany. Also, he was a president of the WCC from 1968–75. See ANS J. Von Bent, "Barth, Karl" and "Lilje Hanns," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Nicholas Lossky, Jose Miguez Bonino, John Pobee, Tom Stransky, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Pauline Webb (Geneva: WCC Publications, William B. Eerdmans Publication Co. Grand Rapids, 1991), 90–91, 615–616.

²³ George Huntston Willimas, "Sacred Tradition: Its Sources and its Task in the Church," 44. During the first Assembly of the WCC, among 147 churches from 44 countries, the Orthodox Church was represented only by the delegations of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Exarchate in Western Europe under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. There were only four representatives: Archbishop Germanos of Thyateira, Prof. Hamilikar Alivastos, Prof. Stefan Zankov, and Fr. Florovsky. The Russian Orthodox Church led the majority of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches to refuse to participate for various reasons, and as several scholars note, most of these reasons did not have a theological foundation. See George Florovsky, "Orthodox Participations in the Amsterdam Assembly," in *Ecumenism II, A Historical Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 175–181. Ioann Sviridov, "25 Years of the Russian Orthodox Church in WCC Membership," *Ecumenical Review* 39 (1987): 346–351, Ian Bria, "The Eastern Orthodox in the Ecumenical Movement," *Ecumenical Review* 38 (1986): 216–227, Nicolas Zernov, "The Eastern Churches and the Ecumenical Movement in the Twentieth Century," 665–666. W. A. Viser T'Hooft, "Fr. Georges Florovsky's Role in the Formation of the WCC," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 23 (1979): 135–138.

During this meeting, the Orthodox Church was represented by many more representatives from several Autocephalous Orthodox Churches.²⁴ Between these huge and widely important ecumenical gatherings, Father Florovsky attended many smaller ecumenical meetings. One of them was the regional Conference on Faith and Order held in 1957 in Oberlin, OH.

Father Florovsky actively participated in the Third General WCC Assembly in 1961 in New Delhi, when the autocephalous Russian, Bulgarian, and Romanian Orthodox Churches joined the WCC.²⁵ During the first half of the 1960s, Father Florovsky attended two more conferences. In 1963, he participated at the World Conference of the Faith and Order Commission in Montreal, Canada and in 1964, he attended the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox meeting in Aarhus, Denmark.

He was a delegate at the Fourth General Assembly in 1968 in Uppsala, Sweden. As Andrew Blane notes, Father Florovsky's last major ecumenical participation was in the Fifth World Conference of Faith and Order in Louvain, Belgium in 1971. He was seventy-nine years old, but despite his old age, he was very actively involved in the sessions. At that time, according to Blane, Father Florovsky had been participating in the ecumenical dialogue for thirty-seven years. Also, Blane emphasizes that no other representative, either Orthodox or non-Orthodox, participated in this movement longer than Father Florovsky. And finally, Blane quotes Father Florovsky, who only one year later, in 1972, said that he did not recognize this meeting in Louvain as the end of his ecumenical participation. As Father Florovsky says: "I am still a member, probably the only one from the original group who has been a part of Faith and Order for so long."²⁶

This brief historical survey of Father's Florovsky's active ecumenical participation shows how he gradually introduced and supported dialogue as a new external or practical aspect of Orthodox missiology. Though dialogue with non-Orthodox participants, Father Florovsky, being a theologian and Orthodox priest, witnessed to Orthodoxy and through dialogue practically implemented internal or theological aspects of Orthodox missiology. The main source of these internal or theological aspects of missiology, Father Florovsky found in Orthodox ecclesiology. This theological discipline offers a theological foundation and source for the analysis of the goals and motives of mission.

As Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, a famous contemporary Orthodox missionary, wrote at the beginning of his international missionary career in the 1960s, wrote the main goal on the Orthodox understanding of mission is the salvation of all people and the whole universe as well as their participation in God's glory. This goal can be fulfilled only in the Eschaton, but the beginning of that active process starts in the Church thro-

²⁴ During the Second General Assembly of the WCC in Evanston, IL. The Orthodox representatives were: The Russian Metropolitan for the American Metropolis, Leonty together with the Bishop John of San Francisco, Fr. Vladimir Borichevsky, Ivan Czap, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. Also, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Orthodox Churches of Greece, Cyprus, Romania (through the Romanian Diocese in the States), Alexandria and Antioch. See George Huntston Willimas, "Sacred Tradition: Its Sources and its Task in the Church," 47, W. A. Visser T'Hoof, "Fr. Georges Florovsky's Role in the Formation of the WCC," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 23 (1979): 135–138, Rev. Milton B. Efthimiou, "Santiago: An Orthodox Perspective," in *Essays on Ecumenism*, compiled by Anton C. Vrame and Cory Dixon (Berkeley; InterOrthodox Press PAOI, 2003), 51–59.

²⁵ See <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches.html> (accessed on December 14, 2009)

²⁶ Andrew Blane, *George Florovsky, Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 140. Father Florovsky also actively participated at many inter-Orthodox gatherings beginning with First Congress of the Orthodox Theological Professors in Athens in 1937. Also, he attended all three Pan-Orthodox Conferences in Rhodes in 1961, 1963, and 1964 supporting the active participation of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Ecumenical movement. See, Andrew Blane, *George Florovsky, Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman*, 137.

ugh the sacramental life, here within history. Thus, the Orthodox motive for mission is this goal — the salvation of all and their incorporation in God's glory. The motive for mission is this inner necessity and it goes from the personal, through the communal, to the Church level. Archbishop Anastasios notes that a Christian who is in union with God, incorporated in God, cannot think, feel, or act differently than Christ. This includes his/her attitude to other people and all creatures. Therefore, a Christian as a coworker in God's plan is called to preach and witness his/her faith in God on all levels.²⁷

Father Florovsky held this missiological perception toward other nonOrthodox Christians as well, and in order to defend this position, he based his arguments on Orthodox ecclesiology where he found the internal or theological aspects of missiology.²⁸ He proposes insights from Orthodox ecclesiology in order to answer the problem of Christian denominationalism. Christian denominationalism is the biggest challenge for Orthodox ecclesiology because Orthodox ecclesiology excludes the legitimacy of any doctrinal differences, deviations, or divisions in Christianity.

Father Florovsky believed that the Orthodox Church is the Church of God and the Body of Christ, and that thus she must carry her mission to be a witness of the full truth and unity of the Church through the ages until all enter into unity of faith.²⁹ This fulness of the truth, according to Father Florovsky, belongs to the Orthodox Church and has its source in the ancient Patristic tradition. He stated that the Eastern Church, through the centuries after the schism of 1054, has preserved the common ancient background through the Patristic tradition that was lost or ignored in the West. Hence, Father Florovsky writes that the Orthodox Church only can witness this truth all over the world:

"The Orthodox have no right to retreat from the world, which needs and seeks the truth of Christ, because it is the duty of Orthodox Christians to witness to that truth which is deposited forever in the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It may be that at present many Orthodox would feel themselves not equipped for the task. Then, let us take up the whole armor of God and serve our brethren in the whole world as witness of the Lord. There is no proud self-assertion in such an attitude. On the contrary, there is a strong feeling of responsibility and duty.

²⁷ Anastasios Yannoulatos, "The Purpose and Motive of Mission," *The International Review of Mission* 45 (1965): 281–297. Father Florovsky has the same Orthodox understanding of the goals and motives of mission as Archbishop Anastasios. When he thinks about the Church, her sacramental life and role in salvific history, Father Florovsky writes: "The Church is constituted by the sacraments, all of which imply intimate participation in Christ's death and resurrection and personal communion with him. The Church is the fruit of Christ's redeeming work and as it were, its 'summary.' The Church is, as it were, the purpose and the goal of his 'coming down' for us men and for our salvation." George Florovsky, "The Early, 'Undivided' Church and Communion" in *Ecumenism II, A Historical Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 14.

²⁸ Father Florovsky kept very strong to the position that the fulness of the truth belongs to the Orthodox Church. However, he did not ignore the possibilities for salvation outside of the Church, emphasizing the idea that humankind does not know how God will judge his people. He writes: "The famous dictum 'extra ecclesiam nulla salus' admits a double interpretation. It is a self-evident truth, for salvation is synonymous with membership in the Church, which is the Body of Christ. 'To be saved' means preciously 'to be in Christ,' and 'in Christ' means in 'His body.' Yet if we confine ourself to the canonical or institutional limits, we may force ourselves into a very dubious position. Are we entitled to suggest that all those, who in their earthly career, were outside the strict canonical borders of the Church are thereby excluded from salvation? Indeed, very few theologians would dare to go so far. On the contrary, one is very anxious to emphasize that the ultimate judgement belongs to Christ alone and cannot be adequately anticipated by man, especially with regard to those who have fought a good fight in this life but happened to be outside of the Church, though not by their own deliberate choice or decision." George Florovsky, "St. Cyprian and St. Augustine on Schism," in *Ecumenism II, A Historical Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 50–51.

²⁹ George Florovsky, "The Testimony of the Church Universal," 166.

One should stand steadfast in faith and grow in it, but the treasures of Orthodoxy cannot be buried underground.”³⁰

This Orthodox Patristic tradition, which preserves the fullness of the truth and allows the Orthodox Church to be a witness all over the world, opens possibilities for reconciliation among Christians, because it “was and must be shown to both, the East and the West, its primary importance and its uniting power.”³¹

Thus, Father Florovsky had introduced ecumenical dialogue in the Orthodox Church as the modern way of practical implementation of the internal aspects of missiology and supported Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement in order to call East and West to build their reconciliation and reunion on their common background — Patristic tradition, which has been preserved, but sometimes forgotten in the Orthodox Church. Through the process of reconciliation and restoration of the broken union, the Church manifests her oneness and unity as her ecclesiological nature.

Orthodox ecclesiology states that the Church as organism cannot be divided, because she is one in her nature, but there are various dissociations from the Church and she is not able to stop these dissociations from herself.³² The source of the fragmentation of Christianity and separation from the Church lies in the diversity of the Christian mind. As Father Florovsky says: “There is no common mind among the Christians.”³³

Father Florovsky thought that unity, that is the fundamental basis of ecclesiology, must be built on common Eucharistic celebration and the common Christian theological heritage and background. He knew that the Orthodox Church has the obligation to witness, among other Christians, this common Eucharistic celebration, theological heritage and background in order to try to reestablish full unity among divided Christians. As Father Florovsky says: “The voice of the Orthodox Church is the voice of the common Christian antiquity.” He notes that this aspect shows the oneness of the Church and her universal role in salvation, because she must be one and the same all over the world and through all the time.³⁴

The Church proves and shows its mystery of unity and oneness of mind through the Eucharistic celebration. Father Florovsky states that in the Eucharistic celebration people must truly unite themselves with Christ. Here he follows the words of Saint John of Damascus who says that though the Eucharistic celebration and Holy Communion, people participate in the Glory of Christ, and thus for a human being, who is the crown of God’s creation, there is no other way of union with God, as the Lord Himself revealed: “Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you (Jn. 6:53). Hence, Father Florovsky states that for separated and fragmented Christians, unity is possible only in Christ, in the unity of His Body and sharing of His cup. Only through sharing from the same cup, does the Church reflect the unity and common love of the Holy Trinity, which serves as the icon of the life for the Church and each of her members.”³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., 167.

³¹ George Florovsky, “The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement,” *Theology Today* 7 (1950): 72.

³² George Florovsky, “The Problematic of Christian Reunification, The Dangerous Path of Dogmatic Minimalism,” in *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 14–15.

³³ George Florovsky, “The Tragedy of Christian Division,” in *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 28.

³⁴ George Florovsky, “The Testimony of the Church Universal,” in *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 165.

³⁵ George Florovsky, “The Eucharist and Catholicity,” *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected*

Through Eucharistic celebration as the material confirmation and testimony of unity, the Church receives her catholic nature. This catholicity means not only the totality of all her members, or all locations of the Church, but this catholicity, as the fulness of the truth, represents itself in every local Church or parish where the Eucharistic celebration is performed, because this fulness of the truth is offered through unity with the body and blood of Christ Himself. In every Church where the Divine Liturgy is celebrated, Christ presents Himself and people from every generation are able to participate in Holy Communion and through it be a part of one and the same body of Christ and His Glory.³⁶ On this reasoning, Father Florovsky emphasizes that unity between a human being and Christ is possible only in and through the Church.³⁷

Also, the Eucharistic celebration is the visible manifestation of the fulfillment of unity and oneness of the Church, because the common Eucharistic Communion is based on oneness and unity of theology or mind. In order to share in the common Eucharistic celebration, each and every of the Church's members must believe that in the Eucharistic celebration our Lord Jesus Christ is present— not symbolically, but truly— through sanctification of the bread and wine, which are transformed into the most pure body and blood of Christ— the historical person who was born in Bethlehem, baptized in Jordan, suffered, was buried and resurrected— the same body and blood of Christ who ascended and sits at the right hand of the Father. Each and every member of the Church, through Holy Communion, becomes a part of one single and catholic body.³⁸

Through Eucharistic communion people become participants in God's glory and enter on the process of salvation, which is the main goal of mission on the Orthodox understanding. Father Florovsky gives the explanation of this missiological teaching, writing:

“The Church is the body of Christ, not simply a “body of men or a corporation.” The Church is in Christ, as well as Christ is in his Church. The Church is not merely a community of those who believe in Christ and walk in his commandments. She is a community of those who abide and dwell in him, and in whom he himself is abiding and dwelling by the Spirit.”³⁹

The Eucharistic celebration as the testimony of unity includes a priest who, serving the Eucharistic Liturgy, builds unity and consensus in the community. However, a bishop is the builder of the Church's unity on a wider level and as Father Florovsky notes “through its bishop or rather in its bishop every particular or local Church is included in the Catholic fullness of the Church, is linked with the past and with all ages.” This statement shows that the apostolic succession is the mystical and sacramental as well as the juridical base for the Church's unity.⁴⁰

Father Florovsky writes that the Apostle Paul gives an excellent analogy in his description of the mystery of Christian existence when he figures this existence as one body.

Works of George Florovsky, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 48–49.

³⁶ George Florovsky, “The House of the Father,” *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 67

³⁷ Father Florovsky states that the Church offers eternity to her members, because the union between people and Christ established in the Church through its sacramental life cannot be abolished after the death of her members; Father Florovsky gives the example of the Church's prayers for a reposed member. “In the funeral ceremony the universal and all-temporal self-consciousness of the Church is revealed with exceptional strength. The prayer for the dead is a very necessary moment of faith in the Church as the body of Christ. Achieving the true contact with Christ himself in the salvatory sacraments, the faithful cannot be separated from him even in death.” George Florovsky, “The House of the Father,” 68.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

³⁹ George Florovsky, “The Historical Problem of a Definition of the Church” in *Ecumenism II, A Historical Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

According to Father Florovsky this analogy is based on the living experience of the sacramental life of the Church — the holy mystery of Baptism as an incorporation and Holy Communion as the mystery of community. In this sacramental life, Christians physically demonstrate their unity of mind. About this he writes:

“First, the unity is given from above. It is given. For we are united in Christ and by Him we are united as branches of one vine, rooted in and incorporated into Him. We, being many, are made into unity, for the Spirit in his many gifts is one. Christian unity is not merely human unity. It is not a unity of commonly maintained discipline. This unity is not made by our human agreements. We do not create or constitute it. We are taken into it. Grace is given, we have to receive and accept it. It is given from above as a perfect and Divine gift. We are gathered together in a unity of eternal and spiritual life.”⁴¹

The Orthodox Church bases her Eucharistic unity on her theological and doctrinal consensus, which crates her identity. Father Florovsky states that the Orthodox Church has claimed to be the Church because she, despite all the challenges and problems that she has faced, has been aware of her identity throughout her entire history. She has been keeping her apostolic and patristic inheritance intact and unchanged and she has been delivering this inheritance from one generation to the other. However, in the history of the Church, there were periods when she partly failed to convey this message to a particular generation in its full splendor in particular the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She has however preserved the patristic tradition that has always been incorporated in her sacramental life. Father Florovsky in his explanation of the identity of the Orthodox Church emphasizes that this living patristic tradition is not only a human tradition, but first of all is a sacred and holy tradition maintained by the Holy Spirit. And as has been said earlier, the fact that the Orthodox Church preserves, unbroken and unchanged, the patristic tradition is evident in her sacramental life, which preserves an unbroken succession from the first centuries of Christianity.⁴²

The importance of the apostolic and patristic tradition of the Church has been observed from the earliest times. Father Florovsky thus mentions Saint Irenaeus of Lyons who says that the Church both preaches the apostolic teaching throughout the world and carefully preserves it. Undoubtedly, the teaching must be spread in various cultures and through various languages, but the core of this teaching must be one and the same. As Father Florovsky notes, it is not a question of external, historical, and formal succession and transmission, and not only of the legacy and community of the faith and teaching, but above all of the fullness, unity and continuity of the life of grace, of the unity of spirit-bearing experience.⁴³ In this connection, Father Florovsky explains the unchangeable importance, fullness and universal role of dogmas in the Church:

“Dogmatic truth is contained in the Church and, therefore, living in the Church it is given, and not set. No matter how immeasurably far present knowledge is “partial” from the promi-

⁴¹ George Florovsky, “The Church and the Communion of Saints,” in *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 81–83.

⁴² Father Florovsky, arguing for the patristic and unchanged identity of the Orthodox Church, also writes: “The Church is constituted by divine action, which is still continuing in her by sacramental means and which is dutifully acknowledged by faith and obedience...Her sacramental and spiritual life has ever been the same in the course of ages. She is aware of having been ever the same since the beginning. And for that reason the Orthodox Church recognizes herself, in the distorted Christendom of ours, as being the only guardian of the ancient faith and Order; that is, as being the Church. For the same reason the Orthodox Church cannot regard herself as just a “denomination” among the multitude of others or just a “branch” of some wider Church.” See George Florovsky, “The Quest for Christian Unity and the Orthodox Church,” in *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 141.

⁴³ George Florovsky, “The House of the Father,” 71.

sed knowledge “face to face,” now, as always, full and complete truth is revealed in Church experience. Truth one and immutable — for Christ Himself has been revealed. The full truth — and there is only one unalloyed truth — was revealed in the resolutions on dogma at the Ecumenical Councils; and nothing falls away from the dogmas of the Orthodox faith, nothing changes, and there are no new definitions changing the meaning of old, nothing is added.”⁴⁴

The fulness of truth based on the Orthodox Patristic tradition has been preserved in the Church through all time and in all places. And in the Church, the truth must be accepted by all. For Father Florovsky, the Church has the universal salvific character and nature and, thus, the Church includes community. To be a Christian means to be a part of community, not to be isolated and individual. The ancient councils of the Church, as Father Florovsky notes, are the most considerable examples of the ecclesiastical community. Father Florovsky observes that the universal character of the Church includes the idea of consensus. A community must be based on consensus in order to preserve that community, because “the communion can be kept or practiced as long as there is a justifiable hope of an ultimate consensus.”⁴⁵

Father Florovsky writes that the great tragedy in Christianity happened when this community of the Christian faith broke, because it created many separations and divisions in Christianity. Many Christians, through the break in the community, lost access to the fullness of the truth and were separated from the Orthodox Church. It happened, as he notes, because the consensus had been broken and the “true unity of the Christian mind been lost, and the Christians lost their common Christian perspective.” Father Florovsky also emphasizes that the great schism dated for convenience to 1054 was the consequence of the already-broken Christian unity of mind.⁴⁶

Father Florovsky understands that Christianity throughout history faced many challenges and temptations that affected the unity and fullness of the Church and this, he argues, is the source of the various Christian divisions throughout history. He writes that errors and heresies come from a certain waning of Church fullness, a decreasing of the Church’s communal self-consciousness as the result of the ego-centrical self-assurance and isolation of individuals or parties within it. The final result of any separation from the Church, according to Father Florovsky is a heresy, an elective rejection of a dogma about the Church that is preserved and protected in the living experience of the Church tradition.⁴⁷

In order to defend the unity of the Church, Father Florovsky, in this theological understanding, emphasizes a high Christocentric position and also a high anthropology. Do the two necessarily belong together? It is especially prominent in his ecclesiology, where he bases the oneness of the Church on Christ, and thus, the fullness of the truth can be preserved only in the Church. He writes that: “For the Church is his body and Christ is never divided. Unity is not one note of the Church among others. It denotes rather the very nature of the Church: one Head and one body.”⁴⁸ However, the picture of modern Christianity is different: instead of unity Christians are divided. There are many social is-

⁴⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁵ George Florovsky, “The Early, ‘Undivided’ Church and Communion,” 13.

⁴⁶ George Florovsky, “The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement,” *Theology Today* 7 (1950): 68–70.

⁴⁷ George Florovsky, “The House of the Father,” 75.

⁴⁸ Ibid. In this sense the Orthodox Church understands the term “catholicity.” In the Orthodox tradition, this term first of all includes the integrity and fulness of the Church’s faith and doctrine as well as her loyalty to her theological tradition.

sues that unite Christians to work together, but the basic theological problem of unity is still unsolved. Thus Father Florovsky, in the ecumenical movement, has suggested a new understanding of ecumenism that leads Christians to reach unity and oneness in faith. This is the idea of “ecumenism in time.” Through this recasting of the ecumenical project, Father Florovsky wanted to return divided Christians to their common Patristic tradition, which builds the unity, consensus and oneness of the faith reuniting all Christians with the whole tradition of the Church in time, which has been neglected or lost. Father Florovsky thus writes:

“The ecumenical experience itself has shown that encounter or confrontation of the divided Christian groups or communions, in their present state and form, cannot break through the deadlock of denominational diversity and of all sorts of isolationist prejudices unless the perspective is enlarged to include the whole scope of the Christian historical tradition. In fact, “modern” Christians have become so excessively “over-modernized” in their attitudes and orientation as to lose access to the very foundations of Christian faith and reality which come to seem “archaic” to them.”⁴⁹

This short observation shows how Father Florovsky extracted from Orthodox ecclesiology internal or theological missionary goals such as salvation based on participation in God’s glory, unity and oneness, fullness and consistence of the faith. These internal goals, according to Father Florovsky can be achieved through the new practical missiological strategy — dialogue that tries to lead divided Christians to unity. As has been observed, in order to be able to reach full unity, the Church by her very nature must include “ecumenism in time.” One of the problems for the ecumenical dialogue, as Father Florovsky notes is the overlooking of the importance of the historical dimension of this ecumenism. The Orthodox Church because of her teaching cannot allow any union based on the acceptance of the existing denominations as they are at the present. It means that the Orthodox Church cannot seek any agreement in the status quo based on “ecumenism in space.” Writing about “ecumenism in time” Father Florovsky elaborates:

“Ecumenism in time is in no sense an easy or smooth path. In fact, most of the planimetric dissensions among Christians are rooted precisely in the different and discordant visions of Christian history, in discordant interpretations of its meaning and relevance. And for that reason they can be properly discussed only from an historical perspective. The phrase “in all ages” is ambiguous and all too simple, just as the great Vincentian Canon does not call for a democratic plebiscite on doctrinal issues. It is no more than a pointer, but a pointer in the right direction.”⁵⁰

Father Florovsky has introduced a new practical missiological strategy — dialogue — in order to bring all Christians to possible unity and through it salvation in Christ. This missiological position proceeds from his ecclesiological understanding. In order to obtain possible unity among Christians, as Father Florovsky observes these divided Christian groups cannot be reconstructed simply by adding together the distorted parts, because many of these groups are polemical or in opposition. They must be reshaped to fit for reintegration. Thus, the only way toward the synthesis is the way of mixed return and renewal, rebirth and repentance. In order to obtain unity among Christians, historical differences must disappear. As Father Florovsky writes “Differences must be overcome, not simply overlooked and parity of the divergent traditions or interpretations can hardly be

⁴⁹ George Florovsky, “My Personal Participation in the Ecumenical Movement,” in *Ecumenism II, A Historical Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 171–172.

⁵⁰ George Florovsky, “The Quest for Christian Unity and the Orthodox Church,” 139.

admitted.”⁵¹ Thus, the final result of the ecumenism in time is to go back to the common tradition in order to find common background and basis for further dialogue. As Father Florovsky states:

“But all Christian convictions are subject to an ultimate test by *paradosis*, by tradition. It is in the process of our common return to that Tradition, which had been continuous, even in the midst of conflicts and splits, if often in a disguised and obscure manner, that we, the “divided Christians” will meet each other on a safer ground than ever before. This Tradition is the Holy Church herself, in which the Lord is ever present.”⁵²

The strong Christocentric perception of ecclesiology formed Father Florovsky’s theological position toward the WCC as a religious institution. One of the contradictions of this institution, which has been propagating collaboration and dialogue among Christians for decades, according to Father Florovsky, was in its own name, World Council of Churches. The name itself is contradictory of the very nature of the Church as one, not many. The plural of this noun, as Father Florovsky writes, can be used only if it includes “local cells of a single body, but all in perfect and organic unison.”⁵³ In this statement, Father Florovsky was very strong and firm, saying that the WCC represents the situation that is opposite to that of the New Testament, because every religious body, or as he writes “separate denomination”, is allowed to be called “Church.”⁵⁴

This position also had crucial importance for the creation of the statement concerning the ecclesiological nature of the WCC during the meeting of the Central Committee in Toronto, Canada in 1950. Father Florovsky, as a representative of the Orthodox Church, insisted on accepting the Orthodox proposal, which clearly stated that the Council is not a Church and thus, does not have its own doctrines. This means that every Christian Church was free to follow its own way and doctrines. Father Florovsky especially tried to emphasize that every Church has freedom to recognize other affiliated Churches as Churches in the full and true meaning of this word.⁵⁵ Father Florovsky’s position,

⁵¹ George Florovsky, “Ecumenical Aims and Doubts,” in *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 25. Father Florovsky also noted that the Ecumenical movement can miss its main goal — to reach the unity among Christians— because they are focused more on social and charitable tasks than on the crucial one — unity among divided Christians. About this Father Florovsky writes: “We have to make a clear distinction between the ultimate goal of the Ecumenical movement and its immediate objective. Any confusion in this matter would be disastrous, and would lead into either utopian deceptions or humanitarian trivialities. The ultimate goal — the true restoration of Christian unity in faith and charity — is indeed beyond human planning and human reach, and it is perhaps even on the other side of all historical horizons. The ultimate unity can come only from above, as a free gift of Almighty God.” See George Florovsky, “Ecumenical Aims and Doubts,” in *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 26.

⁵² George Florovsky, “The Tragedy of Christian Divisions,” in *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 25.

⁵³ George Florovsky, “Orthodox Participation in the Amsterdam Assembly,” in George Florovsky, “My Personal Participation in the Ecumenical Movement,” in *Ecumenism II, A Historical Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 180. In another article Father Florovsky writes: “There should not be “division” among Christians, because Christ himself is never divided. And his Church is essentially One, and simply cannot be divided either. In actuality, however, there are many “Churches,” and they are neither truly “united” nor in “communion” with each other.” George Florovsky, “An overview of the Ecumenical Movement Since 1927,” in *Ecumenism II, A Historical Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 197.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See George Florovsky, “The World Council of Churches,” in *Ecumenism II, A Historical Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 188–196. The Toronto memorandum in 1950 has crystalized the understanding of the nature and purpose of the WCC. The following explanation, that represents the final product of this Memorandum, is given in the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement: “According to this statement, the WCC is not and must never become a super-Church. It does not negotiate union between Churches. It cannot and should not be based on any one particular concep-

which protected the position of Orthodox ecclesiology, was accepted after intensive debate and the document “The Church, Churches, and the World Council of Churches” was issued. Also, this statement opened the gate for the other autocephalous Orthodox Churches to join the WCC and to participate in many of its programs.⁵⁶

However, Father Florovsky through the new strategy of practical missiology — dialogue — emphasized the necessary obligation to witness to Orthodoxy and its ecclesiastical understanding of the truth. Facing “disunity of mind,” the WCC was not able to make any crucial decisions, that led to unity among Christians, but at the same time the WCC has opened the door for further dialogue in order to establish a better mutual understanding and seek possible ways for Christian unity.

In conclusion, it is evident that Father Florovsky contended that the Orthodox Church has the fullness of the truth, because she has preserved intact the whole apostolic and patristic tradition that is the basis, treasure and protection of the Christian truth. He is unswayed in this belief and through a new strategy of practical implementation of internal missiological goals — dialogue — he firmly has witnessed to his position. Thus, Father Florovsky can be criticized in that he used the ecumenical movement as an opportunity to push other Christians to convert to Orthodoxy. Also, there are some critiques of Father Florovsky’s work which claim that it is too focused on “Hellenocentrism” and is lacking much mention of other Eastern Christian traditions, such as the Syrian and the Georgian traditions, that also build up the Eastern Orthodox theological mindset.⁵⁷

On the other hand, the critics of Father Florovsky’s position toward ecumenical meetings must observe the wider picture in order to make their statements concrete. Many additional observations should be included. One of them is the fact that these ecumenical meetings were only initial steps. For the first time various Christian denominations met each other to talk around the table. For example, the Orthodox Church for many centuries, because of her institutional captivity in various socio-political and historical contexts, was unable to meet and speak to other Christians. Also, the Orthodox Church distrusted and was in fear of other Christians, seeing them as potential threats to the ancient faith. However, Father Florovsky was one of the first to break this prejudice from the Orthodox side and introduce dialogue among Christians. He truly believed that it will help them to know each other better, and to bring them closer on the way toward full reunion and oneness. In his address at the First Assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948, he said: “We are here together first of all to rediscover one another. I mean, to rediscover one another as fellows and brethren in Christ. For we have been isolated and estranged from each other for years and years. We have to regain and rediscover a common language.”⁵⁸

Today, sixty years later, the Orthodox approach toward the ecumenical movement has passed through various dimensions, from very positive and active to negative and passive. The Orthodox Church, from her side is still in the process of learning to be a par-

tion of the Church. Membership of the Church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership in one’s own Church body, but it does not imply that each Church must regard the other member Churches as Churches in the true and full sense of the word.” See Tom Stransky, “World Council of Churches; Nature and Purpose,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Nicholas Losky, Jose Miguez Bonino, John Pobee, Tom Stransky, Geoffrey Wainright, and Pauline Webb (Geneva: WCC Publications, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, 1991), 1084–1086.

⁵⁶ See W. A. Visser T’Hooft, “Fr. Georges Florovsky’s Role in the Formation of the WCC,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 23 (1979):135–139.

⁵⁷ Hilarion Alfeyev, “The Patristic Heritage and Modernity,” *Ecumenical Review* 54 (2002): 91–111.

⁵⁸ George Florovsky, “Ecumenical Aims and Doubts, An Address at the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, 1948,” in *Ecumenism I, A Doctrinal Approach, The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol 14 (Vaduz, Europe: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 22.

ticipant in a dialogue, because this theological and missiological strategy is new for her, but nobody can ignore the importance of Father Florovsky's thought to introducing dialogue as a new practical strategy of missiology. The initial Orthodox position in this dialogue, as Father Florovsky proposed, was to bring other Christians back to Orthodoxy, but a few decades later, the Orthodox Church has changed her position, recognizing values in others from whom she also can learn. Thus, today, the Orthodox Church is more open toward others and their ideas. The Orthodox Church holds a dialogue, which includes speaking as well as listening equally.

The final result of this long process is dialogue which cannot undermine doctrinal teaching without communal acceptance, and in itself includes equality among people, and respect of their religious, social and cultural identities and thus, as a practical missiological strategy is supported by the Orthodox Church. Two of the most important contemporary Orthodox supporters of this practical strategy of missiology are Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Tirana and all Albania, and Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon.⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ See Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Facing the World, Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2003). Metropolitan John Zizioulas states: Dialogue does not mean indifference to truth or relativism. On the contrary, it means conviction, yet without stubbornness. It involves the recognition that the other, the different, exists not simply in order to exist — that the tolerance means — but as someone who has something to say to me, which I have to listen to seriously, relate to my own conviction and judge in light of these convictions." See Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, "The Orthodox Church and the Third Millennium," *Sourozh* 81 (August, 2000): 28.

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