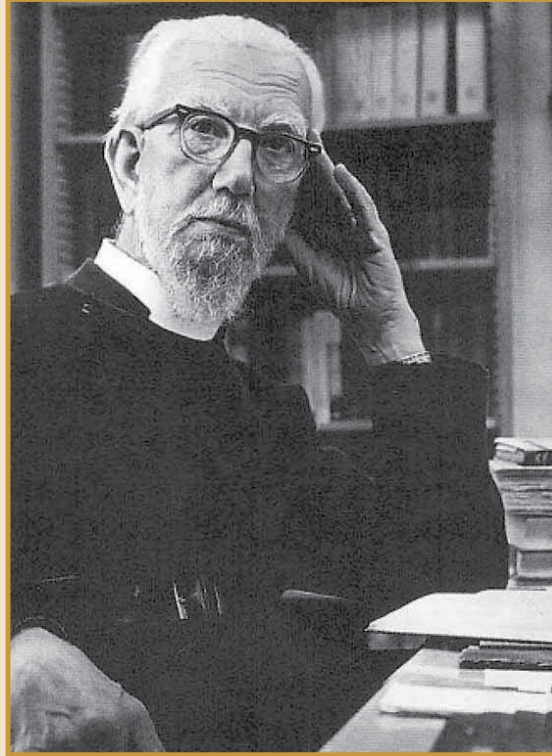


GEORGES FLOROVSKY

By Dr Brandon Gallaher



*If the greatness of a theologian is determined by his influence, Georges Florovsky is undoubtedly the greatest Eastern Orthodox theologian of the 20th century, as indeed is often claimed. His theological programme and method of a spiritual return to, and renewal in, the Byzantine heritage (the Greek Patristic corpus, the monastic and liturgical tradition) – in line with the well-worn slogan, ‘neo-patristic synthesis’ – has increasingly become the dominant paradigm for the Orthodox theology and ecumenical activity. As a teacher, his students included some of the best-known names in modern Orthodox theology: Father John Meyendorff (1926-92), Father John Romanides (1928-2001) and Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon (b. 1931). In addition, he mentored others who are also now key figures in modern Orthodox thought: Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov (1896-1993), Vladimir Lossky (1903-58), Father Alexander Schmemmann (1921-83) and Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia (b. 1934).**

* For Florovsky's writings see *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Theological Writings*, eds. Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur (London: Bloomsbury, Forthcoming).

A VOYAGE INTO EXILE AND TOWARDS PAN-ORTHODOXY¹

Protopresbyter Georges Vasilievich Florovsky was born on 28th August 1893 (Old Style Julian Calendar or 9th September 1893 by the Gregorian Calendar) into a clerical and highly academic family in the provincial town of Elisavetgrad in the Russian Empire (now Kirovohrad, Ukraine) and at six months moved south with his family to Odessa. He was a precocious but sickly child with a voracious appetite for reading and an aptitude for learning languages, which would later earn him the reputation, even amongst his critics, as a genuine theological encyclopaedia. Florovsky studied philosophy (with an emphasis on history) at the University of Odessa from 1911 to 1919. However, in January 1920 the threat of an offensive by the Red Army forced his family to flee Odessa via Istanbul for Sofia, Bulgaria. The Florovskys joined many of the Russian intellectuals of the period, driven into exile either forcibly (such as Nicholas Lossky (1870-1965; father of Vladimir Lossky), Father Sergii Bulgakov (1871-1944), Nicholas Berdiaev (1874-1948), Simeon Frank (1877-1950) and Lev Karsavin (1882-1952), all expelled by the Bolsheviks), or ‘voluntarily’ (like Anton Kartashev (1875-1960), Saint Maria (Skobtsova) (1891-1945) and the Florovsky family), fleeing chaos, civil war and threat of persecution in the ruins of the Russian Empire. The cultural and spiritual trauma of the revolution and the sense of a need for roots marked the thoughts of both the older (for example, Bulgakov, Berdiaev) and the younger (for example, Florovsky, Lossky) generations of Russian intellectuals in exile and many sought an

identity in Orthodoxy and the Byzantine legacy that would permit them to rise above the tragedy of exile.

He was associated with the ‘Eurasian’ movement until he broke definitively with Eurasianism in 1928. The Eurasians were a Russian cultural and nationalist movement who were generally sympathetic to state control of all areas of life, especially religion. They were highly critical of the West and Roman Catholicism and looked to Asia and the Tatar period in their quest for an authentic Russian identity. The Eurasians aspired to a non-Western political and cultural transformation of Russia and saw Bolshevism as an illegitimate Westernisation of the country. Although Florovsky assimilated many aspects of the Eurasian anti-Western rhetoric and a tendency to see the East and West as polarised, he distanced himself from Eurasian autocratic political posturing, their utilitarian vision of religion as simply a means of nation building and focused more particularly on Russia’s Byzantine-Orthodox heritage.²

In December 1921, he took up a Czechoslovak government scholarship to study and teach in Prague. He soon began teaching the philosophy of law as a teaching assistant in the Russian Law Faculty of Charles University as well as the history of Russian literature at the Russian Institute of Commercial Knowledge (or simply, Russian Institute) and the philosophy of Vladimir Solov’ev at the Slavic Institute. In Prague he completed, and in June 1923 successfully defended before the Russian émigré academic organisation known as the Russian Academic Group (RAG in Czechoslovakia), a higher research Masters

¹ For biographical material see Andrew Blane (ed.), *George Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood: Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993); Paul L. Gavriluk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); George H. Williams, ‘Georges Vasilievich Florovsky: His American Career (1948-1965)’, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 11.1 (1965), pp.7-107; Andrew Blane, ‘A Sketch of the Life of Georges Florovsky’, in Andrew Blane, ed., *Georges Florovsky, Russian Intellectual, Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), pp. 11-217; and A.V. Cherniaev, G.V. *Florovskii kak filosof i istorik russkoi mysli* (Moscow: IFRAN, 2010). For criticism see Brandon Gallaher, ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’: Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky’, *Modern Theology*, 27.4 (October 2011), pp.659-691 [Russian translation: “V ozhidanii varvarov”: identichnost’ i polemichnost’ u Georgiia Florovskogo], trans. A.V. Cherniaev, *Filosofskie Nauki*, 10 (2013), pp.77-92]; Paul Ladouceur, ‘Treasures New and Old: Landmarks of Orthodox Neopatristic Theology’, *Saint Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 56.2 (2012), pp.191-227; and Matthew Baker, ‘Neopatristic Synthesis and Ecumenism: Towards the ‘Reintegration’ of Christian Tradition’, in Andri Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer, ed., *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013), pp.235-260.

² See Gavriluk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, pp.60-79; Marc Raeff, ‘George Florovsky and Eurasianism’ in G.O. Mazur, ed., *Twenty-Five Year Commemoration of the Life of Georges Florovsky (1893-1979)* (New York: Semenenko Foundation, 2005), pp.87-100; and Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008).



Georges Florovsky's parents: K.G. Florovskaya (née Poprushenko) and V.A. Florovsky (left).
The house in Odessa where the Florovsky family lived until 1920 (right).



The former building of the Faculty of History and Philology at Odessa University, where Florovsky studied philosophy from 1911-1919 (left).

Georges Florovsky, 1920s (middle).

The first page of the second chapter of Georges Florovsky's masters thesis, *The Historical Philosophy of Alexander Herzen*, 1923 (right).

thesis (roughly equivalent to a present day PhD dissertation) on the historical philosophy of the Russian social and political thinker Alexander Herzen (1812-70).³ The Masters degree was confirmed in October of 1923 and the diploma was issued on 30th April 1925 by the Board of Russian Academic Organizations Abroad.⁴ Herzen's attack on all forms of historical determinism, emphasis on the freedom of man as an historical actor

³ See recently Derek Offord, 'Alexander Herzen' in *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity*, edited by G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.52-68.

⁴ See Paul Gavriluyk, 'Georges Florovsky's Monograph "Herzen's Philosophy of History": The New Archival Material and the Reconstruction of the Full Text', *Harvard Theological Review*, 107 (Jan. 2014), pp.1-16.

and vision of the movement and creativity of history in terms of perpetually opposed antinomies would later influence Florovsky's hermeneutics and practice as an historical theologian. In Prague (1921-6), in reaction to Bulgakov's sophiology (who was then oddly also his confessor), he formed a study circle devoted to the Fathers which he saw even then as the wellspring of Orthodoxy. It is on the basis of his interest in the Fathers that Florovsky was offered in 1926 by Bulgakov a post in patrology at the newly formed L'Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe Saint-Serge in Paris, which became the seminary for the Patriarchal Exarchate of Russian Parishes under the Patriarchate of Constantinople led by Metropolitan Evlogii (Georgievskii) (1868-1946). Florovsky lived and taught in Paris for some sixteen years (1926-39 and 1945-8), broken only by the Second World War which he spent in Belgrade teaching and acting as a school chaplain. During his Paris years the foundations of all his later academic and ecumenical work were laid. Ordained to the priesthood in 1932, he became intensively involved with the life of his own church as an assistant chaplain for the Russian Student Christian Movement and entered deeply into the ecumenical movement (with the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius and the nascent World Council of Churches (WCC)), including a long-running dialogue with the great Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968). He adapted for Orthodoxy the first ferment of what would later become the *ressourcement* movement or return to the patristic and medieval sources which preceded and grounded the work of Vatican II. Florovsky developed his theology during a period of ecclesial confusion in the Orthodox Church. For centuries the Orthodox, under a succession of 'yokes' (Tatar, Muslim, Turkish, et cetera), had Westernised their theology so that it was at odds with their distinctively Eastern spiritual character. The confusion wrought by this Western 'pseudomorphosis' of Orthodox consciousness (which Florovsky detailed in his massive 1937 work, *The Ways*



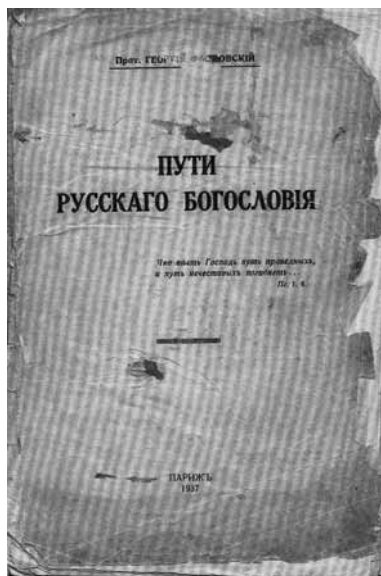
Eurasianism originated in the Russian émigré community in the 1920s. Together with Georges Florovsky, among its initial exponents were the geographer and economist Petr Savitsky (1895-1968) (shown on the left in the photo), the linguist Nikolai Trubetsky (1890-1938) (centre) and the musicologist Petr Suvchinsky (1892-1985) (on the right).



Father Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944), the Russian philosopher, theologian and Orthodox priest.



Visiting Sergius Bulgakov, Paris, 1930s. Georges Florovsky, Father Sergius Bulgakov, and Sergei Bezobrazov (the future Bishop Kassian, an active member of the ecumenical movement and of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius).



The Ways of Russian Theology. Paris, 1937.

of *Russian Theology*)⁵ came to the crisis point in the twentieth century in a long succession of national tragedies including the Armenian Genocide of 1915, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 and subsequent Civil War (1917-1922), and the 1923 'Asia-Minor catastrophe' during which most of the substantial Greek population of Asia Minor (in what is now modern Turkey) was massacred or expelled. Florovsky's theology, which calls for a renewal of the Orthodox Church by a return to its Patristic, liturgical and monastic sources, is a response to this confusion.

THE BULGAKOVIAN CONTEXT AND THE FINAL AMERICAN YEARS

These years also saw two controversies with Bulgakov (then Dean of Saint Serge) that would confirm Florovsky in his theological project: the 1933-5 controversy concerning Bulgakov's Proposals for Limited Episcopally Blessed Intercommunion between the Anglican and Orthodox Churches in the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, of which Florovsky was a vocal opponent, and the 1935-7 controversy concerning sophiology in which he mostly opposed Bulgakov through non-public measures. Florovsky opposed what he saw as the ecclesially universalist and pantheist tendencies of Bulgakov's sophiology in both these episodes through a contrasting maximalist insistence on what he understood to be the maintenance and defence of traditional doctrinal and ecclesial boundaries. Ultimately, the memory of Florovsky's trenchant opposition to the well-beloved Bulgakov (d. 1944), and his sometimes imperious manner, led to hostility from his colleagues and in 1948 he eagerly took up a professorship in Dogmatic Theology and Patristics (and from 1949, the deanship) at the newly formed Saint Vladimir's Orthodox

⁵ Cf. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology, I, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* [hereafter cited as CW, I, CW, II etc.], Gen. Ed. Richard Haugh (Vaduz, Liechtenstein and Belmont, MA: Buechervertriebsanstalt, 1974-89), V, p.85 (See *Puti Russkogo Bogoslovija* (Vilnius: Vilnius Orthodox Diocesan Council, 1991)) and 'Western Influences in Russian Theology', CW, IV, p.170; the term is derived from mineralogy via Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1915/22). A pseudomorph is a crystal of one mineral with the form of another (George Hunston Williams, 'Father Georges Florovsky's Vision of Ecumenism', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 41(2-3) (1996), p.154). See also F.J. Thomson, 'Peter Mogila's Ecclesiastical Reforms and the Ukrainian Contribution to Russian Culture: A Critique of Georges Florovsky's Theory of the Pseudomorphosis of Orthodoxy', *Slavica Gandensia*, 20 (1993), pp.67-119.

ORTHODOX PHILOSOPHERS

GEORGES FLOROVSKY



Teachers and students of the Paris Theological Institute, 1931. Seated (centre) Father Sergius Bulgakov, Metropolitan Evlogy (Georgievsky), and Father John (Shahovskoy). Georges Florovsky is standing third from the right.



Theological Seminary then in New York City.

As Dean of Saint Vladimir's, he formed the seminary into a Pan-Orthodox institution with the highest academic standards and an international reputation gained through his well-publicised ecumenical labours within the WCC. To a faculty that already included such Russian émigré luminaries as Nicholas Lossky (1870-1965) (father of Vladimir Lossky), George Fedotov (1886-1951), and Nicholas Arseniev (1888-1977), he also recruited

Conference of the Fellowship of St Alban the Martyr and St Sergius in 1936. Father Bulgakov and Father Florovsky are in the centre. High Leigh, 1937.

younger emigrant scholars who later became leaders in Orthodox theology and church life in America, including Father Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983) in 1951, Serge Verhovskoy (1907-1986) in 1952, and Veselin Kesich (1921-2012) in 1953. He initiated the first Orthodox theological journal in North America, *Saint Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*

ORTHODOX PHILOSOPHERS

GEORGES FLOROVSKY



Father Georges Florovsky arrives for the meeting of the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches in New York. April 7th 1947.



At the first, founding assembly of the World Council of Churches. Amsterdam, 1948.



Teaching at the Saint Vladimir Seminary, 1948.



With Father Vladimir Borichevsky (later Dean of St Tikhon's Seminary, Pennsylvania) at the second Assembly of the WCC, Evanston, Illinois, August 1954.

(subsequently *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*). His lecturing was renowned for its unsystematic and high flown (even 'rhapsodic') style in which he would jump from ancient to modern periods and back again. Thus, in the course of lecturing on Origen's thought,

he would link it to Paul Tillich (1886-1965) from which he would then speak of Tillich's opponent Barth so he might then go on to discuss Tertullian. This dizzying approach to teaching won over a few dedicated disciples as well as graduate auditors but left many

of the young seminarians more than a little confused, being, as they often were, emigrants themselves (for example, Japanese, Polish, Slovakian, or Russian) or the sons of emigrant clergy from the cross-border Eastern European areas of Ruthenia and Galicia that had settled in the Rust Belt of America (Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York). However, in the process of all this academic and ecclesial work, he alienated both the faculty and the students of Saint Vladimir's who found him at once intellectually dazzling but overbearing, distant but demeaning and short-tempered, and, finally, subject to going way beyond the bounds of his teaching syllabus but yet uncompromisingly academically demanding. Moreover, Florovsky was more often than not absent from the seminary on lecture tours or abroad for WCC business and so was quite disconnected from the daily routine of seminary life. During this period, Father Schmemmann and Verhovskoy effectively ran the institution. A series of missteps, including a conflict with the popular Father Schmemmann whose family was briefly evicted from their seminary apartment, led to his dismissal by the Board of Trustees in early 1955. Florovsky then taught part-time at schools in Boston⁶ and New York until he obtained a position at the Harvard Divinity School in early 1956, the first Orthodox theologian to hold a post there. He taught patristics and Russian culture and history at Harvard, all the while continuing his ecumenical involvement, especially in the World Council of Churches, and writing a number of seminal essays on tradition, patristics and ecumenism. In the autumn of 1964 he moved to Princeton University as Visiting Professor of Slavic Studies and Religion. On 11th August 1979, Florovsky died at eighty-five years of age in Princeton, New Jersey. He had retained his identity as an Orthodox Christian to the end through revolution, exile, war, displacement and life in a score of countries. ■



Father Georges Florovsky working at home, in his office in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



With his wife, Xenia Ivanovna. 1960s.

First published in S. J. Kristiansen and Svein Rise, eds., Key Theological Thinkers – From Modern to Postmodern Theologians (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate 2013), Chapter 28: “Georges Florovsky”. 353-370.

⁶ Interestingly, Florovsky taught part-time from 1955 to 1965 at the Greek seminary in Boston, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, until he was fired by then Bishop (later Greek Orthodox Primate of the Archdiocese of North and South America) Iakovos (Coucouzis) (1911-2005) in a faculty dispute concerning Florovsky's advice on fasting to some conservative students.

Florovsky's Ecumenism

Orthodox Ecumenism as Missionary Activity and the Limits of the Church

By Dr Brandon Gallaher

Florovsky's essential ecumenical position was forged in the mid-1930s in reaction to Bulgakov's ecumenical work. Bulgakov believed both that the churches might be led to unity by limited episcopally blessed intercommunion and that although the Orthodox Church most fully embodied the Church Universal or *Una Sancta*, the Church Universal was not bound by its limits and included to a lesser degree other ecclesial bodies as true churches.¹ Throughout his work, in contrast, Florovsky is clear that he believed that the Orthodox Church is *the true and only* Church which does not witness to a 'local tradition of her own' but witnesses to 'Patristic tradition' or 'the common heritage of the Church universal.'² Nevertheless, he argued that not everything that had been held or was even then held by the Orthodox Church was the 'truth of God'. All other churches, he argued, had defected from Orthodoxy as the common tradition of the Undivided Church or were 'schismatic' and were consequently called to return and be healed (i.e. 'conversion') within the unity of the Orthodox Church.³ Intercommunion, between the Orthodox and the heterodox, whose faith and life

were so radically different, was naturally inconceivable and as a *means* to unity it was "a blind alley from which there is no escape".⁴ Future progress on the road to unity would only come from supplementing an 'ecumenism in space' (the discovery and registry of the various agreements and disagreements amongst the churches) with an 'ecumenism in time', which was the reintegration of the East and the West in their return to their common tradition in Orthodoxy;⁵ although he tended to see this common tradition as essentially 'Eastern', 'Christian Hellenist' and 'Greek' in character. Florovsky, not surprisingly, saw the involvement of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement as a kind of 'missionary activity'⁶ or as the witness of the truth of Orthodoxy to the whole Christian world: "Christian reunion is just universal conversion to Orthodoxy ... What is beyond [the Church's norm of the rule of faith and order] is just abnormal. But the abnormal should be cured and not simply condemned. This is a justification for the participation of an Orthodox in the ecumenical discourse, in the hope that through his witness the Truth of God may win human hearts and

¹ See the following works by myself: Brandon Gallaher, 'Bulgakov and Intercommunion', *Sobornost*, 24(2) (2002), pp.9-28 (sequel to 'Bulgakov's Ecumenical Thought', *Sobornost*, 24(1) (2002), pp.24-55), *Catholic Action: Ecclesiology, the Eucharist and the Question of Intercommunion in the Ecumenism of Sergii Bulgakov*, MDiv thesis, St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 2003, 'Great and full of Grace': Partial Intercommunion and Sophiology in Sergii Bulgakov, in *Church and World: Essays in Honor of Michael Plekon*, ed. William C. Mills (Rollinsford, New Hampshire: Orthodox Research Institute, 2013), pp.69-121 and 'Father Sergius Bulgakov' in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education: "That they all may be one" (John 17,21)*, eds. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitzGerald, Cyril Hovorun, Aikaterini Pekridou, Nikolaos Asproulis, Guy Liagre and Dietrich Werner (Volos, Greece: Volos Academy Publications in cooperation with WCC Publications, Geneva, and Regnum Books International, Oxford, 2014), pp.201-206.

² Florovsky, 'The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement', *Theology Today*, 7(1) (April 1950), pp.68-79 at 72.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.204-205.

⁴ Florovsky cited in 'Report of Conference held at High Leigh June 26-28, 1934 on "The Healing of Schism"'. Found in Oxford Archive of The Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. Folder labelled 'The Fellowship Conference Policy Before 1940', p.6.

⁵ Florovsky, 'The Challenge of Disunity', *Saint Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, 3(1-2) (Fall-Winter 1954-5), pp.31-36 at 36.

⁶ Florovsky, 'Une vue sur l'Assemblée d'Amsterdam', *Irénikon*, 22(1) (1949), pp.5-25 at 9.



Father Georges Florovsky, Father Sergii Bulgakov and attendees of the first congress of Orthodox theology. Athens, 1936.

minds.”⁷ He largely enunciated this vision of ecumenism in successive ecumenical meetings of the WCC in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Florovsky’s ecumenical theology has since become the core of the present rationale for Orthodox involvement in the ecumenical movement – ecumenism as a sort of tacit evangelism.

Furthermore, although Florovsky believed the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church *is* (not merely, in a weak sense, ‘subsists in’) the Orthodox Church, he did not hold that only Orthodox were therefore Christians. He contended, most famously in the 1933 essay ‘The Limits of the Church’,⁸ which itself is dependent on an earlier little known essay of Bulgakov,⁹ that *individual Christians* in various schismatic bodies existed outside of the canonical but inside the spiritual bounds of the Orthodox Church. This quasi-membership of certain heterodox in the Orthodox



Father Georges Florovsky at the Faith and Order conference at which the plan to establish a World Council of Churches was agreed.

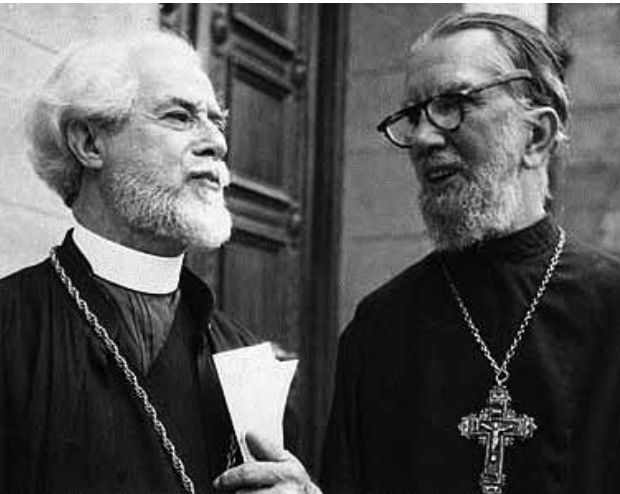
⁷ Florovsky, ‘Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement’, pp.204-205.

⁸ See Florovsky, ‘The Limits of the Church’, *Church Quarterly Review*, 117 (233) (October 1933), pp.117-31 and also see ‘The Doctrine of the Church and the Ecumenical Movement’, *The Ecumenical Review*, 2(2) (Winter 1950), pp.152-61.

⁹ Bulgakov, ‘Ocherki ucheniia o tserkvi. (III). Tserkov’ i ‘Inoslavie’’, *Put’*, 4 (June–July 1926), pp.3-26. Abridged translation: ‘Outlines of the Teaching about the Church: The Church and Non-Orthodoxy’, *American Church Monthly*, 30(6) (1931), pp.411-23 and 31(1) (1932), pp.13-26.



With eminent theologian, Rector of Chalki Theological School, Metropolitan Germanos (Strinopoulos) of Thyateira and Great Britain. Geneva, 1950.



With Athenagoras Cavadas (Bishop of New England, First Dean of Holy Cross Seminary) at the Faith and Order Conference of the World Council of Churches in Lund, Sweden, 1952.

Church is by virtue of such elements as right belief, the preaching of the Word of God and true devotion. Above all, and here he adapts Augustine,¹⁰ the heterodox could be said to be Christians due to the ‘validity’ of their Trinitarian baptism whose graciousness and ecclesiality, albeit lacking full efficacy outside the canonical bounds of the Church, the mainstream tradition of the Orthodox Church acknowledges by receiving the heterodox believers not by a ‘new baptism’ but by the sacraments of Confession or Chrismation. The validity of heterodox sacraments is the guarantee that God continues to act through the Church even in Christians separated from the true Church, drawing separated Christians back to the fullness of union and communion within herself.

This should not be taken to mean Florovsky supported the so-called ‘branch-theory’ which sees the Orthodox Church as but one of many branches of the historical Christian Church including Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. But for him neither was the term ‘church’ a magic word reserved only for the ‘Orthodox Church’ thus meaning that if one calls the Anglican Church, ‘a church’, that it is of the same ecclesial and dogmatic reality, or even one with, as Orthodoxy. This is manifestly not the case, contrary to the recent opinions of some zealots. For Florovsky, the Cyprianic and Nikodimite view that outside the canonical walls of Orthodoxy there was undifferentiated darkness and that all heterodox sacraments are null and void was a late theological distortion and overreaction. In no way, he argued, are the canonical and spiritual bounds of the Church identical. He claimed that this latter opinion emerged in the counter-Reformation when Orthodox were being rebaptised by Roman Catholics and, though it was an understandable overreaction at the time, it was contrary to the explicit teaching of

¹⁰ See Will Cohen, ‘Sacraments and the Visible Unity of the Church’, *Ecclesiology*, 4.1 (2007), pp.68-87.

the Fathers who distinguished between the sacraments of different sorts of heretics (for example, Gnostics from Arians) and heretics from schismatics who had broken from the Church but whose basic teaching was sound and so whose baptism also could be said to be in some sense Orthodox as well. As Saint Basil explains in his first canonical epistle, “it seemed good to the ancient authorities to reject the baptism of heretics altogether, but to admit that of schismatics, on the ground that they still belonged to the Church” (Letter 188, to Amphilochius). This is the reason why the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate receive Roman Catholics and Protestants with a Trinitarian Baptism through the Sacrament of Chrismation and not through a repetition of their Baptism which is considered ‘valid’ though lacking efficacy outside the canonical Church. Florovsky certainly believed the Orthodox Church was *the true and only* Church though the true Church is not yet the perfect Church. Other bodies (to a greater or lesser degree) might in some sense be said to be ‘churches’ as well but only insofar as they faced the Orthodox Church, the Body of the Living Christ, the “fullness of Him that fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23) and resembled the Church and contained through their right teaching and sacraments, a grain of Orthodoxy. It is to be hoped that Florovsky’s theology of ecumenism will be vindicated by the positive reception of the Holy and Great Council which was held in Chania, Crete in June 2016. His ecumenical theology is founded on the witness of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world which ever draws other Christians back to the fullness of life in Christ, where their baptism finds its fulfillment. ■

First published in S. J. Kristiansen and Svein Rise, eds., Key Theological Thinkers – From Modern to Postmodern Theologians (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate 2013), Chapter 28: “Georges Florovsky”. 353-370.



Father Georges Florovsky at the Second Assembly of the WCC, Evanston, Illinois, August 1954. In the same year he was elected President of the National Council of Churches in the USA.



Father Georges Florovsky in Greece, 1959, where he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Thessaloniki.