

The Hour is Coming, and is Now Come: Sergei Bulgakov and the Search for the Ecumenical Future

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation draws upon the lived and written ecclesiology of Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov (1871-1944) in order to make theological and methodological contributions to the current debates surrounding the future of the Christian ecumenical movement.

Part I lays the groundwork for the subsequent chapters. It begins with a brief introduction to Bulgakov's personal history and context, as well as an identification of the most relevant primary and secondary sources on the topics of Church and ecumenism. This is followed by a short survey of the origins and significant highlights of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century, and an identification of certain challenges which have emerged in the latter part of the century.

Part II represents the heart of the study. It sets out to engage in an in-depth examination of the key features of Bulgakov's ecumenical thought and career. Initial attention is given to both the personal and intellectual influences which shaped Bulgakov's vision of Christian unity. Bulgakov's distinctive Sophiology is then reviewed, with particular attention to the way it impacts his understanding of the limits of the Church, his views on the respective roles of the hierarchy and the laity in seeking reunion, his insistence on the prophetic orientation of ecumenical work, and his appreciation for the ecclesiological and ecumenical significance of face to face relationship between separated Christians and Christian communities. Finally, these features are observed in action through a narration of some of Bulgakov's most notable and representative ecumenical involvements.

Part III does the work of positive construction. The lessons learned from Bulgakov's example serve to lend both theoretical and practical support to those twenty-first century ecumenical impulses which are emphasizing a distinguishable but integrated understanding of the ecumenical aim, a re-recognition of the importance of local and grassroots relationships, renewed attention to the spiritual dimensions of division and the role of spiritual experience as necessary companion to doctrinal dialogue, and an appreciation for the possibility of recourse to sharing the Eucharist as a means to greater communion rather than simply the end goal of the ecumenical task.

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A word of gratitude goes to Allan Smith as well, who unexpectedly had to step in to direct my research part way through the process. I owe my first introduction to Bulgakov’s thought to Dr. Smith, and have learned a great deal from him in the area of Russian history and theology. He was also very patient with me as I sought to get this project to completion while balancing full time work and full time family life.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the staff of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, Oxford UK. Their assistance during my archival research was invaluable.

The final thank you is offered to Fr. Sergei Bulgakov, for the way he lived and worked in the Spirit of these inspirational words: “The way towards the reunion of the East and the West does not lead through the Union of Florence or through tournaments between theologians, but through a reunion before the altar.”

Contemplata aliis tradere

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
Part 1 – The Hour is Coming	1
Chapter 1: Going to the Well.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 A Potential Resource	5
1.3 A Selected Literature Review	7
1.4 Conclusion	17
Chapter 2: The Ecumenical Golden Age	20
2.1 The Great New Fact	20
2.2 Ecumenical Highlights	21
2.2.1 The World Council of Churches	22
2.2.2 Bilateral Dialogues	30
2.2.3 Communion Agreements	37
2.3 Conclusion	41
Chapter 3: The Ecumenical Turning Point	42
3.1 A Change of Pace	42
3.2 Ecumenical Challenges	44
3.2.1 Wider Ecumenism	44
3.2.2 Bureaucratization	53
3.2.3 Consensus	59
3.2.4 Reception	63
3.3 Conclusion	67
Part 2 – Bulgakovian Ecumenism	68
Chapter 4: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology	69
4.1 A Product of Time and Place	69
4.2 Russian Role Models	70
4.2.1 Aleksei Khomiakov	70
4.2.2 Vladimir Soloviev	71
4.3 The Sacred Council of 1917	73
4.4 Revolution and Exile	76
4.5 Paris and St. Serge	80
4.6 The Sophia Controversy	83
4.7 Conclusion	86
Chapter 5: An Ecclesiology of Ecumenism.....	88
5.1 Written Ecclesiology.....	88

5.2 A Sophiology of Church	90
5.2.1 Origins of Sophiology	90
5.2.2 Bulgakov, Sophia, and Ecclesiology	97
5.3 One, Holy, Sobornaia	119
5.3.1 Khomiakov and Sobornost'	120
5.3.2 A Sobornaia Church	124
5.4 A Primacy in Prophecy	128
5.5 An Ecclesiology of Friendship	136
5.6 Conclusion	140
Chapter 6: Lived Ecumenism	142
6.1 Ecumenism in Action	142
6.2 The Russian Student Christian Movement	143
6.3 Faith and Order	147
6.4 The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius	154
6.5 The Intercommunion Proposal	159
6.6 Conclusion	166
Chapter 7: Bulgakovian Ecumenism	167
7.1. A Review	167
7.1.1 Spiritual Division, Spiritual Unity	167
7.1.2 Prophetic Ecumenism	168
7.1.3 Ecumenical Relationships	170
7.2 Drawbacks to Bulgakov as a Resource	171
7.2.1 Bulgakov's Reputation	172
7.2.2 The Necessity of Sophiology	178
7.2.3 Bulgakov and Anglicanism	180
7.3 Conclusion	183
Part 3 – And is Now Come	184
Chapter 8: Bulgakov and the Ecumenical Future	185
8.1 Bulgakovian Resources	185
8.1.1 Bulgakov and Wider Ecumenism	185
8.1.2 Bulgakov and Local/Grassroots Ecumenism	191
8.1.3 Bulgakov, Spiritual Ecumenism, and Ecumenism of Life	204
8.1.4 Bulgakov and Ecumenical Eucharistic Sharing	221
Chapter 9: This Leg of the Journey	239
9.1 Conclusion	239
BIBLIOGRAPHY	243

Part 1
The Hour is Coming

“So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink”, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, “I have no husband”; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’”

– The Gospel According to John 4:5-26

Chapter 1

Going to the Well

1.1 Introduction

The biblical epigraph above is commonly referred to as the story of The Woman at the Well. The well in question is taken to be that of Jacob, the Father of Israel. It was initially visited simply for a drink, or perhaps to do some household work. Of course, it has since been the source of considerable inspiration by scholars and preachers alike. The Russian Orthodox priest and theologian, Fr. Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov (1871-1944), was very fond of biblical typology, and he regularly made use of it in much of his wide-ranging theological reflection. His creative ecumenical interpretation of this particular narrative is one good example of this. In this beloved Gospel account are found many of the basic convictions which characterized Bulgakov's vision of the Church, especially with respect to the issues of ecclesial division and reunion.¹ A historical and theological analysis of the influences and the results of those convictions, as a methodological reflection on their contemporary application, is the burden of this study.

The familiar Johannine text records Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman who has gone to draw water. This is the woman which Christian tradition has remembered as St. Photini. The religious and cultural subtleties involved in their meeting can be somewhat lost on us today, but it seems clear from the details that are given that the encounter is meant to surprise us. Of course, the first curiosity we are told about is that Jesus is found to be

¹ See the essay "By Jacob's Well," in *Sergius Bulgakov: A Bulgakov Anthology*, ed. James Pain and Nicolas Zernov, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976). This short treatise is the single most important text in Bulgakov's corpus for discerning his views on subject of the reunion of the churches.

speaking to a woman alone, and evidently a woman with a reputation for a difficult past. The even greater scandal, however, is that Jesus asks her, a Samaritan, to give him something to drink. The unprecedented nature of the request is highlighted for us by the woman's response and the Gospel writer's parenthetical commentary: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria (for Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans)?"² The icon which displays this event in salvation history shows the woman looking perplexed, yet listening intently. Interestingly, we also see St. Peter, the disciple who is ever vigilant for protocol and appearances, standing close by. He is suitably astounded at the Lord's impropriety. Yet, despite the woman's initial suspicion of the stranger, she can tell there is something different about this man. He speaks to her as if he knows everything about her, and cryptically reveals himself as the source of "living water" which will forever quench her thirst.

Trying to make sense of the mysterious words she hears, her first reaction is to try to enter into a theological debate: "The woman said to him 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.'"³ In other words, she instinctively falls back on the established order of things, and the rules and regulations which perpetuate them. It is then that Jesus offers her the mysterious and powerful reply:

Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.⁴

² John 4:9b

³ John 4:19-20

⁴ John 4:21-23a

St. Photini understood this prophecy of reconciliation as a sure sign that the Messiah had come, and she left that place proclaiming her new-found hope with great joy.

Sergei Bulgakov read Jesus' prophecy of a spiritual unity that transcends the human-made divisions as a message not only for the Jews and Samaritans of first century Palestine, but for the people of God in every subsequent generation. As we will see, he did not gloss over the realities of the heresies and schisms which had severed large portions of the Western Church from the communion of the East. He would continue to affirm, with Jesus, that 'the hour was coming' when the sins of division would be overcome and the spiritual and visible unity of the churches would be restored. This was a future hope, and, this side of the fullness of time would always be an ongoing task. Yet he was also eager to recognize that Jesus had assured the woman that in him, in some sense the realization of that hope 'had now come.' For Bulgakov, this seems to have been an enduring reminder that the communion which Christians share with one another is a gift which has its foundation in the person of Christ, and it is realized when and how God wills. The unity of the Church is given to us, not created by us.

Because of this basic orientation, Bulgakov was a preeminent ecumenical optimist. One might even say he was a radical, always pushing the envelope with a prophetic word about where that true worship in the Spirit was breaking through provisions and canons in unexpected ways. Even in the face of serious challenges to progress, which he certainly did experience, Bulgakov was able to move forward with confidence and hope rather than pessimism and doubt, and to encourage others forward with him.

Bulgakov has much to offer to the contemporary ecumenical conversation, especially as the movement continues to struggle to determine its next steps following nearly a century of important breakthroughs. On one level, we can learn from some of the practical experiences which Bulgakov had of ecumenism during the early stages of the organized movement. More importantly, Bulgakov's ecclesiology provides a basis both for diagnosing some of the present challenges in the work for Christian unity, including some projections for a potential way forward. In the end, we will likely continue to conclude, as Bulgakov did, that the great hour which Jesus promised for those who worshipped him is still coming. However, we will hopefully also have a clearer sense about what to look for when seeking to determine where that promise has already come, as well as some ideas about how to respond when we do find it.

1.2 A Potential Resource

Sergei Bulgakov was born in 1871, in the Russian town of Livny, into an Orthodox Christian family.⁵ His father was a priest, as were his grandfather and great grandfather before that. As a young man, however, Sergei did not seem at all interested in following the path which his heredity seemed to have placed before him. Instead, he embarked upon his adult life as a student of Marxism in pursuit of an academic career as a philosopher of economics.

Despite this initial vocational trajectory, Bulgakov was never entirely at ease with the Marxist worldview. Two of his earliest publications, the 1897 text entitled '*On Markets in*

⁵ Bulgakov's autobiography is *Avtobiograficheskiia Zametki* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1946). Portions of it appear in English translation in *A Bulgakov Anthology*, ed. James Pain and Nicolas Zernov, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976). I have relied on these translated excerpts for my personal details.

Capitalist Production,⁶ and the two-volume study '*Capitalism and Agriculture*,⁷ written four years later, were critical of Marxist theory at key points, suggesting that Marx's analysis did not accurately apply to agrarian Russia. Bulgakov would eventually come to reject the materialism of the Marxist worldview, finding it incapable of justifying its own value judgements about the economic conditions of the past, or its hope in positive progress in the future.⁸

This loss of intellectual faith, combined with a series of mystical experiences and the death of a son, began a process in his life which would ultimately culminate in a return to the Orthodox faith in middle age. Not long after his renewed embrace of Orthodoxy, Bulgakov would also return to follow his ancestors in their priestly call. He would be ordained to the priesthood in 1918, right in the midst of the turmoil following the Bolshevik Revolution.

Although Bulgakov had been somewhat politically active during the years of his transition towards Christian faith,⁹ he was not an especially outspoken critic of the Revolution. He was, however, a Christian philosopher of some influence, and therefore the subject of suspicion by the powers that be. In 1922 and 1923 the so-called Philosopher's ships would carry away several hundred Russian intellectuals to destinations in Central and Western Europe, and Fr. Bulgakov was among them. After spending several years in Crimea and the Czech Republic,

⁶ The Russian original is Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov, *O Rynkakh pri Kapitalisticheskom Proizvodstve*, (Moscow: M.I. Vodovozova, 1897).

⁷ The Russian original is Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov, *Kapitalizm i Zemledelie*, (Moscow: Tichanov, 1901).

⁸ Some of the personal and intellectual turmoil involved in this transition is narrated in Sergej Nikolaevich Bulgakov, *Ot Marksizma k idealizmu*, (St. Petersburg: Obshestvennaia polža 1903).

⁹ Bulgakov served as a representative to the Duma from 1907 to 1912.

Bulgakov was eventually pushed even further away from home to spend the rest of his life as a Russian exile in the city of Paris.

Largely out of necessity the exiled Russian community had to forge a number of relationships and alliances with churches and Christian groups with which, prior to the Revolution, they had only had the most minimal of direct contact. Thus began Bulgakov's ecumenical career. Bulgakov quickly became one of the most widely involved and well-known early Orthodox ecumenists. He gladly threw himself into the movement with tremendous passion. Though the form of his involvement would evolve somewhat over time, he held a consistent commitment to the ecumenical task for the remainder of his life. The cause of Christian reunion would become so important to him that he was even eventually willing to risk alienation from his own community in order to advance that goal.

1.3 A Selected Literature Review

Bulgakov remains a relative newcomer to the Western, English speaking theological scene. In part this has been due to the language barrier. Wider political and ecclesiastical tensions, which will be touched on later, have also played a role. In the last few decades, however, widespread academic engagement with Bulgakov's work has finally begun to blossom, especially in the West. Primary Bulgakov sources continue to be translated from their original language, with nearly every major work and many minor works now available or forthcoming in a variety of languages including French, Italian and English. A significant body of secondary sources on diverse aspects of Bulgakov's project has also appeared. This

includes general surveys,¹⁰ treatments of the philosophical foundations of his early thought,¹¹ discussions of his economic and political theories,¹² and engagements with his writings on a wide range of doctrinal subjects such as Trinitarian theology,¹³ the Theotokos,¹⁴ the Sacraments,¹⁵ Angels,¹⁶ and Eschatology.¹⁷

If Bulgakov's name is known by non-specialists it is usually for his somewhat infamous construction of a systematic theology heavily dependent upon the doctrine of Sophia, the uncreated Wisdom of God. Sometimes the official uproar surrounding this aspect of his work is better known than the content of the work itself. The specifics of Bulgakov's sophiology, and the questions surrounding it, will be dealt with at various points later in this study.

¹⁰ See for example Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above: A Primer in the Theology of Father Sergei Bulgakov*, (Gloucester, U.K.: Gracewing, 2005), T. Allan Smith, "A Century of Eastern Orthodox Theology in the West," *Religious Studies and Theology* 16 (1997): 60-77, Myroslaw Tataryn, "Sergei Bulgakov: Eastern Orthodoxy Engaging the Modern World," *Studies in Religion* 31, no. 3-4 (2002): 313-22, Myroslaw Tataryn, "Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944): Time for a New Look," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 (1998): 315-38, and Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov – Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000).

¹¹ Antoine Arjakovsky, *Essai sur le père Serge Boulgakov (1871-1944): philosophe et théologien chrétien*, (Paris: Parole et silence, 2006), Winston Ferris Crum, "Sergius N. Bulgakov. From Marxism to Sophiology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 27 (1983): 3-25, Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross & the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), Jonathan Seiling, *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, (PhD Diss., University of St. Michael's College, 2008).

¹² Scott Van Lingenfelter, *Tradition & Modernity: Sergei Bulgakov's Quest for a Christian Civil Society*. (University of Illinois at Chicago, 2005), Rowan Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999).

¹³ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, "The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005): 251-269, Charles Graves, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Sergius Bulgakov* (Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1972), Lingua Graziانو, *Kénosis di Dio e santità della materia: la sofiologia di Sergej N. Bulgakov*, (Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2000), Michael Aksionov Meerson, *The Trinity of Love in Modern Russian Theology: The Love Paradigm and the Retrieval of Western Medieval Love Mysticism in Modern Russian Trinitarian Thought (from Solvyov to Bulgakov)* (Chicago: Franciscan Press, 1998), John O'Donnell, "The Trinitarian Pantheism of Sergej Bulgakov," *Gregorianum* 76 (1995): 31-45, Mikhail Sergeev, "Divine Wisdom and the Trinity: A 20th century controversy in Orthodox Theology," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 45 (2000): 573-582, Rowan Williams, *A Margin of Silence: The Holy Spirit in Russian Orthodox Theology*, (Quebec: Editions du Lys Vert, 2008).

¹⁴ Andrew Louth, "Father Sergii Bulgakov on the Mother of God," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49.1/2 (2005): 145-164.

¹⁵ Andrew Louth, "Eucharist in Sergii Bulgakov," *Sobornost* 27:2 (2005): 36-56.

¹⁶ R. Slesinski, "Bulgakov's Angelology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49.1/2 (2005): 183-202.

¹⁷ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, "Universal Salvation in the Eschatology of Sergius Bulgakov," *Journal of Theological Studies* 57 (April 2006): 110-32, Arvydas Ramonas, *L'attesa del regno: eschaton e apocalisse in Sergej Bulgakov*, (Pontificia Università Lateranense, 2001),

Suffice it to say at this point that Sophia served more or less as an explanatory postulate in Bulgakov's theological system which he argued could be employed to illuminate the various fields of systematic theology which involved the synergistic interaction between the Divine and the human worlds.

It should be no surprise that the Church – a realm of tremendous Divine and creaturely interplay – should take an important place in such a theological project. In fact, the Church is one of Bulgakov's most central concerns. Several important studies of Bulgakov's ecclesiology have already been produced, including a few which deal directly with aspects of his ecumenical activity. A brief review of some of the most notable of these prior efforts will show where additional work remains to be done.

One of the earliest scholarly treatments dealing exclusively with Bulgakov's ecclesiology is Stanisław Świerkosz's 1980 study *L'église visible selon Serge Bulgakov: Structure hiérarchique et sacramentelle*.¹⁸ As Świerkosz observes, Bulgakov's ecclesiology can best be understood as the product of the evolution of the ecclesiology of the nineteenth century Russian thinker Aleksei Khomiakov¹⁹ brought into contact with the Christological, Soteriological and anthropological conclusions drawn from a foundation in the sophiology of Vladimir Soloviev. The attention given to the convergence in Bulgakov's thought of the Sophia concept and the Khomiakovian ideal of *sobornost'* can be attributed in part to Świerkosz's work of ground-breaking. I also follow Świerkosz in affirming that, despite the clear preference which a sophiological ecclesiology typically has for speaking of the Church

¹⁸ Stanisław Świerkosz, *L'Eglise visible selon Serge Bulgakov: structure hiérarchique et sacramentelle*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 211, (Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1980).

¹⁹ More on Khomiakov will appear in chapters below.

in an ideal or invisible sense, it was in fact Bulgakov's appreciation for what he called creaturely Sophia which ultimately prevented him from too extreme a neglect of the visible and structural elements of the Church. Although Świerkosz does not spend much time discussing Bulgakov's ecumenical involvement, his outline of the central convictions of Bulgakov's ecclesiology is highly relevant to the work which will be done in the chapters that follow.

Paul Valliere's *Modern Russian Theology*,²⁰ published in 2000, locates Bulgakov within the wider stream of twentieth century Russian theology. Although only about half of the volume is devoted to Bulgakov, it serves as an excellent introduction to many of the main theological themes found in Bulgakov's work. The chapter on the Church focuses on the church-World relationship in Bulgakov's thought, seeking to explain how Bulgakov preserved the distinction but also went beyond it to eschew any ultimate dualism.²¹ This feature of Bulgakov's thought is very relevant to his positive appraisal of the salvific status of that which is presently deemed outside the limits of Orthodoxy – something which becomes very important in his ecumenical thought (and indeed in connection with questions of an inter-religious nature as well). Valliere is also particularly helpful in terms of narrating Bulgakov's practical ecumenical activity. Unlike many of the other studies of Bulgakovian ecumenism which tend to focus almost exclusively on his involvement in the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, Valliere also pays special attention to Bulgakov's involvement in the Faith and Order Commission, and even comments on his visits to America. Particularly useful in this regard are Valliere's citations from the ecumenically relevant portions of Bulgakov's

²⁰ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 227-371.

²¹ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 347.

autobiography, as well as those from the diary entries of his bishop, the Metropolitan Evlogii. I will make use of a good deal of Valliere's work in developing my own commentary.

In my opinion, the best general introduction to Bulgakov's theological thought as a whole is Aidan Nichols' *Wisdom from Above*,²² published in 2005. The chapter on the Church is relatively brief, yet gives a good picture of the main thrusts of Bulgakov's ecclesiology. He begins by highlighting Bulgakov's use of the synergistic images of the Church as Body of Christ and Bride of the Lamb to elaborate on the ultimately sophiological notion that the Church is simultaneously the origin and *telos* of the world.²³ The more broadly conceived section on Bulgakov found in another of Nichols' texts, *Light From the East*,²⁴ highlights his conviction that each local church is a full manifestation of the Church in totality, and the corresponding rejection of the notion of any canonically mandated subordination of local churches and local bishops to higher organs of ecclesiastical authority. The tremendous impact which these features of Bulgakov's ecclesiology exercise upon his ecumenism is something which I will go on to discuss in Chapters 2 and 3.

The more significant treatment of Bulgakov's ecumenical contributions to date comes from the exceptionally thorough scholarship of Brandon Gallaher. Major portions of Gallaher's labours were made available in an abridged form in 2002 in the journal *Sobornost*.²⁵ This

²² Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above: A Primer in the Theology of Father Sergei Bulgakov*, (Gloucester, U.K.: Gracewing, 2005).

²³ *Ibid.*, 197ff.

²⁴ Nichols, *Light from the East*, 122-23.

²⁵ Anastassy Gallaher, "Bulgakov's Ecumenical Thought," *Sobornost* 24.1 (2002): 24-55, and Anastassy Gallaher, "Bulgakov and Intercommunion," *Sobornost* 24.2 (2002): 9-28.

research would then be defended as a Master of Divinity thesis in 2003, under the title *Catholic Action: Ecclesiology, the Eucharist, and the Question of Intercommunion in the Ecumenism of Sergii Bulgakov*.²⁶ Gallaher's meticulous sifting of unpublished material held in the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius has paved the way for all future Bulgakov scholars, including mine. His reconstruction of the time-line of events surrounding Bulgakov's proposal for intercommunion between the members of the Fellowship is meticulous. A 2013 offering entitled "Great and Full of Grace" further develops the link between Bulgakov's intercommunion proposal and his sophiology.²⁷ In addition, Gallaher is one of the scholars who have insisted that interpreters must uniquely attend to Bulgakov's personal experience of Church in order to fully understand the origins and shape of his ecumenism.²⁸ I follow Gallaher in this observation, and expand upon it. Gallaher is also the first to begin to make some application of Bulgakov's ecumenical history to the ecumenical landscape of the twenty-first century.²⁹

I will draw heavily upon Gallaher's work to compose my own picture of Bulgakovian ecumenism. However, I am in no way interested in simply repeating Gallaher's observations and conclusions. Gallaher focuses largely upon Bulgakov's history with the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, and especially his work on the question of intercommunion. While this is clearly a high point and paradigmatic crystallization of his ecumenical thought, I

²⁶ Brandon Gallaher, *Catholic Action: Ecclesiology, the Eucharist and the Question of Intercommunion in the Ecumenism of Sergii Bulgakov*, (St Vladimir's Theological Seminary, 2003).

²⁷ Brandon Gallaher, "Great and Full of Grace," in *Church and World: Essays in Honour of Michael Plekon*, William C. Mills ed., (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2013): 69-121.

²⁸ Gallaher, "Bulgakov's Ecumenical Thought," 27.

²⁹ Gallaher, "Bulgakov and Intercommunion," 25.

intend to draw on a somewhat wider range of sources and experiences.³⁰ Most importantly, I will make the connection between Bulgakov and the contemporary ecumenical situation explicit, which is something that Gallaher has not attempted to do. The latter represents the most creative dividend of my project. This work is the heart of this dissertation and will be the subject of the crucial chapter eight.

Bryn Geffert's 2003 dissertation on the history of relations between Anglicans and Orthodox in the first half of the twentieth century includes two chapters that deal in considerable depth with Bulgakov the ecumenist.³¹ This study was revised and published as a monograph six years later.³² Geffert's research is a resource that will be indispensable for future studies of Bulgakovian ecumenism, and I readily acknowledge my indebtedness to Geffert's historical spade-work on the Russian Student Christian Movement, the 1927 Lausanne Conference of Faith and Order, and the Fellowship of St. Alban and Sergius. However, Geffert's study is primarily historical and does not really seek to address contemporary questions of ecumenical methodology. This wider application is precisely the work which I will be taking up.

Recognition must also be given to Michael Plekon's 2005 article "Still by Jacob's Well."³³

While Plekon does offer a concise summary of the ecumenical features of Bulgakov's

³⁰ Gallaher deals quite minimally with the principle of *sobornost'* as it functions in Bulgakov's ecclesiology. He does not speak at all about the notion of Johannine primacy, nor does he comment on the ecclesiological significance of Christian friendship. I see these as important additions which help complete our picture of Bulgakovian ecumenical thought.

³¹ Bryn Geffert, *Anglicans and Orthodox between the Wars*, (PhD. Diss. University of Minnesota, 2003).

³² Bryn Geffert, *Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans: Diplomacy, Theology, and the Politics of Interwar Ecumenism*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

³³ Michael Plekon, "Still by Jacob's Well: Sergius Bulgakov's Vision of the Church Revisited," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49 (2005), no. 1/2: 125-44.

ecclesiology,³⁴ it is Plekon's engagement with Bulgakov's similarly titled essay "By Jacobs Well" which represents his most important contribution. From this brief paper, Plekon draws out some useful points regarding Bulgakov's highly positive evaluation ecumenical scripture study and ecumenical prayer, as well as his continued faith in the unifying power of sacraments even in a state of division.³⁵ Plekon also suggests, as Gallaher, that Bulgakov's ecumenical example is ripe for contemporary application, especially given the frustrated conditions of the ecumenical movement.³⁶ Unfortunately, he too provides little in the way of specifics. Any precise extrapolation as to what Bulgakov might contribute to the present day ecumenical scene remains wanting.

Another major engagement with Bulgakov's ecclesiology and ecumenical activity is Sergei Nikolaev's 2007 doctoral dissertation entitled *Church and Reunion in the Theology of Sergei Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky, 1918-1940*.³⁷ Portions of this study also appeared in condensed form in a 2005 article for *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*.³⁸ Though again not exclusively focused on Bulgakov, the study uses the respective ecumenical methodologies of both Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky, one of his principle critics, to draw some conclusions about each man's ecclesiology. In my opinion, one of Nikolaev's most important observations is the degree to which Bulgakov was driven by a prophetic interpretation of his own spiritual experience through ecumenism, as opposed to Florovsky's

³⁴ Ibid., 136-40.

³⁵ Ibid., 130-35.

³⁶ "Perhaps Fr. Sergius' powerful vision of the Church will still give us the joy that sent Photina running back into the village with the good news... Perhaps we will have not only the 'living water' but also the 'food' to eat that we 'do not know about.'" Ibid., 143.

³⁷ S. V. Nikolaev, *Church and Reunion in the Theology of Sergii Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky, 1918-1940*, (Southern Methodist University, 2007).

³⁸ Sergei Nikolaev, "Spiritual Unity: The Role of Religious Authority in the Disputes Between Sergii Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky Concerning Intercommunion," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49 (2005), no. 1/2: 101-124.

more typical concern for seeking precedence in the past from Tradition and canon law.³⁹ My own emphasis on this spiritual-prophetic feature of Bulgakovian ecumenism owes itself in part to Nikolaev's discussion. However, my treatment of the subject will attempt to connect this feature of Bulgakov's thought more completely to the ecclesiological themes of Sophia and *sobornost'*. My reflection will also benefit by taking into consideration the other aspects of Bulgakov's ecumenical work and not confining itself to the Fellowship and the debates over intercommunion.

Angela McCormick's 2009 thesis, "That all May be One in the Eucharist and the Church: A Comparison of the Eucharistic Theologies and Ecumenical Possibilities of John Paul II and Sergius Bulgakov," also engages in the work of comparison.⁴⁰ As the title suggests, specific attention is given to the ecumenical implications of Bulgakov's theology of the Eucharist. McCormick rightly gives considerable attention to the impact of both the historical context in which he lived and the intellectual assumptions which grounded his thought in her discussion of Bulgakov's ecumenical career. Although her constructive commentary is geared specifically towards addressing issues in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic ecumenical relationship, she does take a few small steps further than Gallaher, Geffert, Plekon and Nikolaev by explicitly applying Bulgakovian thought to some specific contemporary issues. In particular, the conversation she unfolds between Bulgakov's vision of the power of the Eucharist as a means towards Christian unity with John Paul II's perspective on Eucharistic

³⁹ As Nikolaev puts it: "Findings of this study suggest that the ecumenical views expressed by Florovsky and oriented toward the question of teaching with authority within the limits of the Church may be less effective in addressing current problems of the world than the ecumenical views expressed by Bulgakov, whose position was oriented toward addressing needs of life prophetically." Nikolaev, *Church and Reunion in the Theology of Sergei Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky, 1918-1940*, viii.

⁴⁰ Angela McCormick, "That all May be One in the Eucharist and the Church: A Comparison of the Eucharistic Theologies and Ecumenical Possibilities of John Paul II and Sergius Bulgakov," (Masters thesis, Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2009).

sharing is an important contribution.⁴¹ My own application will be both more broadly based and more methodologically oriented than hers, but it is nevertheless a work in the same vein as McCormick's prior efforts.

The latest contribution in this line of scholarship is found in a 2011 article from John Jillions.⁴² Jillions draws on Bulgakov's ecumenical career by seeking to create a threefold typology of Orthodox ecumenism: "traditionalist," "mainstream," and "prophetic."⁴³ The traditionalist model, according to Jillions, aims at nothing less than the conversion of heretics and the return of schismatics to the bosom of Orthodoxy, and indeed this represents a popular understanding among the average Orthodox Christian of the purpose of Orthodox involvement in the ecumenical movement. The mainstream model represents the official position of the Orthodox churches and the vast majority of official Orthodox ecumenical representatives. The goal of mainstream Orthodox ecumenism is the same as the traditionalist model, although there is generally an acknowledgment of Orthodoxy's own sins against unity, and a more positive appraisal of the presence of truth and spiritual grace among non-Orthodox communities. The mainstream model focuses heavily on the recovery of doctrinal agreement, and insists on complete unity in faith before any form of sacramental communion. Jillions identifies Bulgakov as the preeminent example of a third approach, the prophetic model. For Jillions, prophetic ecumenism focuses not on the doctrinal differences which have divided Christians in the past, but on the spiritual realities of the present and the future. This is to say that God is in not entirely bound by the limitations which we have

⁴¹ McCormick, "That all May be One in the Eucharist and the Church," 42-46.

⁴² John A. Jillions, "The Future of Orthodox Ecumenical Engagement: Traditionalist, Mainstream or Prophetic?" *Revista Teologica*, 1 (2011), 120-141.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 121.

created but is always capable of doing a new thing. Although I will not explicitly adopt Jillions' typology, I do make use of prophetic language when speaking about the distinctiveness of Bulgakov's ecumenism in contrast to other forms of ecumenical engagement in his time and our own. I also frequently echo his observations with respect to Bulgakov's questioning of the centrality of doctrinal dialogue within the ecumenical movement. As such, Jillions too must be credited as one who recognizes Bulgakov's ecumenical potential.

1.4 Conclusion

It is of course true that the twentieth century is full of names and stories that are bursting with potential as resources for contemporary reflection on the task of Christian ecumenism. That being the case, the question becomes why Bulgakov? What was it about his ecumenical life and logic that makes him deserving of our attention? This is a question which will only be completely answered as this study unfolds. However, what I will be attempting to demonstrate is that there are many aspects of Bulgakov's ecumenical life and work and thought which seem to speak directly to many of the most pressing questions and challenges being faced by ecumenists today. Bulgakov, therefore, is someone I contend should be consulted and applied as a resource within those discussions to help move the conversation forward.

To this end, the chapters below will engage in detailed analysis of Bulgakov's biographical and theological history, with a special emphasis on his ecclesiology. However, I wish to

emphasize at the outset that this work is not being done entirely as an end unto itself. Strictly speaking this is not simply a dissertation *about* Sergei Bulgakov, at least not primarily. First and foremost my goal is to draw on Bulgakov as a way of commenting on the ecumenical movement and its present uncertainty about the road ahead. I do hope that my research will contribute some additional insights within the world of Bulgakov studies proper, especially with respect to the relationship between his understanding of the Church and the larger project of sophiology. However, this should be understood as a secondary by-product resulting from the wider aim.

I also want to make clear at this stage that my purpose is not the resourcing of Bulgakov's theology to address particular theological issues in ecumenical dialogue. Bulgakov does have much to offer on this front: His perspective on relations of the persons of the Trinity can contribute to some of the classical East-West tensions; his Eucharistic theology has some intriguing insights to offer to discussions about real presence; his view of episcopal authority in the Church could prove fruitful ground in conversation between historic churches and those who do not have the threefold ministry. These are but a few of the many possibilities which are so numerous that they could warrant an entire study unto themselves. I am bracketing such considerations out of my purview so as to concentrate on questions of ecumenical method. With these caveats in mind, the first task at hand is to get a feel for the ecumenical lay of the land. Only with an understanding of where we have come from and where we are can anything be said about where we might be going. This ecumenical retrospective will include a chapter on the early development of the ecumenical movement, as well as an accounting of certain of its most notable highlights. It will also survey some of

the reflections on the recent state of ecumenism and the experience of frustration and stall which have come to characterize the general attitude towards the prospects of the ecumenical future. Thus, as we move into chapter two, we temporarily set Bulgakov to one side in order to prepare for his entry as a key speaker in the debate at a later point.

Chapter 2 The Ecumenical Golden Age

2.1 The Great New Fact

In my opinion, sweeping pronouncements about the singular importance of this or that moment in history often serve to reveal more about the agenda of the historian than they do about the event in question. The historian Howard Zinn cautions against this very thing, criticizing, for example, the journalistic gloss of the 1930s and 40s as the ‘greatest generation’ in American history.⁴⁴ Church historians are certainly not exempt from this temptation.⁴⁵ It is also true, as Bernard Lonergan has argued, that a history can never be completely written until the full implications of the events in question have had sufficient time to unfold, which may take centuries.⁴⁶ However, even with these historiographical concessions in mind, there can be little doubt that the advent of the so-called ecumenical movement will stand near the top of the list of notable highlights of the Church in the twentieth century.

There is always a tendency for those in the present to look back on the past with rose-coloured glasses. This is certainly true when speaking of the ecumenical movement. The early years of ecumenical progress are regularly glossed as something of a ‘Golden age.’ There are, of course, many good reasons for this kind of nostalgia. Unlike today, where

⁴⁴ See Howard Zinn, “The Greatest Generation?” *The Progressive Magazine*, October 2001.

⁴⁵ See for example James J. Walch, *The Thirteenth, Greatest of Centuries*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1907).

⁴⁶ On the inherently unfinished nature of the work of history see for example Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), especially the chapter on the functional speciality of history.

ecumenical activity between churches and denominations is taken to be rather a commonplace feature of Church life, there was a time when the ecumenical movement, to use the words of one former Archbishop of Canterbury, was looked on as “the great new fact” of the era.⁴⁷ Many talented and charismatic leaders were emerging,⁴⁸ unprecedented meetings were being held and influential organizations formed,⁴⁹ and large numbers of youth, lay-people, theologians, and church hierarchs were devoting themselves to the work for Christian unity with considerable enthusiasm. Everything was unprecedented and exciting, and there was a real optimism about the possibilities going forward into the not so distant future. It is for good reason, then, that this period is so often viewed so positively. One hundred years of ecumenical work has indeed led to a great deal of positive progress in a relatively short period of time. The magnitude of this can hardly be overstated.

2.2 Ecumenical Highlights

Histories of the ecumenical movement and its highlights already exist in some number.⁵⁰ To rehearse that history in detail here is therefore unnecessary. However, before I can offer my own particular analysis of certain features of the present ecumenical movement, and of its

⁴⁷ William Temple, *The Church Looks Forward*, (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 2.

⁴⁸ John Mott (1865-1955), Nathan Soderblom (1866-1931), Paul Couturier (1881-1952), William Temple (1881-1944), Pope John XXIII (1881-1963), Patriarch Athenagoras (1886-1972), Pope Paul VI (1897-1978), Willem Visser't Hooft (1900-1985), Yves Congar (1904-1995), Michael Ramsay (1904-1988), etc.

⁴⁹ The First World Missionary Conference (Edinburgh 1910), the International Missionary Council (1921), the Malines Conversations (1921-25), the First (Lausanne 1927) and Second (Edinburgh 1937) World Conference on Faith and Order, the First (Stockholm 1925) and Second (Oxford 1937) Life and Work Conference, the World Council of Churches (1948), the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), etc.

⁵⁰ The standard multi-volume history is *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, ed. by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), *The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement, volume 2, 1948-1968*, ed. by Harold E. Fey, (London: SPCK., 1970), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, volume 3, 1968-2000*, ed. by John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, and Georges Tsetsis, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004). A more recent commentary on various ecumenical highlights is Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits*, (London: Continuum, 2009).

possible future, a measure of attention to various aspects of its past is certainly required. I intend to comment on three: 1) The formation and development of the World Council of Churches; 2) Achievements of bilateral dialogue; and 3) Relationships of ‘full communion.’ By no means do these three topics represent an exhaustive list of the results of one hundred plus years of ecumenical work. They do, however, set the stage for the methodological reflection on the current challenges of the ecumenical movement.

2.2.1 The World Council of Churches

The year 1910 is the traditional date given as the symbolic beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, owing, of course, to the initial impulses in the direction of Christian unity which emerged from the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh Scotland that same year.⁵¹ Under the motto ‘the evangelisation of the world in this generation,’ Edinburgh 1910 brought together some 1200 delegates, largely from North America and Western Europe, to discuss barriers and opportunities for the global Christian mission. The primary subject of this Conference was cooperation in the evangelistic task and not overcoming the doctrinal and institutional differences which stood as obstacles to it. However, the scandal of the disunity of the Church was an issue that would have to be faced more seriously going forward.

The organization we know today as the World Council of Churches (WCC) can be traced back to the convergence of several related strands coming out of Edinburgh 1910. In 1921,

⁵¹ For a history and analysis of Edinburgh 1910 see Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009).

the International Missionary Conference was formed to carry on the cooperative evangelistic spirit forged at Edinburgh. The inaugural Conference on Life and Work met at Stockholm in 1925 to discuss a unified Christian response to the social and economic issues of the time. In 1927, the first Faith and Order Conference was held in Lausanne. In 1948, Faith and Order and Life and Work would merge to form the World Council of Churches, and would be joined by the International Missionary Conference in 1961.

In the earliest stages, the ecumenical phenomenon was heavily Protestant and Anglican in its orientation and membership. This is likely due, at least in part, to the roots which the movement has in the nineteenth and twentieth century global missionary gatherings. It could also be attributed to some degree to the particular ecclesiological understandings of the various reformed traditions. However, the involvement of the Orthodox churches in the early development of the WCC must not be neglected.⁵² As George Tsetsis argues, the impetus for an organization like the WCC could be accurately traced back to Constantinople almost as well as Edinburgh.⁵³ Orthodox leaders, especially Greek, have often expressed a certain ‘pride of ownership’ in the ecumenical movement, owing to the pioneering 1920 encyclical of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, *Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere*.⁵⁴ The Orthodox churches sent delegates to the earliest meetings of Faith and Order and Life and Work. Orthodox involvement was also essential to the articulation of what amount to the

⁵² On this see for example the public lecture of Konrad Raiser, “The Importance of the Orthodox Contribution to the WCC,” Thessaloniki, Greece, 1-3 June, 2003, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/orthodox-contribution-to-the-wcc> (accessed Sept. 15, 2013), as well as Gennadios Limouris (ed.), *Orthodox Visions of the Ecumenical Movement*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994). On the earlier years of Orthodox activity see Constantine G. Patelos, *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978).

⁵³ *Orthodox Visions of the Ecumenical Movement*, 272.

⁵⁴ Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, *Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere*, January, 1920.

foundational principles regarding the ecclesiological status of the World Council known as the ‘Toronto Statement.’⁵⁵ In more recent years, the WCC has continued to be influenced by the insistence of its Orthodox membership that the Council should not lose sight of its mandate to seek the visible reunion of divided Christian communities.⁵⁶

For quite some time the Vatican did not permit Catholic participation in any of the early conferences of the constituent bodies that would become the WCC. As is well known, the ecumenical movement was regarded by Rome for most of the first half of the twentieth century as suspect and dangerous. At this stage, as illustrated by Pope Pius XI’s 1928 encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, Rome was still condemning the ecumenical movement as an inherently Protestant approach to Christian unity, instead presenting the “return” of the “erring sons (sic)” as the only viable ecumenical path.⁵⁷ The same sentiment was repeated by the Holy Office during the pontificate of Pius XII as late as 1949.⁵⁸

In 1952, however, under the leadership of Johannes Willebrands, the *Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions* was formed in order to facilitate some contact and discussion between Roman Catholicism and the Faith and Order branch of the WCC. In 1966, this organization was transformed into the Joint Working Group to allow for greater collaboration. Although the Roman Catholic Church continues to maintain its position of non-membership in the WCC as a whole, in later decades Roman Catholics have participated

⁵⁵ WCC Central Committee, *The Church, the churches, and the World Council of Churches: The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches*, July, 1950.

⁵⁶ For an example of this sentiment from Orthodox participants see the contribution to the report on the Canberra assembly of 1991, *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report, Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991*, ed. Michael Kinnamon (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), 279-282.

⁵⁷ Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Mortalium Animos*, 1 June, 1928.

⁵⁸ Instruction from the Holy Office on the Ecumenical Movement, December 20, 1949.

as full members of Faith and Order, and have brought a great deal to the work of that body on the doctrinal side of Christian division.⁵⁹

The WCC is by no means an organization without its difficulties, and these will be touched on further below. There are, however, a number of important significant highlights which are deserving of mention.

The Life and Work stream of the WCC first evolved into three major WCC bodies: the Commission of the Churches on Diakonia and Development, the Commission of the Churches on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, and the Reference Group on Inter-religious Relations and Dialogue. As of 2006, these have been co-ordinated under the organizational structure now known as the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. Projects include the WCC Program to Combat Racism, the World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the integrity of Creation (Seoul, 1990), the creation of the emergency humanitarian aid organization Action by Churches Together (ACT), the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998), the Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence (2000-2010), and the Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in Africa, just to name a few. In the eyes of some, these kinds of joint initiatives represent a more meaningful product of Christian rapprochement than any doctrinal statement ever could.⁶⁰

From the Faith and Order side of the WCC's agenda, in my opinion still the most significant achievement has been the 1982 publication of the multilateral convergence text *Baptism*,

⁵⁹ See Paul A. Crow, "The Roman Catholic Presence in the Faith and Order Movement," *One in Christ* 38(2): 3-31.

⁶⁰ David Gill ed., *Gathered for Life: Official Reports of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva: WCC, 1983), 49.

Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM).⁶¹ This text represents not only a tremendous degree of convergence on three historically contentious subjects, but also a great deal of breadth in terms of the wide variety of Christian traditions involved in its production. The text had the input of most of the major global churches and confessional bodies and was endorsed by a WCC membership of three hundred plus member churches. Among the many agreed statements on issues of doctrinal difference it also stands as the text to have received the most attention in terms of official church evaluation, with over two hundred responses collected into six volumes.⁶² Yet, Faith and Order is still very much alive and well today. The Commission has recently released its second major convergence paper, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.⁶³ In addition to its own advancements in mutual understanding in the area of ecclesiology, this text also draws together the work of a wide range of prior dialogue groups and texts on the same topic. A process of local reception and response modeled on the same initiative undertaken to invite responses to BEM is planned, which will likely make this document a similar jewel in the Faith and Order crown.

However, perhaps the most important WCC dividend has been its institutional living-out of the complexity of ecumenical work. There are, of course, a number of varying outlooks on the ecumenical task, including the very nature of the unity which it is thought to be seeking. As the early histories of Faith and Order, Life and Work, and the International Missionary Conference attest, these differing perspectives have been inter-woven into the fabric of the

⁶¹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

⁶² See *The Churches Respond to BEM*, vols. I-VI, Max Thurien ed., (Geneva: WCC, 1986-1988).

⁶³ *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper no. 214, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013).

WCC from the start, and have unfolded alongside one another. This has allowed the WCC to become a forum for some very interesting reflection on ecumenical methodology.

Harding Meyer is well known for his systematization of the dominant “principles and models” of ecumenical engagement, and it is instructive to apply his categories to the WCC at various stages in its development.⁶⁴ According to Meyer, the pre-1948 Life and Work Conferences exhibit a strong affinity for what he calls the “cooperative-federal” model of Christian unity.⁶⁵ In general, those who follow this approach to the ecumenical task are far less concerned with the resolution around doctrinal issues related to the mutual recognition and transfer of ministries and sacraments, etc. These issues are typically set aside for the purpose of focusing on common interests, and the institutional character and freedom of the respective churches are retained. Meyer sees this as an expression of the mainline Protestant membership of the WCC in its first few decades, and as the goal sought by those especially drawn to the activist oriented Life and Work side of the ecumenical task still today.⁶⁶

Another dominant line of ecumenical thinking is that which Meyer terms “organic union.” In contrast to the cooperative-federal vision, the organic model places more stress on structural reintegration. As Meyer writes:

When hitherto divided churches that live ‘in the same territory’ enter into organic union, they cease to exist as institutionally identifiable entities. What comes into being is a single church with its own new identity. The undivided loyalty of its members belongs to this single church and no longer to the churches from which they came and from which the union has been formed.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Harding Meyer, *That All May Be One: Perceptions and Models of Ecumenicity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999).

⁶⁵ Meyer, *That All May Be One*, 81-100.

⁶⁶ Meyer, *That All May Be One*, 83-86.

⁶⁷ Meyer, *That All May Be One*, 97.

According to Meyer, this understanding of the ecumenical goal owes itself to the influence of the more ‘catholic-minded’ ecclesiologies prominent among early American Anglican ecumenical leaders.⁶⁸ One would also have to acknowledge the presence of the Orthodox contingent in the WCC as a significant factor in this regard. The organic model appears to have been the dominant line of thinking in the Faith and Order sphere of the WCC, and at the forefront of the minds of many during the landmark Lausanne 1927 and Edinburgh 1937 Conferences.

The 1961 New Delhi Statement reflects yet another model which retains aspects of the other two. The statement reads:

We believe that the unity which is both God’s will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires.⁶⁹

Here we see an early articulation of the ecumenical ecclesiological expression of the Church as fellowship/communion (Greek *koinonia*, Latin *communio*). Unlike the cooperative federalism, this viewpoint stresses that common witness and service, though essential, are not sufficient on their own to constitute actual Church unity. In most cases, some degree of institutional adjustment will be necessary by each respective partner tradition in order to realize their existing fellowship more fully. However, unlike the organic union model, there is greater room allowed for diversity, and historical confessional identities are more easily

⁶⁸ Meyer, *That All May Be One*, 94.

⁶⁹ “New Delhi Statement on Unity,” <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/1961-new-delhi/new-delhi-statement-on-unity>, accessed March 19, 2013.

retained. William Rausch notes how the subsequent Conferences of the WCC at Upsalla (1968), Nairobi (1975) and Canberra (1991) seem to have added some additional adjectives to their descriptions of what “fully committed fellowship” means. This seems to have been done in order to place a greater emphasis on local distinctiveness. Nevertheless, the same basic framework from New Delhi onwards has continued to become more and more dominant as Faith and Order thinking has developed and matured.⁷⁰ The most recent major document to come out of the WCC, the Faith and Order text entitled *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, depends greatly upon an understanding of the Church as communion.

On one reading, this understanding of unity would seem to fit within the third of Meyer’s ecumenical forms, that of “mutual recognition.” Under this model the divided churches come to recognize one another as different expressions of the one Church of Christ, without giving up their own self-understandings as to what constitutes being church in the fullest sense. However, according to William Rusch, the advantage of communion ecclesiology for the ecumenical movement is that it does not demand adherence to one particular model of unity that will be applied the same way between every church and ecclesial community, but remains open to a variety of forms of realization.⁷¹ In the last few decades, the concept of the Church as communion/fellowship has been prominent not only in the WCC, but has come to function as a virtual ecumenical universal. I believe this is because churches across the ecclesiological spectrum have seen in it the ability to continue to affirm their own ecclesiological uniqueness and sufficiency while still recognizing the lived reality of

⁷⁰ William Rusch, “A Survey of Ecumenical Reflection About Unity,” in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson eds., *In One Body Through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity*, (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 7-9.

⁷¹ Rusch, “A Survey of Ecumenical Reflection About Unity,” 9.

important spiritual bonds with other Christian communities from whom they are currently divided.

The various branches of the WCC have certainly had their share of tensions. In recent years, many would argue that they have become strained to their absolute limits. However, the role of the WCC as a laboratory for both ecumenical activity and reflection on method cannot be denied. Whether and how it will continue to have an important seat at the table in the ecumenical conversation remains a point of debate. This will be explored further in the next chapter.

2.2.2 Bilateral Dialogues

There are numerous results of bilateral dialogue that warrant reference, and I can only highlight but a few. My list is selective, the examples given chosen on the basis of my own perception of the historical and symbolic significance of the theological issues at hand. In no way is this recounting even remotely exhaustive or sufficiently representative. Nevertheless, I present these as a small sampling of the significant work that has been done on this front between several Christian Communion.

As the term suggests, bilateral dialogues are ecumenically oriented conversations that involve two divided Christian Communion. They typically take place at the global Communion or the national church level. The bilateral forum has shown itself to be especially important for churches for which doctrinal consensus is a uniquely central concern

in the unity equation. As J-M-R. Tillard has argued, bilateral dialogues are of particular importance in the work for Christian unity not because anyone believes that the divisions of the churches were entirely the result differences in theological understanding. They are significant, rather, because they take seriously the fact that these kinds of differences hold a certain symbolic power over the present which must be dealt with before churches can encounter one another afresh and truly recognize one another's faith.⁷² At the most basic level, the purpose of such relationships is to facilitate a greater understanding of each side's historical position on the major doctrinal differences which have played a part in their past divisions. The hope, of course, is that by attending with fresh ears to the ways in which these issues are understood by the respective traditions in the present day we may find that they no longer need to be seen as communion dividing. Numerous examples of common declarations and mutual statements representing various levels of newfound agreement or growing convergence can now be found across an extremely wide spectrum of Christian traditions.⁷³

Some of the earliest twentieth century bilateral dialogues were initiated by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, and actually predate the official commitment of the Roman Church to the ecumenical movement. These include, for example, the Malines Conversations between Rome and the Church of England as early as the 1920s,⁷⁴ as well as Pius XI's

⁷² J. M.-R. Tillard, "The Ecclesiological Implications of Bilateral Dialogue," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23, no. 3 (Summer 1986), 417.

⁷³ For the standard collection of bilateral ecumenical literature consult *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, ed. by Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1984), *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level 1982-1998*, ed. by Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer and William G. Rusch, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), and *Growth in Agreement III: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements 1998-2005*, ed. by Jeffrey Gros, Thomas F. Best and Lorelei F. Fuchs, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

⁷⁴ On this see Adelbert Deneaux and John A. Dick, *From Malines to ARCIC: The Malines Conversations Commemorated*, (Leuven: University Press, 1997).

encouragement of the formation of Roman Catholic monasteries of the Byzantine Rite for the purpose of promoting greater familiarity with Orthodox thought and spirituality.⁷⁵

However, despite some of these important precursory overtures, it is the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) which represents the great ecumenical landmark for Roman Catholics, and also for bilateral dialogue. The ecclesiological reforms of the Council paved the way for the Catholic Church to take up a leading role in the ecumenical movement. Although bilateral dialogue is embraced by nearly every Christian tradition as an effective means of ecumenical progress, the Roman Catholic Church has demonstrated a clear preference for this approach over dialogue carried out in a multilateral context. By virtue of the sheer size and influence of the Roman Church, this fact has been instrumental in bringing bilateral dialogue to the forefront of the ecumenical movement through the 1970s, 80s and 90s.⁷⁶

The Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church have had one of the longest and most productive bilateral ecumenical relationships.⁷⁷ The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was created in 1970, following three years of preparatory work after the close of Vatican II. ARCIC has produced statements which represent significant agreement on issues such as the Eucharist,⁷⁸ ministry and ordination,⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Pope Pius XI, Apostolic Letter *Equidem Verba*, 21 March, 1924.

⁷⁶ On this see for example K. D. Whitehead, *The New Ecumenism: How the Catholic Church After Vatican II Took Over the Leadership of the World Ecumenical Movement*, (Staten Island, N.Y.: St. Paul's/Alba House, 2009).

⁷⁷ On the history of ARCIC see Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, "The Work of ARCIC 1968-2000," *One in Christ*, 39(1): 23-32

⁷⁸ See *Eucharistic Doctrine* (Windsor, 1971) and *Elucidation* (1979) published in *The Final Report, Windsor, September 1981*, (Forward Movement Publications, 1982).

⁷⁹ See *Ministry and Ordination* (Canterbury, 1973) and *Elucidation* (1979) published in *The Final Report*.

ecclesial authority⁸⁰ and Marian doctrines.⁸¹ The significant convergence on issues related to global conciliarism, collegiality and primacy during the third phase of the ARCIC dialogue are of course hugely important given their particular association with the histories of these two traditions.⁸²

In my opinion, however, it is the *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* statement which represents the most successful of ARCIC's efforts, not so much for the subject matter it treats, but for the approach which it takes and the creativity which it displays. This text attempts to foster "re-reception" of the Marian tradition on the part of both partners, framing this within their shared soteriological and eschatological understandings of the theological concepts of grace and hope. Re-reception is defined as a mutual return to the sources of Scripture and Tradition in order to hear them together within the context of a new relationship.⁸³ In a remarkable footnote, the text even proposes the possibility that Anglicans need not necessarily be asked to explicitly adopt the Roman Catholic Marian dogmas of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as terms of full communion. Through study, both sides of the dialogue have observed that they actually share many common or at least mutually consistent convictions about Mary, even if Anglicans do so without formally articulating them as Roman Catholics have done.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ See *Authority in the Church I* (Venice, 1976), *Elucidation* (1981), and *Authority in the Church II* published in *The Final Report*.

⁸¹ The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (Toronto: Novalis, 2005).

⁸² See *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III*, (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1999).

⁸³ See *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, paragraphs 3, 44, 50.

⁸⁴ *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, paragraph 63 n13.

Recent developments have added new strains that appear in the eyes of many to threaten future progress, specifically the decision of the Church of England to move towards female bishops, and the corresponding Roman Catholic move to create an Ordinariate for disaffected Anglicans. At the time of these decisions Walter Kasper warned that they would forever change the nature of the Anglican-Roman Catholic ecumenical relationship.⁸⁵ Despite these and other challenges, the dialogue has continued. The International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) has focused its efforts on the matter of how to apply the results of ARCIC in terms of concrete action in mission.⁸⁶ A new phase of bilateral theological dialogue ARCIC III, began in 2011 and continues to do its work.⁸⁷ The beginning of the pontificate of pope Francis just days apart from the installation of Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury also seems to represent a fresh opportunity for openness and optimism, and perhaps a new tenor or style.

The Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue also originates in the 1960s. In comparison with ARCIC, the issues which have been addressed have not been as numerous, and the level of consensus on many has not been quite as complete. Most recently Roman Catholics and Lutherans have been working on the thorny subject of apostolicity.⁸⁸ Yet, in my opinion, and that of many others, one of the most significant products of bilateral ecumenical dialogue to date is the 1999 Lutheran-Roman Catholic *Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification*

⁸⁵ Address of Cardinal Kasper at the Lambeth Conference, "Roman Catholic Reflections on the Anglican Communion," Lambeth Conference, July 30, 2008, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20080730_kasper-lambeth_en.html, accessed May 14, 2013.

⁸⁶ See *Growing Together in Unity and Mission: Building on 40 Years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue*, (London: SPCK, 2007).

⁸⁷ Launched in 2011 ARCIC III has now met for three sessions in Rome Italy, Hong Kong, Rio De Janeiro Brazil.

⁸⁸ Lutheran Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *The Apostolicity of the Church*, ed. Sven Oppegard, (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2007).

(JDDJ).⁸⁹ Again the centrality of this issue in the European Reformation makes it obvious why this particular issue has tremendous symbolic significance. However, its greatest gift to the wider ecumenical movement and to the reflection on ecumenical methodology comes from its employment of the principles of ‘differentiated consensus.’⁹⁰ Without arriving at a uniform understanding, Lutherans and Roman Catholics were nonetheless able to say together that the diversity in their respective historic perspectives on the issue of justification by faith need no longer be understood as communion dividing. Instead, they can now be interpreted as mutually enriching emphases of secondary aspects of a shared core belief. I do not think anyone can deny that this is a meaningful breakthrough, even if there is further work to be done. More will be said about the developing understandings of words like agreement and consensus in chapters below.

A third bilateral relationship of note is that of the churches of the Roman Catholic Church and the family of churches now commonly referred to as Oriental Orthodox.⁹¹ The rift between these communities goes back over fifteen hundred years, owing to the non-reception on the part of the latter churches of the Christological definitions of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Through the work of an unofficial dialogue under the sponsorship of the Pro Oriente foundation,⁹² the basis was created for a series of Common Declarations between

⁸⁹ The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 2000).

⁹⁰ On this see William Rusch, *Ecumenical Reception*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 118-130. See also Harding Meyer, “Die Prägung einer Formel: Ursprung und Intention” in *Einheit – Aber Wie?: Zur Tragfähigkeit der ökumenischen Formel vom “differenzierten Konsens.”* in *Quaestiones Disputatae* 184, ed. Herald Wagner, (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2000), 36-58.

⁹¹ This includes churches such as the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Egypt, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia, the Orthodox Church of Eritrea, and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Malankar.

⁹² The Pro Oriente foundation was founded in 1964 by Cardinal Franz König. In 1972 it released the so called Vienna Christological Formula which restated the Christology of the Council of Chalcedon using terms and

the Roman Catholic Church and the various Oriental Orthodox Patriarchs through the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Representatives in this regard are the 1971 and 1984 Common Declarations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. Having learned to avoid the older terminologies that had served only to calcify the disagreements in the past, a new context was created which allowed the two traditions to express together their understanding of and faith in Christ. Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Ignatius Jacob III were able to say together that “there is no difference in the faith they profess concerning the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become really man, even if over the centuries difficulties have arisen out of the different theological expressions by which this faith was expressed.”⁹³

In similar fashion, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I together declared in 1994 that their past divisions with respect to articulating the doctrines of the Incarnation were no longer to be deemed communion dividing. It was recognized the disputes were the result of terminological and cultural differences rather than substantive theological divergence.⁹⁴

Roman Popes and Oriental Patriarchs can now speak of themselves as sharing a common faith in Christ, even without sharing the Chalcedonian formula. The importance of this and similar breakthroughs for the wider ecumenical movement, both because they are so ancient, and because they touch on the most central elements of Christology, is massive.

concepts acceptable to both Roman Catholic and Oriental Orthodox understandings. See The Vienna Christological Formula, <http://www.pro-oriente.at/?site=gl20050201095749>, accessed June 14, 2014.

⁹³ Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Ignatius Jacob III, Rome, October 27, 1971, http://syrianorthodoxchurch.com/pa_declaration.htm, accessed April 28, 2013.

⁹⁴ Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Rome, June 23, 1984, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/anc-orient-ch-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19840623_jp-ii-zakka-i_en.html, accessed April 28, 2013.

The role of bilaterals within the ecumenical movement has been a topic of theological and methodological debate within the academy since at least the 1970s, and has continued up to the present time.⁹⁵ According to the reports from the two most recent WCC sponsored Forums on Bilateral Dialogue held in Breklum Germany in 2008 and Dar Es Salaam Tanzania in 2012, there are a range of issues in discussion: Whether or not the statements coming out of bilateral dialogue are actually representative of the full spectrum of thought within the communities they seek to represent; how the results of the many different dialogues can be compared and/or coordinated with one another; and the degree to which the results of bilateral dialogue are given authority and allowed to influence inter-church relations going forward.⁹⁶ We will have an opportunity to explore some of these questions further in the chapter below, particularly in connection with the discussion of ecumenical reception.

2.2.3 Communion Agreements

It is true that, compared to the youthful exuberance about the prospects of a visible reunion of the churches in the not too distant future, the present lack of concrete ecumenical progress

⁹⁵ See for example Günther Gassmann, "Nature and Function of Bilateral and Multilateral Dialogues and their Interrelation," *Mid-Stream*, 25.3 (July 1986): 299-308, Emmanuel Lanne, "Two Decades of Bilateral Conversations and their Impact on the Ecumenical Movement," *Mid-Stream*, 25.3 (July 1986): 309-321, Harding Meyer, "Future of Bilaterals and the Bilaterals of the Future," *Lutheran World*, 22.3 (1975): 226-234, Methodios G. Phougias, "Bilateral Theological Dialogues: An Orthodox assessment," *Patristic and Byzantine Review*, 22.1-3 (2004): 124-136, Oliver Schuegraf, "Finding Bilateral Agreement: The Rules of the Game," *Ecumenical Review*, 55.3 (July 2003): 264-271, Alan P. Sell, "The Role of Bilateral Dialogues in the One Ecumenical Movement," *Ecumenical Review*, 46.4 (October 1994): 453-460, Darlis Swan, "The Bilateral Dialogues: New Visions and Challenges," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 35.3-4 (Sum-Fall 1998): 353-356, J-M-R Tillard, "The Ecclesiological Implications of Bilateral Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 23.3 (Sum 1986), 412-423.

⁹⁶ See respectively *The Breklum Statement, Ninth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues*, "Many Ways to Unity," 10-15 March, 2008, and *The Dar es Salaam Report, Tenth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues*, "International Dialogues in Dialogue: Context and Reception," Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 8-14 March, 2012.

can come across as a real letdown – possibly even a failure. However, given a fair assessment, nobody can seriously suggest that there have not been any meaningful results stemming from the first century of the ecumenical movement. The still quite recently reestablished relations between various Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed and other Protestant confessions stands as evidence of this. Indeed it represents the fulfillment of the unrealized hopes of Thomas Cranmer, John Calvin, and Philip Melancthon some four hundred and fifty years prior.⁹⁷ Such results, therefore, are no small matter. Thus while an exhaustive discussion of the full communion phenomenon and the ecclesiology which grounds it is beyond my purview, a brief survey of several of the particularly significant such relationships is certainly fitting.

Anglican and Lutheran national churches have been most prolific in terms of establishing these kinds of relationships.⁹⁸ The so called Meissen Agreement outlines the mutual recognition of churches by the Church of England and the German Evangelical Church, and commits these two to growth in common life and visible unity.⁹⁹ The *Porvoo Common Statement* does the same for the British and Irish Anglican churches and the Nordic and

⁹⁷ Dairmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life*, (London: Yale University Press, 1996), 501-502.

⁹⁸ For commentary on these the details and implications of these relationships see for example John Robert Arnold “From Meissen to Porvoo and beyond,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 73, no. 4 (2004):466-482, Richard G. Leggett, “We too have Common Sense: the Waterloo Declaration and Full Communion in Canada,” *Anglican Theological Review*, 87 no 1 (Winter 2005): 23-42, Martin Reardon, “Intercommunion and the Meissen and Porvoo agreements,” *One in Christ*, 37(1): 57-72, Michael Root, “Consistency and Difference in Anglican-Lutheran Relations: Porvoo, Waterloo, and Called to common mission,” in *One Lord, One faith, One Baptism: Studies in Christian Ecclesiality and Ecumenism in Honor of J. Robert Wright*, Marsha L. Dutton and Patrick Terrell Gray eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006): 296-315, David Tustin, “The impact of the Porvoo Agreement on the Church of England,” *One in Christ*, 38(2): 58-68.

⁹⁹ “On the Way to Visible Unity: A Common Statement,” 18 March, 1988, Meissen Germany, <https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCYQFjAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.churchofengland.org%2Fmedia%2F36079%2Fmeisseninfo.rtf&ei=1QgdVOynF9HYoASywIKIDg&usg=AFQjCNHZL-Le5bbVrbCsAfiLazjm5TjbrQ&sig2=PdKVZsP57yhRbf9rMM4Glg>, accessed July 5, 2013.

Baltic Lutheran churches.¹⁰⁰ *Called to Full Communion* is a common declaration between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada.¹⁰¹ *Called to Common Mission* refers to the respective texts which articulate the relationship in the American context between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Episcopal Church of the USA.¹⁰² Among the most notable results of these agreements are the mutual recognition of ministries and ministers, and the official permitted openness to regular Eucharistic communion.

There are similar examples which incorporate even greater confessional diversity than the Anglican and Lutheran concordats on their own. In 1997, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ adopted the *Formula of Agreement*.¹⁰³ The Churches Uniting in Christ movement,¹⁰⁴ inaugurated in 2002, has taken significant steps to establish such a relationship between eight mainline Protestant denominations in America. Current full members include the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, the International Council of Community Churches, the Moravian Church Northern Province, the Presbyterian Church USA, the United Church

¹⁰⁰ *The Porvoo Common Statement*, (London: Council for Christian Unity, 1993).

¹⁰¹ “*Called to Full Communion (The Waterloo Declaration)*,” <http://elcic.ca/What-We-Believe/Waterloo-Declaration.cfm>, accessed May 11, 2013.

¹⁰² “An Agreement of Full Communion – Called to Common Mission,” <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/agreement-full-communion-called-common-mission>, accessed May 11, 2013.

¹⁰³ *A Formula of Agreement*, (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church USA, 2000).

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of this movement see Michael Kinnamon, “We have come this far by faith: reflections on where we have been and where we are headed as Churches Uniting in Christ,” *Mid-Stream* 41, nos. 2-3 (Ap-Jl 2002): 1-9, and Keith Watkins “Coming Away With Hope: Thoughts About the Inaugural of Churches Uniting in Christ,” *Encounter* 63, no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 439-445.

of Christ and the United Methodist Church. Work presently continues to include three additional member churches.¹⁰⁵

There is of course some debate about the meaning of full communion, and whether or not it is a satisfactory expression of the ecumenical goal.¹⁰⁶ In the context of the Anglican-Lutheran and inter-Protestant full communion agreements listed above, it is understood as a means of preserving the institutional autonomy – spiritual and liturgical distinctiveness and the doctrinal traditions of each member church – while allowing for the transferability of ministers and pulpit and table fellowship. It would appear to be a fairly clear outworking of Harding Meyer’s mutual recognition model. As such, it should be no surprise that it will be assessed differently as a viable manifestation of unity to greater or lesser degrees depending upon the ecclesiology that is operative within each respective Christian community.¹⁰⁷

Even for some of those churches that have entered into full communion relationships there are issues that remain which sometimes question whether the communion really is as full as it is claimed. John Webster has commented on this from an Anglican perspective noting that many Lutheran theologians still think of a full communion relationship as something more along the lines of what he calls “the ‘reconciled diversity’ model.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, ‘Lutheranism’ as a confessional institution is still retained, and this is seen as a good thing.

¹⁰⁵ Initially the CUIC included as full members two historic black churches: The African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. These two churches have since withdrawn their membership out of concerns over a perceived failure by some of the CUIC member churches to fully reconcile their history of racial discrimination towards these black churches. They do, however, remain in dialogue. At present, the ELCA is not a full member of CUIC, although it does have previously existing full communion agreements with many of its member churches.

¹⁰⁶ For a general discussion of the use of the term and the issues in the debate surrounding it see Jeffrey Gros, “The Requirements and Challenges of Full Communion: A Multilateral Evaluation?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 42(2): 217-242.

¹⁰⁷ See for example the reflection by John Breck, “An Orthodox Perspective on ‘Full Communion’ Among Protestant Churches,” *Lutheran Forum* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 8-14.

¹⁰⁸ John Webster, “The Goals of Ecumenism” in *Paths to Unity*, ed. by Paul Avis (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 8.

Webster continues to reflect that while Anglicans are happy to use the language of communion as full with Lutherans, and to recognize Lutheran ministry, and to extend Eucharistic hospitality, “Anglicans have often urged that the continued co-existence of confessionally distinct congregations or denominations is, in fact, fatal to unity, and leaves the real scandal of disunity untouched.”¹⁰⁹

Again there can be little dispute that full communion agreements do represent meaningful evidence of ecumenical progress. However, it remains as clear on this score as it does with the others surveyed above that there are continuing challenges even with the greatest examples of ecumenical breakthrough.

2.3 Conclusion

Despite the above examples which attest to the real and important progress that has been made towards visible Christian unity in the last hundred years, the ecumenical century did not come to a close with the same exuberance with which it began. Although much has been accomplished, a number of deeply rooted challenges have grown up alongside the ecumenical fruits which now appear to threaten its future progress. We now transition to discuss some of these ecumenical challenges and the debates which surround them.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 3 The Ecumenical Turning Point

3.1 A Change of Pace

Clear signs of a slowing of the ecumenical pace began to appear in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Words like ‘uncertainty,’ ‘stagnation,’ ‘tiredness,’ and even ‘crisis’ began to characterize the growing mood. In recent years, it has become customary to talk of an ‘ecumenical winter.’ Increasingly, professional ecumenists find themselves preoccupied with diagnostic appraisals and programmatic proposals of ecumenical methodology rather than actual ecumenical dialogue. This has led to something of a small cottage industry of publications on the subject of the ecumenical problem.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ A small sampling from the last two decades includes Aram I, “The Ecumenical Movement at a Crossroads,” *Ecumenical Review* 47 no. 4, (1997): 9-29, Paul Avis, *Paths to Unity*, (London: Church House, 2004), André Birmelé (ed.) and the Institute for Ecumenical Research Strasbourg, *Crisis and Challenge in the Ecumenical Movement: Integrity and Indivisibility*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson eds., *In One Body Through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity*, (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), Carl E Braaten and Robert W. Jenson eds., *The Ecumenical Future: Background Papers for In One Body Through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004), Avery Dulles, “Saving Ecumenism from Itself,” *First Things* 178, (December 2007): 23-27, G. R. Evans, *Method in Ecumenical Theology: The Lessons So Far*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Beril Huliselan, “The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century: Bringing Unity Down to Earth,” *Ecumenical Review* 60 no. 3, (July 2008): 213-221, Robert Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), Michael Kinnamon, *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement and How It Has Been Impoverished by Its Friends*, (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2003), George Lindbeck, “The Unity we Seek: Setting the Agenda for Ecumenism,” *Christian Century* 122, no. 16 (August 9, 2005): 28-31, Jeremy Morris and Nicholas Sagovsky eds., *The Unity We Have & the Unity We Seek: Ecumenical Perspectives for the Third Millennium*, (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2003), P. D. Murray and Luca Badini Confalonieri, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), James F. Puglisi, “On the Path to Christian Unity: Will Words Alone Suffice?” *Centro Pro Unione* no. 50, (Fall 1996): 18-23, Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), William G. Rusch, *Ecumenical Reception: Its Challenge and Opportunity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), Thomas Ryan, “The Ecumenical Landscape,” *America*, Jun 19-Jun 26, 2006, Tantur Ecumenical Center, *Ecumenism: Present Realities and Future Prospects*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), and Lucy Wumbui Waweru, “Prospects for Ecumenism in the 21st Century: Preparing for Tomorrow,” *Ecumenical Review* 60, no. 3 (July 2008): 222-238.

It is true that the 1980s, 90s, and 2000s also represent a high point for the proliferation of bilateral and multilateral convergence statements and joint declarations. From one perspective, this could seem to belie the many expressions of dramatic concern. However, as the former head of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Walter Kasper, reflected at the time, by this point many of the common texts that were appearing were not new breakthroughs but simply the publication of the results of work that had taken place decades earlier.¹¹¹ Kasper's words are representative of the prevailing attitude of many at the time:

Although the conversations and meetings, visits and correspondence continue, the dialogue has somehow faltered. Situations and moods have changed, and in some ways one even has to speak of a crisis. There can be no doubt: the ecumenical movement is today at a turning point.¹¹²

Even if we maintain, as Kasper does, an overall optimistic outlook about the ecumenical future, it is irresponsible to ignore the fact that the movement is facing some significant obstacles.

It can be tempting to view the first ecumenical century with a sentimental nostalgia and to lament that most seem no longer to feel the same kind of excitement about the prospects for Christian unity as in the previous few generations. Yes there are challenges to be faced, but the present situation need not be viewed as the end of the ecumenical movement. Ecumenical challenges force us to reflect, to go back, and to retrace our steps. They act as signposts directing us along those portions of the path which we have yet to take. Struggle is not failure, but the foundation of future success. The ecumenical movement is one that is grounded in the prayer of Christ 'that all may be one.' For the Christian who takes on this

¹¹¹ Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today*, (London: Burns & Oates, 2004), 155.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 155.

prayer as a vocation, this familiar slogan is no mere sentimental cliché. In fact, it represents a kind of Divine guarantee that, even in the face of great frustration, outright stall, and even apparent failure, those who continue to struggle for the unity of the Church are nonetheless cooperating with the will of God. This dissertation is an attempt to confront some of the hurdles, without resigning to doom and gloom. Before looking for new ways forward, however, we must be sure to have a proper grasp of the ground under foot, so as to avoid false steps. That is the purpose of this present chapter.

3.2 Ecumenical Challenges

It is impossible to review the entire mass of publications relevant to the subject of challenges to the ecumenical cause in one study. I have chosen to focus on just four main areas of the discussion: 1) Wider ecumenism; 2) Bureaucratization; 3) Consensus; and 4) Reception. I have selected these four subjects for two reasons. The first is because I believe them to be especially pressing points of concern. The second is because they are precisely the kinds of issues which seem to have been faced rather presciently by Sergei Bulgakov many decades earlier, and to which I believe he has some especially helpful resources to offer.

3.2.1 Wider Ecumenism

The vocabulary of ‘ecumenism’ and ‘ecumenical’ finds its roots in the Greek word *oikumene*, which itself primarily connotes a sense of ‘the entire inhabited world.’ While it has more commonly been employed to describe the goal of a unified Christian Church, there

are those who see its meaning being extended considerably further.¹¹³ Perhaps, it is suggested, the unity of the churches is something that can only be properly understood within the context of the unity of all humanity, and indeed of the whole of the created world. Such is the basis for what is sometimes called “wider ecumenism.”¹¹⁴

One especially important contributor in the wider ecumenism discussion has been Konrad Raiser. Raiser, a former general secretary of the WCC, has a tremendous firsthand knowledge of the vicissitudes of ecumenical history. Originally published in German in 1988, one of Raiser’s most significant scholarly publications, the book entitled *Ecumenism in Transition*, represents his attempt to describe what he calls the “paradigm shift” which he sees unfolding in the ecumenical movement.¹¹⁵

Raiser begins to map the latest ecumenical paradigm shift by paying attention to an earlier one; the move from a cultural conception of Christian unity to a basis in what Raiser calls “Christocentric universalism.” According to Raiser, during the first several decades of the twentieth century leading up to the formation of the WCC, the idea of Christian unity was very much tied in with the expansion of Western Christian culture through European colonialism and the global mission phenomenon.¹¹⁶ This paradigm, Raiser argues, was

¹¹³ A representative example of this kind of conversation can be seen recorded in the WCC’s *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches* document. Such semantic discussion is, of course, part of a far more fundamental debate in the realm of ecclesiology, having to do with questions about the scope of God’s work in the world and the agents through whom that work takes place.

¹¹⁴ On this see for example Wesley Ariarajah, “Wider Ecumenism: A Threat or Promise?” *The Ecumenical Review* 50 (July 1998): 321-29, Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), S. J. Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue: Ecumenical Issues in Inter-Religious Relationships*, (Geneva: WCC, 1981).

¹¹⁵ Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement*. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991), 3-30.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 34-45.

dominant for the first thirty years of the ecumenical movement's history, decisively shaping the understanding of the form of unity that was being sought.¹¹⁷ Understandably, it animated much of the early work on issues of ecclesiology.¹¹⁸ However, it would not prevail forever. In Raiser's interpretation, the decisive event which finally served to call this cultural basis for unity seriously into question was the Second World War. After this point, the ecumenical movement began to reinterpret itself instead upon the salvific universality of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁹

Writing at the beginning of the 1990s, Raiser was convinced that the ecumenical movement had recently embarked upon its second major shift in self-understanding, and all the talk in the literature about the feelings of crisis and uncertainty was, for him, the evidence of this trend. This time around, however, it was the Church's increasing encounter with the reality of religious pluralism that was taken to be the impetus for a change of orientation.¹²⁰

For Raiser, the new paradigm shift would see the ecumenical movement come to base itself not on the principle of unity in the salvation Christ, but rather on the Holy Trinity.¹²¹ The diversity of the Trinity, as well as the mission of the Spirit, would provide the foundation for a commitment not only to the unity of Christians, but for the "One Household of Life."¹²² This would manifest itself by a greater focus on working for the reconciliation of all that divides humanity, including especially the promotion of human rights and social justice, and through increased cooperation between the world religions.¹²³ Raiser did not see this new

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 46-51.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 43-44.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 36-41.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 54-59.

¹²¹ Ibid., 74-76.

¹²² Ibid., 79.

¹²³ Ibid., 85-91; 107-8.

vision as contradicting the task of Christian unity, but the ecumenical goal would now increasingly be framed within this wider Trinitarian view.

The move toward of a wider ecumenism has not always been embraced from every quarter of the ecumenical movement. In fact, it has caused some to question the continued value of the WCC to the cause of Christian unity. Orthodox participation in the WCC has always been a challenge to maintain, requiring a delicate balancing act. The paradigm shift described above is not one that has found very much in the way of support from the Orthodox membership. Indeed the trend towards greater and greater attention to the realms of ethical activism and inter-religious cooperation has been the source of considerable frustration to the WCC's Orthodox member churches, particularly in the wake of the 1991 Canberra Assembly.

A symbol of the Orthodox disappointment with Canberra has become the opening address delivered by Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung on the presence of the Holy Spirit in the oppressed peoples of the world. The Orthodox delegation was utterly perplexed by the content of this speech, and it acted as a catalyst to crystalize criticism of the direction the WCC seemed to be moving at Canberra as a whole.

In response, the Orthodox delegation produced a report: "Reflections of Orthodox Participants."¹²⁴ It spoke critically of the "very great ease" with which the presence of the Holy Spirit was invoked with respect to cultural movements and religious diversity. It insisted on the conviction that "Pneumatology is inseparable from Christology or from the

¹²⁴ "Reflections of Orthodox Participants," Document No. AS4. World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February, 1991.

doctrine of the Holy Trinity confessed by the Church on the basis of Divine Revelation.”¹²⁵

In a more general sense, the report expressed a desire to see the Council return to its Basis, with a priority on the theological work of the Faith and Order Commission as a means towards the recovery of the unity of the churches. It acknowledged that the Orthodox did in fact “follow with interest” some of the discussions about “broadening some of its aims in the direction of relations with other religions.” However, it also expressed “a certain disquiet” that this could very easily devolve into a baseless syncretism rather than an authentic Christian dialogue and bearing witness to the faith of the Church.¹²⁶ In the opinion of the Orthodox delegation, the WCC should take care to bring itself back into line with its original purpose. If not, it would have to be seen as resigning itself to a future as little more than “a forum for an exchange of opinions without any specific Christian theological basis”¹²⁷

These kinds of feelings continued to escalate, eventually leading not just to the verbal expression of displeasure but rather to concrete action in protest. The Georgian and Bulgarian Orthodox churches to withdraw their membership in the World Council in 1997 and 1998 respectively, causing other national Orthodox churches to contemplate similar decisions.¹²⁸ There is now regular talk from various Orthodox jurisdictions about if and when they too will be forced to sever themselves from further relationship with the WCC.

¹²⁵ “Reflections of Orthodox Participants,” as cited in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, ed. by Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 238.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹²⁷ “Reflections of Orthodox Participants,” as cited in *The Ecumenical Movement*,” 237.

¹²⁸ This includes the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church in America.

Seeking to address this growing Orthodox unease about their continued participation in the work of the Council, a ‘Special Commission’ was formed in 1998. Four years of patient and sincere work did manage to secure the continued participation of most Orthodox delegations.¹²⁹ By adopting a consensus model with respect to decision making and determining the agenda of social and ethical initiatives, for example, the hope was to allow the Orthodox a greater measure of influence on the future direction of the WCC. However, relations have still continued to be strained.¹³⁰

The 2006 Assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre, Brazil was viewed more favorably from Orthodox quarters. The official report on the proceedings coming from Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev spoke of considerable satisfaction about the newfound ability for the Orthodox to make their voices heard. However, the overall feeling of pessimism with respect to the so-called “systematic liberalization” of the WCC agenda, especially with respect to ethics and traditional Christian practice, is still prominent.¹³¹ Indicative of this sentiment were the comments from Alfeyev that perhaps Orthodox ecumenical goals would be best served by a refocusing their efforts away from the widening of the WCC in favour of a “strategic alliance between the Orthodox and the [Roman] Catholics in defense of traditional Christianity.”¹³²

¹²⁹ See the “Final Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches,” accessed August 23, 2013, http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2002/final-report-of-the-special-commission-on-orthodox-participation-in-the-wcc?set_language=en

¹³⁰ See for example “Orthodox to Participate in 10th Assembly,” <http://oca.org/news/headline-news/orthodox-to-participate-in-10th-wcc-assembly>, accessed November 23, 2013.

¹³¹ Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev, “Orthodox Participation in the WCC Ninth Assembly,” *The Ecumenical Review*, July 1, 2006: 262-63.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 263.

Similar concerns about the WCC were raised by the American-based ecumenical think tank known as the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology in 2003. In response to a growing concern about the future of the World Council, the Center sponsored the publication of the document entitled *In One Body through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity*. The text is the work of sixteen theologians from a wide range of ecclesial locations (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Pentecostal, etc.), coming together semi-regularly over a period of three years to discuss the future shape of the ecumenical movement. The *Proposal* touches on a number of different issues and themes, and eventually goes on to present suggestions for how to work at overcoming several common ecumenical challenges, such as inordinate loyalty to confessional identity, issues of reception, and the subject local ecumenical involvement.¹³³

The *Princeton Proposal* makes many of its own important positive contributions. However, reading it reveals clear signs that it is first and foremost a response to something else; a treatise designed with the primary intention of taking the leadership of the WCC to task with respect to the subject of wider ecumenism. The document goes so far as to identify the election of a new General Secretary (Raiser) and his “notion of a ‘paradigm shift’ in the ecumenical movement” as decisive for the Council’s demise. In particular, the *Proposal* narrows in upon what it sees as an effective attempt to marginalize the Faith and Order and International Missionary streams of the movement in the name of a “broader theism.”¹³⁴ It highlights the gradual refocusing of the World Council’s priorities away from “traditional

¹³³ For an engaging assessment of the content of the proposal as a whole see Peter De May, “A Call to Conversion: An Analysis of The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity (2003), *Ecumenical Trends* 34.4 (April 2005): 1-10.

¹³⁴ *In One Body Through the Cross*, 25.

Christian doctrinal and structural concerns” in favour of things like “care for the planet,” “interreligious dialogue,” “and political and social agendas.”¹³⁵ In the minds of these ecumenical theorists, the uncertainty surrounding the ecumenical future was not a sign of a movement struggling to catch up with a wider and more mature vision, but rather the result of having lost sight of its original goals.¹³⁶

As was touched on briefly above, the WCC has always struggled with internal friction between the varying strands of ecumenical concern. The activism and social justice oriented ecumenism of Life and Work, the doctrinal and institutional ecumenism of Faith and Order, and the evangelistic and missionary dimension of the International Missionary Conference have all been living under one roof. As Konrad Raiser himself has put it, the varied strands of seeking agreement on the doctrines of the faith, enabling mutual action for justice, and promoting cooperation in mission have, in its best moments, never been held out as an either-or. Rather, they have been more cooperatively framed as simply “different expressions of one integrated vision concerning the calling of the whole church to bring the gospel to the whole world.”¹³⁷ However, as the examples of the Orthodox frustration and the critiques of those involved with the *Princeton Proposal* make clear, maintaining a balance and complementarity of each particular focus in a way that satisfies everyone has never been easy. Can the inter-ecclesial and intercultural/interreligious dimensions of organized ecumenism continue to coexist, or are they fundamentally at odds at the level of basic theological paradigms?

¹³⁵ Ibid., 24, 52.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 52-53.

¹³⁷ Konrad Raiser, “Ecumenism in Search of a New Vision,” in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, ed. by Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 71.

Michael Kinnamon has devoted considerable attention to what he calls the “impoverishments” of the ecumenical movement by its “friends.” He identifies as one of those impoverishments the ever present temptation to “split the agenda”¹³⁸ of the movement into its constituent parts. On the one hand, Kinnamon insists that cooperation in social justice and the promotion of peace and religious tolerance can never be taken as “sufficient expression[s] of, or alternative[s] to communion.”¹³⁹ However, he is equally adamant that words like ‘communion’ and ‘fellowship’ have little meaning when they do not include actions like “a common commitment to combat racism and sexism, and a shared preferential option for the poor.”¹⁴⁰ When it comes to the relationship between traditional inter-Christian dialogue and the wider interreligious dimension, Kinnamon also stresses balance. In his opinion, “Christian ecumenism” and “interfaith relations” must never be “confused or collapsed, as if the latter were simply an expanded version of the former.” Nevertheless, while he insists that interreligious dialogue should always be categorized as a “different thing,” it cannot be written off as a tangential distraction, precisely because of the missional impulses which lie at the heart of the ecumenical imperative.¹⁴¹ Unity is not just an end in itself, but rather an end which is made pressing by the urgent need of Christians to speak and act together to the needs of the world. In the words of the Strasbourg Statement, what is needed is an “integrated vision of the ecumenical effort... [This] signifies more than a mutual respect and toleration among the different forms of ecumenical activity, although this

¹³⁸ Kinnamon, *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement and How It Has Been Impoverished by Its Friends*, 45.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 99, 106.

is indispensable. It is a matter of a clear insight into why the various forms of ecumenical activity belong together and how they are dependent upon each other.”¹⁴²

In 1948, a diverse group of Christians came together in Amsterdam and experienced their connection to one another in Christ in a new way because they shared a number of related concerns. They left with a desire to “stay together,” even as they went out on their separate ways.¹⁴³ The internal task of holding on to the will for ‘togetherness’ has been an issue for the WCC right from the beginning, and one that is very much still ongoing. In all likelihood, it is a challenge that will never be fully resolved. However, there are additional resources on which we can draw that to provide some theological grounding for maintaining an integrated vision, rather than retreating into accusations that one side or the other is the legitimate ecumenism and the only way to authentically move forward. This kind of integrated approach will be discussed further in later chapters.

3.2.2 Bureaucratization

Though different vocabularies are used to describe the process, scholars seem to be in general agreement that social movements pass through four basic developmental stages. I will be using the language of social theorists Donatella De La Porta and Mario Diani, who speak in terms of emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization, and decline.¹⁴⁴ It is certainly

¹⁴² *Crisis and Challenge in the Ecumenical Movement*, 38.

¹⁴³ Message of Kathleen Bliss, First Assembly of the WCC, Amsterdam, 1948 in Man’s *Order and God’s Design, The Amsterdam Assembly Series* (New York: Harper, 1949), un-numbered pages at the end of the volume.

¹⁴⁴ D. De la Porta and M. Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd Ed., (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

instructive to take these general categories and to apply them to the history of the ecumenical movement. This is true especially with regard to the institution of the WCC, but also to the machinery of the various churches and their bilateral dialogues. Doing so helps to uncover the first major ecumenical challenge which will receive consideration in this study: the challenge of bureaucratization.

Every new social phenomenon has to begin somewhere. The stage often called 'emergence' can be understood as the stirring of interest in or discontent with some feature of the present reality. The frustration may only be found in a select few, or it could be more widespread. However, it will most certainly not be organized in any significant way; indeed there may be a very wide spectrum in terms of evaluating the source of the discontent, as well as what a possible resolution to it would look like. On our timeline of the modern ecumenical movement, we could plot this around 1900-1910 and the initial sensitivities and expressions of restlessness towards the organizational inefficiencies and theological contradictions represented by the division of the Church.

'Coalescence' is where we see the unease or concern of the previous stage moving from the fringe to the popular and coordinated level. Here particular charismatic leaders may begin to take leadership of a cause and begin to take steps towards addressing the movement's increasingly common concerns. We can see the ecumenical movement coalescing during the 1920s and 30s in the WCC realm and the 1950s and 60s in the Roman Catholic context.

Bureaucratization refers to the stage where a movement comes to rely less on the charisma and initiative of its first few generations, and comes instead to require specialized staff and a formalization of functions and goals in order to perpetuate itself. We can see examples of this stage during the 1970s and 80s. Although the term is often interpreted entirely in the negative, bureaucratization need not be seen as such. In fact, this stage is generally understood to be essential to transform interest and excitement into concrete results. The challenge that comes with bureaucratization is for the movement to avoid going into decline. This, I would suggest, is a pretty fair description of where the ecumenical movement had come in the 1990s and 2000s.

Decline, the fourth developmental stage towards which social movements frequently move, can be experienced in a variety of ways. A movement could be repressed by the wider society or by factions within to the extent that it becomes very difficult for it to achieve its goals, let alone to survive. More commonly, however, and more in line with what can be observed in the history of the ecumenism, a movement's successes can lead to its establishment within the mainstream, to the that point it becomes just another commonplace feature of the society it was seeking to change. Sometimes this will also involve the co-opting of the leadership towards tangential ends which sap the movement of its earlier vitality by disconnecting it from its constituency.

I have reviewed these terms and their meanings for the purpose of applying them to the ecumenical movement. The bulk of the theological reflections on the state of ecumenism do not necessarily intentionally or directly employ this language of social development theory to

their assessments. They do, however, seem to arrive at observations and conclusions which bear clear resemblance to the descriptions of these same categories. A few brief references to examples will make this clear.

In its 1998 response to the purported ecumenical crisis, the Strasbourg Ecumenical Institute identified “anchorage of the ecumenical movement in the organized churches”¹⁴⁵ as one of the most pressing challenges. While the ecumenical movement as something that originally operated on the “fringes” of the Church at the initiative of a few leading individuals, the Strasbourg group notes how it became clear quite quickly that it could only achieve its aims if it was taken up as a task to be supported and carried out within the churches on a more official basis. The term ‘anchorage,’ so the text notes, contains both positive and negative implications. Having the participation of ecclesiastical leadership in the ecumenical task, not to mention the resources and financial support, has enabled the ecumenical movement to achieve many successes. However, this has come at something of a cost. The Strasbourg statement speaks of situations where the churches have come to control the agenda of the movement to an inordinate degree, at times resulting in an ecumenism which serves to maintain the status-quo and manage impulses for change.¹⁴⁶ A measure of anchorage is therefore obviously desirable and beneficial, but the danger is that it begins to overshadow and distort the initial intents of the movement in its early stages.

Michael Kinnamon demonstrates how the ecumenical movement benefited tremendously in its beginnings from the heavy involvement of lay people, suggesting that the freedom that

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 13.

comes from a lack of ordained office in the Church is at least partially responsible for the sort of creativity and boldness that was necessary for the early ecumenical progress.¹⁴⁷ He also speaks of the importance of recovering a certain “protest” character that once characterized the movement in its emerging days.¹⁴⁸ Kinnamon acknowledges that some efforts have been made over the years, especially by the WCC, to address these trends through intentional efforts for the increased participation of the laity in general, as well as women, youth, and the poor.¹⁴⁹ However, the unfortunate consequence of the clericalization of ecumenism and shift toward the mainstream of Church life is that it has been somewhat robbed of its urgency and simply added as one more thing on the ecclesiastical to do list. In Kinnamon’s judgement, “unless the movement becomes less clericalized, less dominated by ‘professional ecumenists,’ ecumenism will seem increasingly remote and irrelevant to persons in our congregations – and its protest character will be further diminished.”¹⁵⁰

Trond Bakkevig echoes many of Kinnamon’s conclusions in his own assessment of the present place and relevance of the WCC within the ecumenical movement. In an essay seeking to evaluate the process of what he calls ecumenical “reconfiguration,” Bakkevig suggests that the bilateral dialogues have grown to overshadow the WCC as the primary locus of doctrine oriented ecumenism.¹⁵¹ He also suggests that, while the churches may at one time have needed the WCC as a way of providing the infrastructure for global cooperation in ethical and political activism, the WCC is no longer doing anything to push the envelope in this regard. This has largely become something that the churches and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 78-82.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹⁴⁹ Kinnamon, *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement and How It Has Been Impoverished by Its Friends*, 83.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 84.

¹⁵¹ Trond Bakkevig, “Transformation in another Key,” *The Ecumenical Review* 56.3 (July 2004), 349.

Christian world Communion are doing themselves.¹⁵² While Bakkevig acknowledges the attempts of the WCC to encourage youth and lay initiatives, he judges that the most exciting and promising ecumenical activity is now happening in lay or monastic oriented spiritual communities. These include movements like Taizé, Focolare, Iona, or within communities largely absent from the WCC constituency such as African instituted churches and the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches of Latin America, Asia and Africa.¹⁵³ Although Bakkevig does not wish to see the WCC simply disappear, he does conclude that its time as a privileged instrument of the ecumenical movement is probably coming to an end. Bakkevig, therefore, proposes that the WCC reconfigure itself in light of the new reality by becoming something more along the lines of a facilitator of ecumenical activity rather than a primary venue. In this new situation, the WCC would support the wider work of the ecumenical movement in various ways: As a means of engagement between Christianity and other world religions at the global level; as an organ for Christian contact with organizations like the United Nations; and as a kind of church-based trade organization for the purpose of safeguarding the interests of financially weaker churches with respect to churches and organizations of greater financial power.¹⁵⁴

Such are a few of the discussions that are happening around what I am calling the challenge of bureaucratization. There is an inevitability to this process in the life of any social movement, and, as we saw, even a certain desirability. The issue is whether the institutionalization which allows for handing on the vision beyond the first few generations also leads to a calcification of energy and creativity. Judging whether or not the ecumenical

¹⁵² Ibid., 349.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 349.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 350-352.

movement has descended into decline is something that has to be left open for discussion. We have surveyed a few evaluations which suggest that indeed it has, especially in some of its older and more established arenas. However, in each case, those levelling the criticisms have also pointed to evidence that perhaps a new round of emergence is taking place, or at least suggested that a return to some of the founding impulses could be possible. The witness of the ecumenical career of Sergei Bulgakov will have something to contribute on this score.

3.2.3 Consensus

Doctrinal dialogue has been at the forefront of the ecumenical movement for a very long time. It was the central portfolio of the Faith and Order Commission, and, therefore, figured prominently in the WCC for many decades. Bilateral dialogues also owe their existence to the emphasis on the search for agreement at the level of doctrine. A key term which emerged early on in the doctrinal realm of ecumenical engagement was that of ‘consensus.’ For much of the history of the ecumenical movement, this has served as the dominant description of the goal of ecumenical dialogue.

However, despite its centrality within the ecumenical conversation, talk of ecumenical consensus is not without its confusion. In fact, one of the difficulties that has always been involved in reaching ecumenical consensus has been the real lack of clarity over what the word even means. There is a general assumption by nearly all parties involved in the ecumenical movement that consensus does not mean uniformity of opinion on every single

issue. Beyond this shared principle, however, the meaning of consensus has proved open to a wide range of interpretation.

A recent study of this very issue is the 2010 volume *Agreeable Agreement*,¹⁵⁵ by Minna Hietamäki. In this very helpful text which summarizes a lot of the high level scholarship around this particular subject, Hietamäki groups the various understandings of consensus into two main categories: 1) Consensus as “unity in essentials,” and 2) Consensus as ‘legitimate diversity,’ the second of which is further subdivided into two variations.¹⁵⁶ Although perhaps not immediately obvious based on the terminology alone, the two understandings are, in fact, substantially different.

The ‘unity in essentials’ approach places its emphasis on seeking the greatest degree of uniformity possible. It begins by identifying certain non-negotiable doctrines, rites, disciplines, etc., and insists that, on these particular matters, no measure of difference can be accommodated.¹⁵⁷ Diversity is only permitted with respect to the comparatively unimportant issues of doctrine and practice; things which the Reformation called *adiaphora*. The problem with this, of course, is deciding which elements are essential and which are not. In a situation of division, of course, there are neither common structures nor common means of decision making in order to determine where one crosses the border between the core and the periphery. This is a clear limitation.

¹⁵⁵ Minna Hietamäki, *Agreeable Agreement: An Examination of the Quest for Consensus*, (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 175-76.

The ‘legitimate diversity’ sense of the word consensus tends to adopt a much more positive appraisal of differences than the unity in essentials approach. It too, however, attempts to manage or relativize the assumed divisive nature of differences by employing concepts such as “Commonality,” or “Compatibility.”¹⁵⁸ Consensus as commonality relies on the notion that differences may continue to exist but that they retain enough in the way of similar features or attributes to conclude that they are not completely irreconcilable.¹⁵⁹ Consensus as compatibility attempts to let differences be real differences, but still wants to come to a point where differences augment each other and balance one another out rather than contradicting each other.

This latter framework has sometimes been called ‘differentiated consensus.’ Within the professional ecumenical academy, the differentiated consensus understanding has risen to prominence in many of the most well developed doctrinal dialogues. Hietamäki lists the Lutheran-Roman Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* as the best instance of this. Also included would be certain texts of the Anglican-Roman Catholic agreed statements, in particular the ARCIC dialogue on Eucharistic doctrine.¹⁶⁰

The careful historical and theological ground work which unfolds in the context of ecumenical dialogue around doctrine has without question led to considerable advancements in the relationships between the churches. However, even with the successes of joint declarations and convergence statements, the goal of consensus has often been highly elusive, seeming to recede from view in perpetuity.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 176.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 177-78.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 189.

In the midst of the first harvest of bilateral and multilateral dialogues in the 1980s and 90s, a new challenge has gradually emerged on the consensus front. Some began to question whether all the work going into the agreed statements might simply be serving to treat symptoms without ever reaching the source of the disease. Ecumenical theologians began to speak of a “*Grunddifferenz*” that seemed to lie behind the convergences on individual doctrinal issues;¹⁶¹ a certain basic ethos or foundational principle at the base of Lutheranism or Anglicanism or Roman Catholicism which may, in fact, be irreconcilable with the ethos of other Christian communions. At the first glance, specific doctrines or practices might have appeared on the surface to have commonalities or be complementary. However, if the fundamental difference remained active in the background it would interminably restrain the kind of consensus deemed sufficient for further concrete steps toward any kind of corporate reunion of the churches.

Developing this line of reasoning further, some have even wondered whether the ecumenical movement is aiming at the wrong thing altogether. Is consensus a good thing? Why is it so difficult? Is it even possible? Hietamäki identifies Ulrich Körtner and Christoph Schwöbel as two important representative commentators who have gone so far as to eschew consensus as a valid condition for unity. They have done so, it seems, on the basis of the postmodern recovery of the notion that expressions of truth are not the products of the free exercise of reason, but rather arise from common practices and shared grammars existing within

¹⁶¹ The major German volume on the subject is *Grundkonsens-Grunddifferenz*, André Birmelé Harding Meyer eds., (Frankfurt: Otto Lembeck, 1992). See also the English text *In Search of Christian Unity: Basic Consensus/Basic Difference*, Ralph A. Burgess ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

communities. This demonstrates, they argue, that not only is consensus ecclesologically undesirable, it is not even achievable in the current situation of division.¹⁶²

Although, in this particular study, I cannot come close to adequately engaging with the philosophical and hermeneutical subtleties of the wider literature on the topic of ecumenical consensus, I do find Hietamäki's distillations of it both instructive and compelling: the future of consensus ecumenism, she argues, lies in "attention to the cognitive and social-communal aspects of consensus."¹⁶³ There is more going on in doctrinal differences than can be resolved through a shared recourse to objective reasoning. As Catherine Clifford puts it, the task of the next generation will be to find ways to connect the earlier work of seeing "theological consensus" with what she calls the "ecumenism of life."¹⁶⁴ Consensus as an expression of the ecumenical goal need not be outright abandoned, but it must be broadened and transformed. As we will see, many of the most successful ecumenical endeavours of the past have actually sought and managed to do exactly that, often in a largely unconscious and unarticulated way.

3.2.4 Reception

'Reception' as a theological concept is one that has its primary referent in the field of ecclesiology, with particular reference to discussions of the nature of the authority carried by

¹⁶² Hietamäki, *Agreeable Agreement*, 37.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Catherine E. Clifford, "Linking Theological Consensus and Ecumenism of Life," in *Ökumene des Lebens als Herausforderung der wissenschaftlichen Theologie*, ed. by Bernd Jochen Hilberath, Ivana Noble, Johannes Oeldemann, and Peter De Mey, (Frankfurt: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2008), 209-23.

conciliar and papal declarations.¹⁶⁵ Gilles Routhier offers an especially useful definition of what the term implies: “Reception is a spiritual process by which the decisions proposed by a council are received and assimilated into the life of a local church and become for that church a living expression of the apostolic faith.”¹⁶⁶ Although this explanation is fairly straightforward, the process itself is by no means so. A classic example is the gradual reception of Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy following the First Council of Nicea (325).¹⁶⁷ We might also draw attention to the historical reality of what William Rusch calls “non-reception,” a paradigmatic case being the so-called ‘robber council’ of Ephesus (449), the decrees of which were deemed to be inauthentic expressions of Church doctrine because of undue political interference.¹⁶⁸ Although not a new idea, it is since the close of the Second Vatican Council that the subject of reception has received renewed scholarly reflection.

Taking Routhier’s formula, we can correctly infer that reception is usually understood to be something that takes place within communions of churches rather than between them. This primary sense is sometimes referred to as the work of ‘classical reception.’ However, the logic certainly has an additional application in connection with the ecumenical movement. ‘Ecumenical reception’ is certainly highly related to the classical form, but it is also easily distinguished.¹⁶⁹ Classical reception involves accepting the apostolic authenticity of a

¹⁶⁵ On this see for example Aloys Grillmeier, “Konzil und Rezeption. Methodische Bemerkungen zu einem Thema der ökumenischen Diskussion der Gegenwart,” in *Theologie und Philosophie* 45 (1970): 321-52 Yves Congar, “La ‘reception’ comme realite ecclesiologicalue,” in *Eglise et papauté: Regards historiques*, (Paris: Cerf, 1994): 229-66, J-M.R. Tillard, “Reception – Communion,” *One in Christ* 28 (1992): 307-22, Gilles Routhier, “Reception in the Current Theological Debate,” *Jurist* 57 (1997): 17-51.

¹⁶⁶ Gilles Routhier, *La reception d’un council* (Paris: Cerf, 1993), 69 as cited in William Rusch, *Ecumenical Reception: Its Challenge and Opportunity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 61.

¹⁶⁷ See Bernard Sesboué, “Reception of Councils from Nicea to Constantinople II: Conceptual Divergences and Unity in the Faith, Yesterday and Today,” *Jurist* 57, (1997): 87-117.

¹⁶⁸ Rusch, *Ecumenical Reception*, 20.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

decision or practice which has evolved within an ecclesial body that is identified as forming a part of one's own community. On the other hand, ecumenical reception requires that divided churches recognize the faithfulness and consistency of written materials or expressions of belief which have been formulated by or in partnership with those who are in some way removed from one's own community.¹⁷⁰

One could describe the increased degree of difficulty between classical and ecumenical reception with the analogy of trying to understand humour in a second language as opposed to one's first language. When one hears a joke in a second language, not only do the words require translation and thereby fail to carry some of the necessary nuance of meaning, the very concept of what is funny is sometimes not entirely the same. If classical reception in the context of an undivided Church represents an involved and complicated process, one can understandably expect that extending the concept to a situation of divided communions to be all the more problematic.

The Strasbourg Ecumenical Institute has also reflected on the obstacles to ecumenical reception, in words that are all too frequently more reflective of the prevailing situation:

The churches' reception or appropriation of the consensus which has been reached has proven on the whole far more difficult and laborious than expected. It is delayed or in many cases simply absent... These disappointed expectations are expressed in the generally perceived waning of interest in ecumenical dialogue.¹⁷¹

Assessments such as this explain why the challenge of reception presents itself in the eyes of many as perhaps the most difficult obstacle to continued ecumenical progress today.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 56-57.

¹⁷¹ *Crisis and Challenge in the Ecumenical Movement*, 11.

As was touched on above, multilateral and bilateral dialogues between the churches have produced a great deal of fruit in the form of convergence papers and joint declarations. In some cases, there has even been purported consensus or agreement. Speaking about the ecumenical situation on the heels of these discoveries, William Rusch suggests that “the challenge at this point is not to find solutions, but to have the solutions that have been found become decisive in the churches.”¹⁷² The multitude of books and papers talking about breakthroughs can only be said to be authentic agreements when they are recognized as true representations of the faith of the churches represented by them and they begin to impact thinking and decision making at all levels. In other words, ecumenical reception involves not only the acceptance of theological texts, but also of the faith of the people for whom the texts attempt to speak.¹⁷³ It will, therefore, require far more than the dissemination of theological and historical information to theologians and church leaders. It will depend upon a radical formation and transformation of the attitudes and understandings of the faithful in both communities, and a willingness to want to receive the other that is not always in place.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, as Rusch admits, while one can identify certain ‘stages on the way’ to real ecumenical reception,¹⁷⁵ there is a measure of uncertainty among some ecumenical theorists as to whether the reception required is even possible in the context of broken Eucharistic fellowship.¹⁷⁶ Reception is the next step, but the institutional and the spiritual conditions which seem to be required to make this process possible seem to be precisely what is missing. Such is the logjam of ecumenical reception.

¹⁷² Rusch, *Ecumenical Reception*, 78.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 70-76.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 89-116.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

3.3 Conclusion

The state of the ecumenical movement can be described in all sorts of ways. Regardless of the word that it used, this chapter should have made clear that something is happening to the ecumenical movement that is causing it to pause and reflect, and will likely mean that it has to plot a new course than the one it has been on to this point. There are many different issues involved in this mid-life crisis, and only a few of these have been briefly introduced. Suffice it to say, those who have committed themselves to the cause of ecumenism are finding out that it is a lot more complicated than the first few generations of activists may have anticipated. There is, it seems, a lot more ground to cover in the work for visible unity and reunion, and even potentially the need to backtrack over some earlier missed steps in order to make sure things are on the right path. As Robert Bilheimer has put it, they will need to be prepared for the ecumenical “long haul.”¹⁷⁷

These first three chapters of this dissertation have been mainly preparatory in nature, laying the groundwork for the real constructive efforts that will begin to take shape in Parts II and III. To this point we have had only seen a sketch portrait of the star of this study, Sergei Bulgakov. However, he has been there in the background, waiting to have his say. We will now begin to delve into the great breadth and depth of Bulgakovian ecumenism, with this ecumenical survey well in hand. As will become clear, Bulgakov’s life as an ecumenical pioneer has a great deal to offer us in terms of resources for responding to the challenges of today.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Bilheimer, *A Spirituality for the Long Haul*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984).

Part 2
Bulgakovian Ecumenism

“What do we mean by the reunion of the churches in one Church? Is this a ‘pact’ or an act that is a manifestation of the one Church as a revelation of Divine-humanity, as Sophia the Wisdom of God? Until the consciousness of the Church can reach this depth of self-determination, all ecumenical ‘pacts’ will be in vain. Again and again will the separated churches dash in vain against the walls which divide them, in tragic realization of the objective impossibility of genuine reunion. There is, nevertheless, one true way, which is that of learning to know and understand the Church as revealed Divine-humanity, Sophia the Wisdom of God.”

– Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*

Chapter 4 An Ecumenical Ecclesiology

4.1 A Product of Time and Place

No one would question the claim that human beings are products of the environments in which they live. This fact is certainly true of theologians, and indeed of ecumenists. In the case of Sergei Bulgakov, this is perhaps even more quintessentially the case. In my view, it is not possible to adequately appreciate Bulgakov's ecumenical inspiration by referencing the written sources of his ecclesiology alone. For Bulgakov, the opinions he formed and the decisions he made about the Church, its divisions, and the source of its unity, are very much attributable to his own history as a member of it. Narrating some of that history is the burden of this present chapter.

Several biographies and general surveys of Bulgakov's life and work already exist,¹⁷⁸ and there is no need to expend great effort only to duplicate that work. This is why I am calling this chapter an 'ecclesiology' rather than a simple biography. In addition, because I will concern myself with highlighting those experiences in Bulgakov's ecclesial life which appear to have been most influential in relation to the issue of Christian division and the work for ecclesial unity, this particular ecclesiology will be ecumenical in orientation.

¹⁷⁸ See for example Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross & the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above: A Primer in the Theology of Father Sergei Bulgakov* (Gloucester, U.K.: Gracewing, 2005), Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov – Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), L. A. Zander, *Bog i mir: Mirosozertsanie Ottsa Sergiia Bulgakova*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1948).

The high water marks of Bulgakov's ecumenical ecclesiology can be plotted around five major events: 1) The influence of two Russian ecumenical role models; 2) His involvement as a lay delegate to the 1917 Sacred Council of the Russian Orthodox Church; 3) The Russian Revolution and his subsequent exile; 4) His move to Paris and the St. Serge Theological Institute; and 5) His experience of ecclesiastical censure in relation to his explorations of the dogmatic implications of Russian sophiology. These will be the focus of attention throughout this chapter.

4.2 Russian Role Models

Although Bulgakov is a representative of what we might call the first generation of modern ecumenism as an organized movement, there were of course many interesting examples of ecumenical engagement going on in the centuries prior to the twentieth. In terms of nineteenth century Russian ecumenism, two names which especially stand out are Aleksei Khomiakov (1804-1860) and Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900).

4.2.1 Aleksei Khomiakov

To those who are familiar with his thought, the identification of Khomiakov as an ecumenical role model may seem somewhat counter-intuitive at first glance.¹⁷⁹ As indicated by one of his best known theological publications, *The Church is One*,¹⁸⁰ it was

¹⁷⁹ Vernon Bruce Rigdon's dissertation contains some commentary on the difficulties presented by Khomiakov in light of twentieth century ecumenism. See Bruce Vernon Rigdon, *Alexsei Stepanovich Khomiakov: Advocate for Orthodoxy*, PhD Diss., (Yale University, 1968), 372-433.

¹⁸⁰ Alexsei Stepanovich Khomiakov, *The Church is One*, (London: SPCK., 1948).

Khomiakov's central conviction that the Church of Christ was coextensive with the visible institution of Orthodoxy. Seeking Christian unity, therefore, meant nothing less than the reunion of the various heretical or schismatic groups with the Church. Despite this strong dose of Orthodox chauvinism, Khomiakov remained very open to contact with Western Christianity throughout his life. Most notable in this regard is his series of correspondences with the Anglican William Palmer during the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁸¹

Bulgakov's ecumenical creativity went far beyond anything Khomiakov would have imagined. As we will see below, it was the sophiological development of Bulgakov's ecclesiology which provided him with a means of acknowledging an ecclesial reality to non-Orthodox Christian Communion in a way Khomiakov could not. However, Bulgakov consistently upheld Khomiakov's conviction that the Church could not be divided into branches, and remained equally staunch in his confession of the identity of the one Church with Orthodoxy to the end.

4.2.2 Vladimir Soloviev

We will hear more about Vladimir Soloviev in the chapters below in connection with Bulgakov's sophiology. However, his involvement in ecumenism also played a role in Bulgakov's formation. The bulk of Soloviev's effort in the ecumenical realm was concerned with the healing of Orthodox relations with the Roman Catholic Church. Soloviev was highly critical of the culture of anti-Catholicism which had become so much a part of the Orthodox

¹⁸¹ See for example A. S. Khomiakov, "Third Letter to William Palmer" and A. S. Khomiakov, "Fifth Letter to William Palmer" in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, Boris Jakim and Robert Bird, eds. and trans., (Hudson NY: Lindisfarne, Books, 1998), 143-153 and 154-160.

identity, and regularly debated the merits of reunion with the West with other Orthodox thinkers of his time.¹⁸² Towards the end of his life Soloviev even appears to have recited a confession of faith in the supremacy of the bishop of Rome, and received the Eucharist from an Eastern Rite Catholic priest.¹⁸³

For a time one popular interpretation of Soloviev's ecumenical history was to read him as a Russian version of the erstwhile Anglican Tractarian later turned Roman Catholic Cardinal, John Henry Newman.¹⁸⁴ However, as both Chrysostom Frank and David Brown have recently demonstrated, there is ample evidence that Soloviev never had any intention of abandoning his location as a member of the Orthodox Church.¹⁸⁵ Rather, Soloviev seems to have felt it possible to individually transcend the institutional boundaries between the divided churches.¹⁸⁶ As Frank suggests, he took this step as a personal prophetic testimony to his assurance about the Church of the future.¹⁸⁷

As we will see in the later chapters, there are clear connections between Soloviev's controversial ecumenical thought and Bulgakov's own proposal of intercommunion within the Anglican-Orthodox Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius. Bulgakov would seek to

¹⁸² For more on Soloviev's dealings with the Slavophiles on the question of the Western Church see the chapter on Soloviev in Nicolas Zernov, *Three Russian Prophets*, (London: SCM, 1944).

¹⁸³ A record to this effect is appears in Soloviev, *Lectures on Divine Humanity*, 22.

¹⁸⁴ Such is the thesis of the influential biography produced by M.J.B d'Herbigny, *Vladimir Soloviev: A Russian Newman*, (London: R & T Washbourne, 1918).

¹⁸⁵ See Chrysostom Frank, "The Problem of Church Unity in the Life and Thought of Vladimir Soloviev," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 36, 3 (1992): 189-215, and David Brown, "Soloviev, the Trinity and Christian Unity," *Dialogue and Alliance* 4.3 (Fall 1990): 41-54.

¹⁸⁶ For more on this see T. S. Solov'eva, "Vladimir Solov'ev and his Philosophy of the Universal Church," in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 57, nos. 1-2 (2005): 47-66.

¹⁸⁷ Frank, "The Problem of Church Unity in the Life and Thought of Vladimir Soloviev," 193-97.

preserve much of the same prophetic element intended by Soloviev, but in a way that sought to maintain his commitment to the ecclesiological principles of the Orthodox Church.

4.3 The Sacred Council of 1917

The history of nineteenth century Russia was dramatically shaped by the rise of what is now called the Slavophile movement.¹⁸⁸ Although they were a rather diverse group with a number of different aims, the Slavophiles did have some common desires. One of these was to return Russia to its uniquely Slavic roots by purging it from the infiltration of what were thought to be alien ideals imported from the West beginning during the time of Peter the Great. The Slavophile movement was in large part social and political, although the reform of the Russian Orthodox Church was also a component of Slavophile thought.¹⁸⁹ The Russian Church, so it was held, should not operate under the models provided by Western Europe. Rather, it should be characteristically Orthodox, and even more importantly it should be Russian Orthodox.

Since 1721, the Russian Church had been without a Patriarch, instead having been headed by a collegial Synod of state appointed clergy under the ever-increasing control of an officer of the government known as the ‘Ober-Procurator.’ This system of heavy state involvement in the governance of the Church began to face significant criticism in the nineteenth century,

¹⁸⁸ For an excellent collection of primary sources and editorial commentary see Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (eds. and trans.), *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998).

¹⁸⁹ For by history I have relied on the work of A. A. Bogolepov’s *Church Reforms in Russia, 1905-1918*, trans. A. E. Moorehouse, (Bridgeport CN: Publications Committee of the Metropolitan Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in America, 1966), and Dimitry Pospelovsky’s *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998).

largely as a result of the Slavophile movement.¹⁹⁰ In December of 1904, Tsar Nicholas II had issued an Imperial ukaz which instituted new legislation on religious freedom. This decision provided new freedoms for non-Orthodox religions but had a negative side effect of further highlighting the lack of freedom for Orthodoxy as the state religion. A Special Conference was, therefore, organized to discuss the issue of Church-state relations, and in 1905, formal requests were made to the Tsar calling for a Church Council to address various reforms in the Church in order to limit the influence of secular authorities. It took a very long time for this Council to be convened, being delayed by state resistance, war, revolution, and the abdication of the Tsar. However, on August 15, 1917, the Sacred Council of the Russian Orthodox Church was opened.

Already a person of influence in the community of religiously minded intellectuals, Bulgakov was invited to participate as one of the lay delegates at the Sacred Council. He was influential on several key issues,¹⁹¹ none more than the cause to re-establish the Patriarchate in Moscow.¹⁹² Amidst considerable debate, one of the first acts of the Council was to reinstitute the Patriarchate, electing Metropolitan Tikhon of Moscow by the drawing of lots. A comprehensive account of all the inter-workings and decisions of the 1917 Council is well beyond my scope here. With respect to our interest in Bulgakov, the most significant aspect of this important moment in Russian Church history lies in the uniquely representative nature of the Council's participants.

¹⁹⁰ See Bogolepov, *Church Reforms in Russia*, 9-12

¹⁹¹ For more on Bulgakov's wider role in the Council see Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, 189-206.

¹⁹² Pospelovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 28-31.

A. A. Bogolepov does an excellent job of demonstrating the nuanced arrangement between voting and decision-making authority that was finally agreed to.¹⁹³ During the preparatory phase, a decision was made that the Council should seek to be as faithful as possible to the character of the early Church Councils. Every effort should be made to allow it to be truly representative, including full participation by the lower clergy and the laity alongside the bishops. Laity, clergy and bishops were to discern together the mind of the Church on a given issue. Each member of the Council had a vote, and each vote counted equally. Bishops were then to exercise the added responsibility of undertaking a collective review of a Council's resolutions prior to their final approval, after which they could either confirm the decision or return it to Council with some recommendations for amendment or further discussion. The bishops could influence the Council in a certain direction, but they did not have an outright veto. It was a system intended to involve the whole Church, and to frame the role of the episcopacy as being within the Church rather than above the Church.

While there are many other factors which helped to form the central convictions of Bulgakov's ecclesiology, there can be little doubt that this experience played a part. That Bulgakov lived through this conciliar moment in the life of his particular church was highly significant in shaping his understanding of the appropriate interplay of the hierarchy and the faithful. In many ways, the 1917 Council was, for him, a visible parable of what an authentic operation of Church authority looked like. In my opinion, I believe it served to shape his vision of the role of the laity in the Church's recovery of unity in important ways as well. The degree of this influence will become more evident as we work through subsequent chapters.

¹⁹³ See Bogolepov, *Church Reforms in Russia*, 21-56.

4.4 Revolution and Exile

In 1918, following the close of the Council, and in the midst of the rapid increase of Bolshevik power, Bulgakov was ordained to the priesthood. As historians are now well aware, the Russian Church was about to enter a time of suffering and martyrdom. “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” So goes the line commonly attributed to Tertullian of Carthage speaking of the way in which the persecution of Christians often serves to inspire new faith in others rather than extinguish it. To say the same thing somewhat differently, we could also quote words of Joseph after being sold into slavery: “What you intended for evil, God intended for good.”¹⁹⁴ The sentiment in each of these two quotes finds an ecumenical application in the life of Sergei Bulgakov. Painful as these years and decades were, through these exiled Russians would come a group of people eager and uniquely equipped to advance the unity and vitality of the one Church of Christ in ways that never would have been expected.

The Bolsheviks were keenly aware of the position of influence held by the Church within Russian society, and they were intent on confronting it.¹⁹⁵ Orthodoxy was seen as a major obstacle in the way of establishing control of the people's hearts and minds. The Church had supported the pro-monarchist white armies in the civil war, and was, therefore, to be treated as an enemy of the Revolution. In the years following 1917, many Russian Christians, including laity, religious, priests and bishops were sent to prison labour camps, subjected to torture, or simply killed. A less direct but equally destructive strategy was the promotion of

¹⁹⁴ Genesis 50:20

¹⁹⁵ On the events of this period see Pospelovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 227-241.

schism. The Bolsheviks actively supported and infiltrated the so-called ‘Living Church’ movement in order to stir up disunity within the Orthodox Church.¹⁹⁶ The hope, of course, was that if the Church could not be brought to its knees simply by material deprivation and physical harm, perhaps conditions could be fostered which would lead to its collapse from within.

To these measures was added the tactic of exile, eliminating any constructive criticism that might be mounted against the regime by forcefully sending it away. As a critic of the Revolution, Bulgakov had already been banned from returning to Russia by late 1918, following a trip abroad. He would spend several years in an unofficial exile in Crimea, as well as brief periods in Prague and Constantinople. After this chapter of moving from one place of dislocation to another, Bulgakov would ultimately end up in Paris for the remainder of his life. The suffering of his Church is another feature of Bulgakov’s ecclesiology which must not be ignored. It was clearly another decisive factor in eliciting Bulgakov’s deep commitment to ecumenism. In 1933, Bulgakov looked back on his ecumenical career and reflected that it was “the experience and tragedy of the Russian Church and personal banishment from Russia” that had served as one of the earliest inspirations to see the unity of the Church.¹⁹⁷

Why did Bulgakov’s experience of Revolution and exile have this kind of effect on him?

Brandon Gallaher suggests that it resulted from an utter disillusionment of Bulgakov’s earlier

¹⁹⁶ On the ‘Renovationist Movement’ and its connections with the Soviet state see Edward E. Roslof, *Red Priests: Renovationism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905-1946*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

¹⁹⁷ *Report of Conference held at High Leigh on ‘The Healing of Schism,’* June 26-28, 1934, 2.

affinity for something he calls Russian Messianism.¹⁹⁸ The idea that Russia had a distinct role to play in the unfolding of Church history and in the Divine plan for the salvation of the world had gained considerable currency with many in the circles which Bulgakov travelled. Going back as far as the fifteenth century, it had become a common trope to speak of the city of Moscow as a ‘Third Rome’; as the next centre of the Empire of Christendom for the modern era.¹⁹⁹ This sentiment saw a revival in connection with the Slavophile movement in the nineteenth century, and was certainly in the minds of some of Bulgakov’s contemporaries.

The abdication of the Tsar and the subsequent humiliation of the Church had seemingly turned all of this on its head. Many Russians, Bulgakov included, interpreted this as a sign that the end of the world was near. Gallaher makes special note of the abundant apocalyptic imagery used in a 1925 address entitled “The Guardian of the House of the Lord,” given by Bulgakov in honour of Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow.²⁰⁰ If Russia had been struck down, it seemed to follow that Christ’s return could not be far off. This only served to ratchet up the prophetic expectations of the purported Russian mission to the wider Christian world. In biblical fashion, Bulgakov seems to have seen himself as a member of an exiled remnant; as someone who had become uniquely responsible for seeking to restore the unity of divided Christendom in advance of the ever increasing time of trial and tribulation. As Bulgakov’s

¹⁹⁸ Gallaher, *Catholic Action*, 30-31.

¹⁹⁹ On this see Dimitri Strémooukhoff, “Moscow the Third Rome: Sources of the Doctrine,” *Speculum* 28, no. 1 (Jan 1953), 84-101.

²⁰⁰ See Gallaher, *Catholic Action*, 31.

diaries from this period record, he was experiencing a growing sense that “the hand of God [was] on me, I know it already, [I] sense it with definiteness, with reliability.”²⁰¹

Speaking some fifteen years later, Bulgakov would identify his experience of the Russian Church’s persecution and martyrdom as the true heart of his ecumenical fervour. “[A] conviction was born in me,” he would declare, “that we Orthodox could not overcome the Antichrist alone and therefore God was calling me to work for Reunion.”²⁰² Christianity was under threat from such a great enemy that it could not afford to fight amongst its internal factions. To Bulgakov’s eyes, the events of history were God blatantly calling the Church to unity. It was not the time to be overly concerned with procedure; it was the time to act, quickly and decisively. As we will see, later in life Bulgakov would begin to push for some rather bold steps in search of reunion, even when the path forward seemed reckless. The eschatological imperative thrust upon him by his personal history had, in his mind, made it abundantly clear to him that pushing the acceptable boundaries was the only logical course of action. This special sense of ecumenical urgency stayed with Bulgakov throughout his life, as did his feeling of personal responsibility for unity with the Christian West. Like many other elements that shaped Bulgakov’s ecumenical career, these too had their roots in his personal experience.

²⁰¹ See S.N. Bulgakov, “Yaltinskii dnevnik” in *Avtobiograficheskie zametki. Dnevnik. Stat’i*, (Orel: Izdatel’stvo Orlovskoi gosudarstvennoi teleradioveshchatel’noi kompanii, 1998), 90, as cited in Nikolaev, *Church and Reunion in the Theology of Sergei Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky, 1918-1940*, 17.

²⁰² *Report of Conference held at High Leigh on “The Healing of Schism,”* June 26-28, 1934, 2.

4.5 Paris and St. Serge

For a period of several years, many of those among the exiled Russian community were essentially transient, passing between the Ukraine, Serbia, Czechoslovakia, and so on. However, the city of Paris quickly became one of the major centres for Russian exiles, and Bulgakov would eventually end up there himself in 1925. He was called to Paris by the bishop with charge over the Russians in Western Europe, Metropolitan Evlogii, in the hopes that he would agree to serve as dean and professor of theology at the newly formed Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe Saint-Serge. Bulgakov held this position for the remaining years of his life, eagerly devoting himself to the formation of priests and theological students from among the dispersed Russian community.

St. Serge was an ecumenical landmark from day one. Donald Lowrie provides a very useful historical treatment of the early years of the exiled Russian community, and of the movement to form a new theological institute in the French city. Lowrie records how the exiled Russians at first had only one church available to them – the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. As the community continued to grow, this quickly became inadequate. By 1924, Evlogii had begun making arrangements for the purchase of a German church building that had been seized by the French government during World War I. The hope was that this building would come to serve not only as a second parish for the growing community of Russians in the city, but also to provide an opportunity for the creation of a theological school for the training of Russian Orthodox pastors and theologians.

The establishment of St. Serge would not have been possible without the intervention of certain key ecumenical leaders. In what one of Bulgakov's fellow St. Serge professors, Anton Kartashev, referred to as a "historic gesture," ecumenical pioneer Dr. John Mott, at that time President of the YMCA, was the first donor to make a large sum of money available in support of this initiative.²⁰³ Lowrie notes how Mott's biography contains numerous interactions with the Russian Church, both in general and in connection with the formation of the St. Serge Institute. Mott had visited Russia in 1917 give an address to the Sacred Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, and, seemingly because of this trip, he would forever maintain a keen sense of personal connection with Russian Christianity.²⁰⁴

Another notable figure in with respect to these efforts was the remarkable Paul Anderson. Anderson had accompanied Mott to Russia in 1917 as part of the YMCA leadership. In 1920, he would be appointed as the YMCA secretary responsible for the relations with Russian Christians living outside of the Soviet Union. Bulgakov would later describe Anderson's work in service of the exiled Russian Christian community as that of a "guardian angel." The full quote reads: "To you, who has enabled me to work in peace and harmony for more than 10 years as a guardian angel to a certain Russian exile, called up from a nation of distant and alien people, I want to say in the name of the Russian Church and Russian culture and the Russian people a heartfelt thanks."²⁰⁵ As E. V. Ivanova comments, Anderson's close connections and personal knowledge of the Russian community allowed him to serve as something of a mediator or "guarantor" of the good faith of the Russians with other Western

²⁰³ Lowrie, *Saint Sergius in Paris*, 7.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁰⁵ As quoted in E. V. Ivanova, "Guardian Angel of the Russian Exile," in *Bulgakov: The Religious and Philosophical Way*, ed. by M. A. Vasil'eva, (Moscow: Russian Way, 2003).

Christians.²⁰⁶ Anderson was able to secure financial assistance for the Institute directly from the Church of England precisely in this way. He also accompanied Bulgakov to Canada and the U.S.A. to give a series of lectures to various Anglican and Protestant schools and parish groups about the situation facing the Russian Church in order to raise funds.²⁰⁷

St. Serge truly was an unprecedented setting: a Russian Orthodox seminary meeting in a once Lutheran Church, funded by Methodist and Anglican money from England and North America, and located in the historically Roman Catholic nation of France. Ecumenically speaking, Bulgakov and his colleagues were sitting on prime real estate. For the Paris Russians, the ecumenical movement was not just another of the many important church activities which they could periodically devote themselves to before going back to the business of their own Christian community. Ecumenism became, of necessity, a way of life. Because of its geographical location, the St. Serge community was closely linked with the genesis of the modern ecumenical movement, and its leadership was uniquely predisposed to participate. Because of his position at the Institute, Bulgakov became a *de facto* Orthodox ecumenical leader. Providentially, he was very well suited to the role.

The St. Serge community never forgot the ecumenical nature of its formation. At the dedication service for the St. Sergius parish, bishop Evlogii highlighted the ecumenical foundations which had assisted in bringing his vision for a Russian church and theological institute to reality. “Remember,” Evlogii told the largely Russian gathering, “what a significant part of the means for this holy enterprise was given by foreigners... [M]ay this be

²⁰⁶ Ivanova, “Guardian Angel of the Russian Exile,” 1.

²⁰⁷ See Anderson’s report on this trip in “Father Sergius Bulgakov in America,” *Sobornost* 1 (March 1935), 38-44.

a place of brotherly (sic) intercommunion and the *rapprochement* of all Christians.”²⁰⁸ A few years later, the institute would grant honorary doctorates to Mott and several other Protestant and Anglican leaders, including two former Archbishops of Canterbury.²⁰⁹ It is no coincidence that the leading figures in Orthodox ecumenism were those with connections to the exiled Russian community and the St. Serge Institute. The connections and friendships which Bulgakov and others made with Western Christians and Western Christian organizations, as well as the spiritual and very tangible the support they had received from them, helped create favourable conditions for later ecumenical openness and creativity. Though this cannot be credited to Bulgakov alone, he was certainly a major player.

4.6 The Sophia Controversy

The 1930s would be the most productive of Bulgakov’s career, yet they would also be a time in which his theological project would face some serious questions.²¹⁰ The apparent source of the controversy surrounding Bulgakov’s thought was the aforementioned doctrine of Sophia, the Wisdom of God. Official statements declaring the heretical nature of the sophiological aspects of Bulgakov’s theology appeared from two different Russian Orthodox jurisdictions.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Lowrie, *Saint Sergius in Paris*, 11.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

²¹⁰ For more detail see Geffert, “The Charges of Heresy against Sergii Bulgakov: The Majority and Minority Reports of Evlogii’s Commission and the Final Report of the Bishops’ Conference,” 49. Geffert also includes English translations of the two official reports against Bulgakov as appendices to the article.

²¹¹ See *O Sofii Premudrosti Bozhiei: ukaz moskovskoi patriarkhii I dokladnye zapiski prof. prot. Sergeiia Bulgakova Mitropolitu Evlogiiu*, (Paris: 1935), and *Dokladnaia zapiska Mitropolitu Evlogiiu prof. prot. Sergeiia Bulgakova po povodu opredeleniia Bozhiei*, (Paris: YMCA Press, 1936).

A more detailed interaction with the details of Bulgakov's sophiology will have to wait until the next chapter. Some reflection on the status and implications of such indictments will be put off until chapter seven. What will be highlighted here at this stage is the fact that the dates of the Sophia affair coincide very closely with the boldest period of Bulgakov's ecumenical career. Indeed they almost overlap exactly with the years when he was formulating his justification for his 1933/34 proposal for intercommunion within the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius. I do not think it can be just a coincidence that these two pivotal moments in his career line up in this way, and would go so far as to suggest that Bulgakov's experience of the reaction of his ecumenical colleagues to the controversy actually played a positive role in his ecumenical formation.

The reaction of Bulgakov's ecumenical contacts to his declared censure is highly interesting especially from within the membership of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius. A remarkable document from the Fellowship archives records that there was a sharp debate about what the appropriate course of action should be, especially considering the fact that Bulgakov was one of the respected leaders within the group.²¹² One side advocated staying out of things completely, treating the Sophia affair "as the domestic troubles of the Russians, which do not concern the other members of the Fellowship."²¹³ However, many felt that there was another way, a way "more daring and... more Christian."²¹⁴ It consisted in "taking the troubles of the Russian section as suffering which affects all our members."²¹⁵ As the Fellowship statement put it:

²¹² *Untitled Confidential Note from the archives of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*, undated.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The present crisis is the first occasion when the reality of our unity is being tested. If we are really the members of the same Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church of Christ then surely we have to bear the burdens of one another and of our Churches, even though as yet they are canonically separated.²¹⁶

In other words, Bulgakov's situation was a real opportunity for the non-Orthodox members of the Fellowship to act out what they were beginning to discover was the case: That they were in a measure of real ecclesial communion with their Orthodox colleagues, and, therefore, it was incumbent upon them to treat this as an event which impacted their community and their churches as well.

Much to their credit, it was this second path which the Fellowship decided to follow. Paul Anderson worked particularly hard on Bulgakov's behalf within the Fellowship (and with officials in the Church of England, and in the United States) to explain all the issues involved so as to avoid hasty conclusions and misunderstandings. Some of the details of his correspondence with Fellowship members and officials from the Church of England are recorded in letters he wrote to Canon John Douglas, a Fellowship member and then Secretary of the Church of England Council on Foreign Relations.²¹⁷

Of course, taking the time to investigate the controversy did not necessarily mean unqualified support of Bulgakov's sophiology. Papers and correspondences reveal that there were some who seem to have understood and agreed with Bulgakov's sophiological presuppositions, some who quite strongly disagreed, and some who were uncertain.²¹⁸ This variety of viewpoints cut across Anglican and Orthodox lines. However, it is the Fellowship's

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ A record of this correspondence is archived at the Lambeth Palace Library. See *The Douglas Papers*, 44, 45-190.

²¹⁸ *The Douglas Papers*, Lambeth Palace Library, 44.

concerned and measured approach to the situation was a testament to the fraternal bonds that existed between the members. A group of Anglicans committing themselves to studying the complexities of a doctrinal controversy initiated by Russian Orthodox church leaders thousands of miles away simply because it involved a man they knew to be of profound character and deep Christian faith is a perfect example of the kind of spiritual community which existed in the Fellowship.

Although I have not been able to locate any written reaction from Bulgakov to the Fellowship's handling of this painful period in his life, it does not seem unfair to speculate that Bulgakov's thinking about the significance of his relationship with Anglicans would have been affected. In my opinion, it is likely that he took this as a very tangible piece of evidence of the real and enduring communion that he and others in the Russian community had come to share with a group of Christians who were by all accounts severed from the unity of the Church. Such a fact had to be taken seriously. That the intercommunion proposal was made in close proximity to these events could be taken as confirmation of that fact.

4.7 Conclusion

I have begun my analysis of the foundations of Bulgakovian ecumenism by focusing on events from his personal history. This was done because of the unique role which experience seems to have played in Bulgakov's thought. At times, interpreters of theology can fall into a reading that is too one-sidedly intellectual. As has I hope been shown, Bulgakov did the things he did ecumenically not only because of his theological assumptions and ideals, but

equally because of where he lived, what he experienced, and the people he interacted with. The material we have covered in this chapter this represents, therefore, an essential complement to the 'written ecclesiology' that will be discussed in the next chapter. We are now able to proceed to those written sources with an added interpretive framework for making sense of the genesis of Bulgakov's formal theology of the Church.

Chapter 5 An Ecclesiology of Ecumenism

5.1 Written Ecclesiology

Ecumenism is in many ways simply an extension of ecclesiology. What a person thinks about the Church will necessarily influence whether or not they engage in relationships and dialogue with other Christians for the purpose of seeking visible unity with them. Bulgakov's ecclesiological viewpoint was certainly instrumental in shaping not only why he became committed to the ecumenical task, but also how he went about it. It must be noted, however, that Bulgakov did not have an especially well defined ecclesiology, at least not in the sense of a modern theological curriculum. This is by no means because the Church was not important to him. Rather, the Church was so central to Bulgakov's vision that it is in the background on almost every subject upon which he reflects.

Bulgakov's ecclesiology emerges especially alongside of his Christology and theological anthropology. Both of these are found within the first volume of his trilogy, *The Lamb of God*.²¹⁹ It is also to be found in connection with his Pneumatology as contained in the text *The Comforter*.²²⁰ A number of ecclesologically relevant ideas also appear in two of the works of Bulgakov's minor theological trilogy, those dealing with the Mother of God²²¹ and

²¹⁹ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, abridged trans. and ed. by Boris Jakim, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

²²⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, abridged trans. and ed. by Boris Jakim, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

²²¹ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, trans. by Thomas Allan Smith, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

John the Baptist²²² respectively. His text on the sacrament of Holy Communion, *The Holy Grail and the Eucharist*,²²³ there are also a variety of salient comments relevant to an understanding of the Church.

Even when it comes to *The Bride of the Lamb*,²²⁴ the volume of the major trilogy ostensibly dedicated to discussing the Church, one still does not find an ‘ecclesiology’ in the contemporary, systematic sense of the term. Bulgakov spends a great deal of time dealing with topics such as creation, grace, free will and determinism, history, death, and eschatology. In fact, he only devotes about one hundred pages of the five hundred page text to what we would normally consider ecclesiological issues proper. Again, this is not because Bulgakov had little to say about the Church, but rather because nearly everything he said was conceived in an ecclesiological way. It is, therefore, highly necessary to work our way through a variety of prior theological reflection in order to obtain an accurate view of Bulgakov’s picture of the Church.

There are two major features of Bulgakov’s written ecclesiology which are especially relevant for understanding his approach to ecumenism: 1) The doctrines of Sophia, and 2) The development of the Slavic principle of *sobornost*. These subjects are central for mapping the evolution of Bulgakov’s commitment to Orthodox uniqueness alongside of his appraisal the ecclesiological content of non-Orthodoxy, his preference for seeking

²²² Sergius Bulgakov, *The Friend of the Bridegroom: on the Orthodox Veneration of the Forerunner*, trans. by Boris Jakim, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

²²³ Sergii Bulgakov and Boris Jakim, *The Holy Grail and the Eucharist*, (Hudson, N.Y.: Lindisfarne Books, 1997).

²²⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, abridged trans. and ed. by Boris Jakim, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

ecumenical spiritual experience over doctrinal convergence, and his emphasis on what I will eventually speak about as local ecumenism. In addition, two further points of special ecumenical interest that can be drawn from Bulgakov's reflection on topics of a more tangential connection to the traditional subjects of ecumenical reflection: 3) A reflection on ecclesial primacy, and 4) An ecclesiology of friendship. Though they are relatively minor pieces in comparison with the larger aims of Bulgakov's overall theological project, we would not have a complete picture of his ecumenical ecclesiology without giving these subjects their own due attention.

5.2 A Sophiology of the Church

The sophianic dimension of Bulgakov's writings is complicated and requires significant background work in order to be properly understood. A complete consideration of the development and the subtleties of Bulgakov's sophiology is too large a task to be attempted here. However, in order to properly comprehend Bulgakov's understanding of the Church, it is necessary to understand Sophia. An introduction to the origins of sophiology, as well as its implications for ecclesiology, is therefore unavoidable.

5.2.1 Origins of Sophiology

There are three sources in which Bulgakov reveals some of the initial inspiration for his thinking on the subject of Sophia, the Wisdom of God. Two of these include his previously mentioned *Autobiographical Notes*, as well as the autobiographical portions of his earliest

articulation of sophiology, *Unfading Light*.²²⁵ In both of these, Bulgakov speaks of the role of personal mystical experience as an influential factor. Although his summary introduction to sophiology written later in life, a third book, entitled, *Sophia: the Wisdom of God*,²²⁶ identifies Orthodox liturgy and piety, Greek thought, and the German mystic Jacob Boehme as other key inspirations, the mystic dimension is also evident.²²⁷ Christopher Bamford's editorial forward to *Sophia* relates a series of spiritual encounters, including an evening gaze at the mountains in southern Russia, a viewing of Raphael's Sistine Madonna, and a visit to the dome of Hagia Sophia. In each case, Bulgakov seems to have been captivated in a miraculous way by the beauty of the world. Reflecting on these experiences later in life Bulgakov would come to see them as a "first encounter with Sophia" and as "tangible proof and manifestation... of the Sophianic nature of the world."²²⁸

However, the origins of Bulgakov's sophiology are not only of the experiential sort. Bulgakov acknowledges "Plato" and the "silent revelation of the Greek genius, bequeathed to the ages" as predecessors of his sophianic project. As Paul Valliere highlights, Bulgakov would point to Plato's theory of forms as an anticipation of certain key elements of sophiology.²²⁹ In his more developed theological texts, Bulgakov references the Platonic *Timaeus* as a flawed and "blasphemous" anticipation of Divine Sophia, but an anticipation nonetheless.²³⁰ The thought of the enigmatic Jacob Boehme is also credited as a sophiological precursor, with Bulgakov describing him as "perhaps the greatest among

²²⁵ Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading light: contemplations and speculations*, T. Allan Smith, trans., (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2012).

²²⁶ Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, (Hudson, N.Y.: Lindisfarne Press, 1993).

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-21.

²²⁸ As cited in Christopher Bamford, "Forward" in *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*, x, xiv.

²²⁹ Valliere references the Russian edition of *Svet Nevechernii*, 189.

²³⁰ Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 125-127.

German thinkers.”²³¹ Boehme lived during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and wrote on a wide range of esoteric theological themes.²³² Central to Boehme’s thinking were ideas about negativity, suffering, and the finitude of the Divine, as well as ideas about the participation of creatures in the becoming of God. Although Bulgakov insisted that his sophiology should not be understood as deriving from these sources, he was willing to acknowledge a certain limited “Western sophiology” which managed to sense some of the same cosmological implications which the Russian sophiologists would finally adequately reflect upon in connection with the ancient tradition of the Church.²³³

Bulgakov also draws on some unexpected sources for his sophiological thinking, at least from a contemporary Western perspective. Particularly interesting in this regard is the way Bulgakov treats sources such as liturgy, iconography, and Church architecture. For Bulgakov, the fact that there were texts for special services devoted to St. Sophia, that there were authorized icons of Sophia, and that there were churches dedicated to St. Sophia not only in Byzantium but in the cities such as Kiev, Moscow, Nizhnii-Novgorod, and Yaroslavl, represented clear confirmation that the Church had always had an unconscious apprehension of the truth of the doctrines of Sophia, even if this had not been very well articulated by theologians.²³⁴ Bulgakov called these signs of Sophia in the life of the Church “hieroglyphic sophiology,” suggesting that “this wealth of symbolism has been preserved in the archives of ecclesiastical antiquity, but, covered by the dust of ages, it has been of no use to anyone.” He

²³¹ Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*, 6.

²³² For an introduction to Boehme see Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic*. (New York: State University Press, 1991).

²³³ Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*, 7.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

therefore frames his sophiological project as part of an effort to “sweep away the dust of the ages and to decipher the sacred script.”²³⁵

To these above factors I would also highlight the decisive role of Hebrew and Christian Scripture. Bulgakov runs through a biblical theology of wisdom, attending to relevant texts in both the Old and New Testaments. Obviously the Scriptures which are traditionally categorized as wisdom books (Job, Proverbs, etc.) are central to his survey, as well as pseudepigraphical texts which are related to this wisdom tradition (Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, etc.).²³⁶ In these passages, Bulgakov saw a common theme of speaking about Wisdom in a personified way, as a principle of life present with God before creation: “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.”²³⁷

Bulgakov was well aware of the traditional tendency to interpret these texts in connection with the person of the Logos, and identifies 1 Cor. 1:24 and Luke 11:49 as two New Testament references where the Wisdom of God is directly identified with the person of Jesus Christ.²³⁸ However, Bulgakov was convinced that the New Testament Wisdom texts must not be understood apart from the Jewish Wisdom tradition. This meant, for him, that while there may be an important Christological point being made about the association of Wisdom with the Divine person of the Logos, the Old Testament portrayal of Wisdom as a personified but impersonal un-created creature should be maintained.

²³⁵ Ibid., 5.

²³⁶ Ibid., 26-28.

²³⁷ Proverbs 8:22

²³⁸ Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*, 28.

Although all of these influences just outlined were important in Bulgakov's sophiological turn, it would be difficult to deny that he drew the bulk of his inspiration from Russian philosophy. This is particularly true of the work of Vladimir Soloviev.²³⁹ Soloviev has been classified by some as Russia's greatest nineteenth century philosopher,²⁴⁰ and he was certainly held in the highest esteem by the young Bulgakov. As Bulgakov would say of this highly significant intellectual predecessor: "Solov'ev's philosophy is, for the present, the last word in the world of philosophical thought, the highest synthesis thereof."²⁴¹

David Brown places Soloviev within the sphere of influence of the German critical idealist F. W. J. Schelling (1775-1854).²⁴² In the briefest of terms, Schelling's philosophy was in part a metaphysics built upon a response to the epistemological position of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).²⁴³ For Kant, apart from the so-called "transcendentals," human beings, owing to the inherent limitations of sense experience, could have little confidence in the correspondence between their own knowing of things and things as they were in themselves.²⁴⁴ Schelling, on the other hand, was among those successors of Kant who questioned this heavy scepticism. It

²³⁹ For more detailed accounts of the place of Sophia in Soloviev's thought see for example Paul Marshall Allan, *Vladimir Soloviev: Russian Mystic*, (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2008), Brandon Gallaher, "The Christological Focus of Vladimir Solov'ev's Sophiology," in *Modern Theology* 25 no. 4, 2009: 617-646, Sergey M. Solovyov, *Vladimir Solovyov: His Life and Creative Evolution*, (Fairfax, VA: Eastern Christian Publications, 2000), Oliver Smith, "The Sophianic Task in the Work of Vladimir Solov'ev," in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 59, nos. 3-4, 2007: 167-183, Jonathan Sutton, *The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov: Towards a Reassessment*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1988), and V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, (London: Routledge, 1953).

²⁴⁰ Valliere presents an introduction to Soloviev's overall philosophical and theological thought with his chapter "Soloviev: The Critical Turn" in *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov – Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000): 109-223.

²⁴¹ Sergej Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu*, 153. As cited and translated by Crum in *The Doctrine of Sophia According to Sergius N. Bulgakov*, 6.

²⁴² David Brown, "Soloviev, the Trinity and Christian Unity," *Dialogue and Alliance* 4.3 (Fall 1990): 41-54.

²⁴³ For a basic introduction to Schelling see Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993).

²⁴⁴ On Kant's epistemology see George Dicker, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).

was Schelling's fundamental assertion that the fact that a knowing subject could experience an object at all presupposed at least some degree of connection between the two, and, therefore, some measure of assurance as to the accuracy of knowledge.²⁴⁵

The nature of the connection between subject and object was another point of debate where Schelling stood at the centre. The so-called left-wing Hegelians argued that the connection consisted in the fact that both subject and object shared matter. Schelling differed from this position, arguing instead that the connection was more likely to be found in another shared quality which all things possess – that of spirit.²⁴⁶ A major part of Schelling's philosophical project was to make a case for this spiritual connection, and to seek to establish a metaphysical foundation for it.

Vladimir Soloviev followed up on Schelling at precisely this point. His position appears in its most developed form in his *Lectures on Divine Humanity*,²⁴⁷ a book which seems to have had a tremendous influence on Bulgakov. One of the key animating principles behind Soloviev's project was the idea of the "all-unity" of things. It was Soloviev's contention that the spiritual connection between all things could be founded upon their shared origins from a common "Absolute." As Soloviev puts it: "If the divine essence were not all-one, did not contain all, then something existent could, consequently, be outside of God; but in that case God would be limited by this being, external to himself: God would not be absolute, i.e. He

²⁴⁵ Here the epistemology of G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and his successors entered the picture. For an introduction to Hegel's epistemology see Kenneth R. Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemology: An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2003).

²⁴⁶ On this see the introduction by R. Stern to Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature: An Introduction to the Study of this Science*, trans. by E.E. Harris and P. Heath, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²⁴⁷ Vladimir Soloviev, *Lectures on Divine Humanity*, trans. Boris Jakim, (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1995).

would not be God.”²⁴⁸ For Soloviev, this was a theological necessity. Soloviev, therefore, goes on to speculate about a kind of “eternal world” which God possesses from all eternity.²⁴⁹ Soloviev gave this eternal world-in-potency the name Sophia, the Wisdom of God.

Commentators differ on the origins of the Sophia reference in Soloviev, with some seeing it emerging from his engagement with Platonic and Neo-Platonic religious thought, others attributing it to his mystical experiences of ‘feminine Divinity,’ and still others pointing to the Jewish Wisdom tradition. I am not in a position to take a side in this debate, nor is it necessary for me to do so. However, regardless of where Soloviev found the inspiration and the terminology for his version of sophiology, I agree with Paul Valliere’s characterization that by the time Soloviev arrives at a mature sophiology, it is best understood a branch of his theology concerned with the world’s ultimate destiny and salvation rather than simply a speculative exercise in cosmology or a product of mystical experience.²⁵⁰

There are many things Soloviev does with his sophiology that warrant closer attention, including the way it impacts his reflection on politics and the history of religions.²⁵¹

However, the most important of Soloviev’s observations, in terms of our introduction to Bulgakov’s sophiology, was his assertion that the inherent connection between God and the world was to be seen most clearly in the human connection to the Divine. For Soloviev, human nature, like everything else about creaturely existence, had to have its basis within the

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 78.

²⁴⁹ Vladimir Solovyov, *Sochineniya* III, 116ff, as cited in Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, 498.

²⁵⁰ Valliere provides an excellent introduction to Soloviev’s project in, *Modern Russian Theology*, 109-223.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 149-154.

being of God. For this reason, Soloviev surmised that God must contain within himself a “Divine-humanity.”²⁵²

5.2.2 Bulgakov, Sophia, and Ecclesiology

Bulgakov’s early sophiology was elaborated largely in connection with his thinking around the philosophy of economics. Bulgakov observed in the economic realm that human beings were both dependent on and bound to nature, but also capable of enhancing and perfecting it. Nature seemed to exercise a measure of determination over human development, but simultaneously carried an inherent receptivity to human initiative. This would lead Bulgakov to affirm, with Schelling and Soloviev, the notion of a kind of original unity between material things rooted the being of God.²⁵³

Bulgakov would struggle for a time to speak sufficiently carefully about his sophiological speculations. In 1917 he referred to Sophia as “a subject, a person, or, to use the terminology of theology, a hypostasis.” While he would add that “[i]t is of course distinct from the hypostases of the Holy Trinity,” he did conclude that Sophia was “an individual reality of another order, a fourth hypostasis.”²⁵⁴ However, as Bulgakov’s thinking turned increasingly theological later in life, he would become progressively more nuanced and careful in order to avoid the dogmatic pitfalls that came from treading on this relatively uncharted territory.

²⁵² Solovyov, *Sochineniya* III, 150ff, as cited in Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, 500.

²⁵³ On this see Sergei Bulgakov, *The Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, ed. and trans. by Catherine Evtuhov, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

²⁵⁴ Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light*, as translated and edited in *Sergeii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, ed. Rowan Williams, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 135.

The original Russian title of Bulgakov's so-called sophiological dogmatic trilogy as a whole is *O bogochelovechestve*.²⁵⁵ This can be translated variously as *On Godmanhood*, or *On the Humanity of God*. Although Bulgakov wrote many other things these three treatises are certainly his magnum opus, and the nod towards Soloviev's *Lectures on Divine Humanity* is obvious. In addition to the intellectual inspiration which Bulgakov received from Soloviev, Bulgakov also named him as his "guide to Christ" and "to the Church."²⁵⁶ Bulgakov, however, judged Soloviev's sophiology as "syncretistic" and "very far from the Orthodox conception of Sophia."²⁵⁷ I think in many ways we can see these efforts as the product of love and loyalty on the part of Bulgakov, intended as a way to honor his mentor's memory by attempting to establish Soloviev's place more securely within the tradition of the Church.

The burden of the Nicean-Constantinopolitan Creeds was to establish both the tri-personality and the consubstantiality of the Godhead. Since that time, in Bulgakov's view, only the former side of this equation had ever been adequately understood or explained. The latter had been largely neglected. As Bulgakov put it:

The first part of the dogma, that is, the doctrine of the relationship between the three hypostases with their hypostatic qualities and distinctive features, has been to a certain extent elucidated in the process of the Church's dogmatic creativity. But the other side, the doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity, as well as the actual conception of the substance or nature, has been far less developed and, apparently, almost overlooked.²⁵⁸

At the most basic level, therefore, Sophia was simply the term Bulgakov used to speak of the Divine nature. In this way, sophiology can be defined as Bulgakov's attempt to further

²⁵⁵ Sergei Bulgakov, *O bogochelovechestve*, 3 vols. (Paris: YMCA Press, 1933-45).

²⁵⁶ Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*, 10.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

develop an understanding of the nature of God.²⁵⁹ That may sound a rather innocuous effort at first glance. Of course, Bulgakov would probably not have found himself in the kind of trouble he did with Church authorities if this was all he was trying to do. It is what Bulgakov wanted say about the meaning of the Divine nature with respect to God, creation, Christ, and history which drew the critical attention his way.

As Rowan Williams has suggested, the real goal of Bulgakov's sophiology was to provide an explanation for the "Why?" of creation.²⁶⁰ Bulgakov was insistent that God's act of creating the universe must never appear as an arbitrary choice of the Godhead that could just as easily not have happened. He took great issue with those theologians (in particular Thomas Aquinas) who, in his opinion, seemed to make creation out to be an effectively arbitrary decision. This arbitrariness, for Bulgakov, was tantamount to blasphemy. Although God was not *externally* required to create, there had to be, he argued, something *internal* to God's own being that made creation inevitable. Bulgakov believed he could locate that something by making a clear distinction between God's one nature and the tri-personhood of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.²⁶¹

Analogy is a venerable form of theological argumentation, especially in connection with questions about the Trinity. St. Augustine of Hippo's psychological analogy of the Trinity is probably best known example. In laying the groundwork for his sophiology, Bulgakov sought to make use of existing theories of the meaning of nature in the philosophy of human personhood (namely those of Fichte and Schelling), and then to extend those ideas

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 35-36.

²⁶⁰ Williams, *Sergeii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, 169.

²⁶¹ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 31ff.

analogically to contribute to a discussion of the nature of God.²⁶² Working with a basically Greek ontology, Bulgakov used nature to mean that which made a thing one thing as opposed to making it something else; it was therefore essential to the existence of any being. Not only that, a nature was also what provided a particular being access to an existence in a particular way. In effect, the nature of a thing determined the manner of its existence. However, the key point for Bulgakov's purposes was the added conclusion that the *nature* of a being could, and indeed must be distinguished from the *being itself*. While the ontological nature of 'chairness' is essential to a chair being a chair, it is not itself the chair. To put it in human terms, a human person must have a human nature in order to be human, human nature is not itself a human person. Might it be the same with God, Bulgakov wondered?

It was on the basis of this question that Bulgakov would begin to formulate an understanding of the Godhead where the Divine nature contained the content of all it meant to be Divine, without itself being personally Divine. This eternal and inseparable yet non-personal and non-Divine nature became a kind of potency for otherness. Because of its fundamental character as the basis for 'not-God' in God, Bulgakov would further describe this otherness as an inherent 'creatureliness' alongside God's being or even as a 'world' with God.²⁶³ Using the language of the Greeks, the Hebrew Scriptures (Job 28, Prov. 8, Wis. 7), and his intellectual mentor Soloviev, Bulgakov called this world in God, this world before the world, Sophia, the Wisdom of God.

²⁶² Ibid., 89ff.

²⁶³ Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 119.

One of the common misconceptions of Bulgakov's Sophiology is that it is a form of pantheism. In fact, Bulgakov viewed pantheism as a serious error to be carefully avoided. However, he also strongly rejected any ultimate cosmological dualism as an equally dangerous misunderstanding.²⁶⁴ Of course creation was never to be thought of as ontologically the same as God, but creation could never be categorized as something totally alien to God either, lest its complete otherness be understood as a rival to God's sovereignty. For Bulgakov, Sophia served simultaneously as both a boundary and a bridge, a "*relation*" or "*link*" between God and the world; always fundamentally not God, but always entirely dependent on, inseparable from God.²⁶⁵ This, he claimed, was the only way to negotiate a space between the equally dangerous cosmological pitfalls of pantheism and dualism.

Bulgakov's creation theology is also regularly written off by casual interpreters as simply repackaging the Hegelian idea of creation as a necessary stage in God's own evolution. Although the thought of Hegel does appear in Bulgakov in places, he was entirely unwilling to follow him on this point. For Bulgakov, "God is absolute in His proper, divine life, and He does not need the world for Himself... [T]he world is not a hypostatic or natural necessity for self-completion."²⁶⁶ However, Bulgakov was not afraid to acknowledge that God was impelled to create by something internal to his Divine life – i.e. his identity as love. As Bulgakov writes, "God is love, and it is proper for love to love and to expand in love... In the insatiability of His love, which is *divinely* satiated in Him Himself, in His own life, God

²⁶⁴ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 6, 34-35.

²⁶⁵ Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 121. Italics original.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

goes out of Himself toward creation, in order to love, outside Himself, not Himself... [I]n *this* sense the world could not fail to be created. It is necessary for God.”²⁶⁷

Sophia, then, was understood by Bulgakov as both the nature of the Trinity and the first principle of all created life.²⁶⁸ ‘Before’ creation Sophia had ‘previously’ existed as God’s nature, only for God. This is what Bulgakov called Sophia in the ‘Divine’ mode.²⁶⁹ In the act of creation, Bulgakov writes, “the Holy Trinity in Unity, or the Unity in Trinity, renounces, as it were, in its sacrificially kenotic love, the possession of the divine world for itself and allows this world to have its own being.”²⁷⁰ In other words, God permitted his Divine nature to exist in a creaturely “mode,”²⁷¹ and all the manifold forms of created life and existence which we know and see around us are nothing other than creaturely reflections of the divine nature. World history, therefore, was understood by Bulgakov as the enduring struggle of Sophia in the creaturely aspect to reflect more fully its foundation within Divine Sophia.

Bulgakov called creation’s progress towards becoming fully itself the “sophianization”²⁷² of the world. In many ways this is similar to more familiar Orthodox notions of *theosis* and divinization. Anywhere that the world could be seen as perfectly manifesting in a creaturely form something of the Divine nature, sophianization was unfolding. This is, of course, ultimately an eschatological reality, one for which all creation presently groans (Romans 8), and which will be realized only with the descent of the new Jerusalem and the time when the

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 120. Italics original

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 112

²⁶⁹ When Bulgakov uses the term ‘Divine Sophia’ he capitalizes the S. I have opted to leave the s in lower case so as to more clearly differentiate between ‘divine Sophia’ and the Divine persons of the Trinity.

²⁷⁰ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 50.

²⁷¹ Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*, 63.

²⁷² Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 203-204.

dwelling of God would be among us (Rev. 21). Likewise, Bulgakov continued to maintain that there would always be an “insurmountable distance between Creator and creation.”²⁷³ However, as becomes clear when reading Bulgakov on the Incarnation, Pentecost, and eschatology, the intended point of the sophiological project was to insist that God always intended to span this distance, and, eventually, to cause the distance between the two to be effectively overcome.

Bulgakov saw evidence of this unfolding sophianization of the world in every epoch of human history, and among every culture and people, and in the religious history of the people of Israel.²⁷⁴ However, among the most visible loci of sophianization, for Bulgakov, was Mary of Nazareth. The *Theotokos* is highly important in Bulgakov’s dogmatics, especially as she relates to his understanding of the strictly human side of the struggle toward sophianization. I am in agreement here with T. Allan Smith who highlights the prominence of Mariology in Bulgakov’s theological system as an example of realized eschatology.²⁷⁵ For Bulgakov, Mary gives us the fullest illustration of what sophianized humanity looks like, and indeed also of the fullness of sophianized creation. She appears prominently in each of Bulgakov’s major theological works, and Bulgakov also devoted one of the treatises of his minor trilogy, *The Burning Bush*, to the subject of Mariology.

The use of ‘Burning Bush’ as a title for the Mother of God is something usually attributed to the great Church father Gregory of Nyssa. As Gregory wrote: “The light in divinity which

²⁷³ Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 138.

²⁷⁴ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 239-242.

²⁷⁵ See Thomas Allan Smith, “Introduction,” in *The Burning Bush*, T. Allan Smith trans., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), xiv.

through birth shone from her into human life did not consume the burning bush... That light teaches us what we must do to stand within the rays of the true light.”²⁷⁶ I am only able to provide this small glimpse into Bulgakov’s expansive Marian imagination, but it is enough to see why it would have drawn him some criticism. In 1933, for example, Archbishop John Maximovitch judged Bulgakov worthy of excommunication from the Orthodox Church for his over-deification of the Mother of God; a mistake that was blamed on the sophological roots of Bulgakov’s thought.²⁷⁷

As Bulgakov highlights, in the life of the Mother of God we can observe a progression of “thresholds in her spiritual increase and glorification.”²⁷⁸ These can be seen in the Church’s liturgical celebration of her Nativity, her entrance into the Temple, the Annunciation, the Nativity of Christ, and the later events of her life at the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost, and finally at her Dormition. Bulgakov called these moments part of a certain ‘first Pentecost’ – “the Pentecost of the Mother of God.”²⁷⁹ This, says Bulgakov, is why the Mother of God is traditionally named in the Church’s liturgy as the ‘glory,’ ‘representative,’ ‘intercessor,’ and ‘summit’ of creation. She is “the personal manifestation of Divine Wisdom, Sophia.”²⁸⁰ While Bulgakov is careful to clarify that “a personal incarnation, a hominization of the Third Hypostasis, does not exist,”²⁸¹ he will even go so far as to say that Mary became in time the “personal, animate receptacle” of the Holy Spirit, “an absolutely

²⁷⁶ *Gregory of Nyssa: Life of Moses*, Intro. and trans. by Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press. 1978), 59.

²⁷⁷ St. John Maximovich, *The Orthodox Veneration of the Birthgiver of God*, Fr. Seraphim Rose, trans., (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996).

²⁷⁸ Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush*, 65.

²⁷⁹ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 246.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

spirit-born creature, the Pneumatophoric human.”²⁸² As the realization of sophianized creation, she is, for Bulgakov, the personal centre of creaturely Sophia – she is the Church *in person*.²⁸³

However, despite her unparalleled uniqueness, the sophianization of Mary must still be seen as that of anticipation. Mary was, at least initially, a member of “the Old Testament Church.”²⁸⁴ The sophianization of creation is something that could only be completely realized in the hypostatic union of the Logos and the flesh of Jesus Christ. Bulgakov saw the person of the Logos as integrally linked to the being of Sophia, in both the Divine and creaturely aspects. Although Logos and Sophia must be distinguished, in that the former is a Divine person and the latter is the Divine nature, Bulgakov referred to God the Word as the “personal center” of Divine Sophia. He did so precisely because the content of Divinity impersonally contained in Sophia was, because of his unique being as the revelatory hypostasis within the Triune life, that which is personally lived by the Divine Son.²⁸⁵ For this reason, Sophia is particularly directed in her creaturely becoming through the hypostasis of the Logos.²⁸⁶ This is why the Word is typically spoken of as the creator (John 1:3), as the “demiurgic hypostasis” as Bulgakov puts it.²⁸⁷ It also explains the close association between Wisdom and the Logos in the Christology of the New Testament (Colossians 1:15, etc.).

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 265.

²⁸⁴ Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush*, 42, 44, 67.

²⁸⁵ Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 136.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

We now come to a place where we must consider the relationship of Bulgakov's Christology to his theological anthropology. This is absolutely critical territory for understanding his sophiology, especially in anticipation of its connection with his thinking on the Church. Strongly echoing Soloviev's speculations about the principle of Divine-humanity, Bulgakov also saw the connection between God and the world, between Sophia in the Divine and the creaturely modes, as a function of the link between the role of the Word in Sophia and the role of humanity in creation. Humanity, Bulgakov claims, operates as the personal centre of creaturely Sophia in the same way that the Son is the personal centre of the Divine nature. The charge to "subdue" and "have dominion" over the world (Gen. 1:28) is a responsibility to share in the creative action of the Logos.²⁸⁸ As he puts it, "man (sic)... has the image of the heavenly God-man... of Logos in Sophia,"²⁸⁹ even as the Word represents a "*pre-eternal Humanity in God*, as the Divine proto-image and foundation of man's (sic) being."²⁹⁰

As we have seen, Bulgakov saw the *telos* of creaturely existence as what he called sophianization; the progressive identity of Sophia in its creaturely mode with Sophia in the Divine life.²⁹¹ From the beginning, the means by which this would take place would be through the Divine-human Logos uniting with the creaturely humanity which bears his image. For Bulgakov, then, the Incarnation was not an "arbitrary act of the unification of two things that cannot be united, of two things that are totally different and alien to one another," but rather, "the ontologically grounded and pre-established union of the Proto-image and the

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 138.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 113. Italics original.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 168ff.

image.”²⁹² In the one-person-two-natures body of Jesus of Nazareth was the first perfectly realized instance of sophianization, and from this body sophianization would come to the whole of humanity, and the whole world.

This was not only a Christological claim for Bulgakov, but also the basis for his ecclesiology. Because the person of the Logos is the Divine image of humanity, Bulgakov can argue that creaturely humanity and creaturely humans are a “multi-unity.”²⁹³ As he writes, “every [human] hypostases is a personal how of a universal what.”²⁹⁴ Because of this ontological composition, human nature can be universally affected by the fall of the first Adam, and universally redeemed by the second Adam.

Of course, the first Adam was no ordinary human; he was the “*primordial* human.” By this Bulgakov means more than just that he was literally the first human, but also to indicate a sense that this particular ‘pre-historic’ human had the power to determine, by his own self-determination, the future possibilities for human nature as a whole.²⁹⁵ Similarly, although in the Incarnation he was limited by an existence as a single individual in a particular time and place, Jesus Christ was also not another individual human hypostasis. Rather, his personal hypostasis was the Divine foundation of creaturely humanity; he was the Divine Human himself. Because of this fact, it could be said that, in effect, “every [human] hypostasis belongs to Christ.”²⁹⁶

²⁹² Ibid., 17.

²⁹³ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 260.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush*, 47, 50. Italics original.

²⁹⁶ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 260.

It is in this light that Bulgakov never tired of quoting from the epistle to the Ephesians: “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.”²⁹⁷ All of the New Testament references to the oneness-in-multiplicity of the Church as Christ’s body and the diversity of gifts from one and the same source in the Holy Spirit are understood within this framework.²⁹⁸ This compelled Bulgakov to read these texts (Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor 10:17, 1 Cor. 12:27, Eph. 2:6, Eph. 4:4, Col. 3:15, etc.) with a radical realism, asserting in the strongest terms that we “should not diminish the ontological significance of this unity by transforming it into merely a figure, a simile: *like* a body or *similar* to a body.”²⁹⁹ For Bulgakov, the Church really *is* a body – a creaturely participation of all humanity as one single organism in the Divine humanity of the Logos. As Bulgakov put it, “the doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ comprises a doctrine of humanity in its relation to the eternal Divine-humanity which is its foundation.”³⁰⁰

The outlines of an ecclesiology have hopefully already begun to emerge in the material we have considered thus far, but it is here where we begin to enter upon the epicenter of Bulgakov’s thinking for the purposes of this study. Bulgakov’s ecclesiology is nothing other than a continuation of his creation theology, Christology, and anthropology, and the sophianic connection between created humanity and the Divine-humanity of Logos. The missing piece that we have not yet touched on is the role of the Holy Spirit.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 254.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 258-60.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 258. Italics original.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 261.

It is true that Bulgakov placed the Incarnation as the decisive moment in the sophianization of the world. However, we must be sure at this point not to neglect the place of the Holy Spirit in the sophianization of creation. Bulgakov never ceased to insist that the Father always revealed himself through both the Son and the Spirit. As such, Bulgakov also insisted that the subject of the Incarnation could never be viewed in isolation from its counterpart in Pentecost.

Bulgakov's Pneumatology, *The Comforter*, forms the second leg of his dogmatic trilogy. For Bulgakov, the Son and the Spirit must always be understood in a "dyadic" link because neither Divine person can fully exist as themselves apart from their relationship with and for one another.³⁰¹ This is the case because of the role the Spirit plays within the being of the Trinity. Because the Son exists as the revelation of the Father, and because the Father gives himself away entirely into the begetting of the Son, Bulgakov sees a "tragedy" where Father and Son are unable to have a relationship with one another. As Bulgakov puts it, "[b]oth are silent in mutually sacrificial love."³⁰² The being of the Holy Spirit is as the one who overcomes this tragedy; the one who gives life to the Son before the Father by eternally reposing upon him as the Father's love.³⁰³

It is working out of this framework that Bulgakov attempted to describe the work of the Holy Spirit as a form of Divine 'Motherhood.' Bulgakov's logic goes like this: If, as we have seen, the Son is the demiurgic hypostasis who provides the content of creation, it is the Spirit who actualizes that content, gives it life, raises it up, leads it to completion, makes it beautiful,

³⁰¹ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 177ff.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 179. Italics original.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 198. Italics original.

and glorifies it.³⁰⁴ As Bulgakov understood human conception, it was the father who generated a new being.³⁰⁵ The mother, for her part, received what was already generated and brought it to life.³⁰⁶ “Motherhood,” Bulgakov writes, “is the *tangibleness of what is being begotten or already born.*” Applying this to the Triune life Bulgakov writes:

The Father, namely as Father of the Son, the Second Hypostasis, is the issuer, *proboleus* of the Holy Spirit, the Third Hypostasis, which already supposes (of course not chronologically but ontologically) a First and Second Hypostasis. The Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father towards the Son, finds the already generated Son, but by Himself He realizes Him for the Father. In this sense He is, as it were, hypostatic motherhood.³⁰⁷

For Bulgakov, the motherhood of the Holy Spirit was not limited to the inner life of the Trinity, but was in fact seen as something extended beyond the Divine life to include the Spirit’s relationship to creaturely Sophia in process of becoming. This was seen nowhere more clearly than in the life of Jesus, and the creation of the Church.

This consideration of the work of the Spirit in creation leads us to a discussion of Pentecost. In the aforementioned treatise, *The Holy Grail and the Eucharist*, Bulgakov located the beginnings of what he called the “New Testament Pentecost” at the foot of the Cross. He did this, creatively, by means of an allegorical interpretation of the ancient narratives surrounding the legend of the so-called Holy Grail. For Bulgakov, the grail was not the cup which was used to catch the blood and water than poured down the spear. It was, in fact, creation itself, to the extent that it can be understood to have ‘caught’ the holy stream from Jesus’ side. While for the Christian reader this may suggest some typological connections with the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, Bulgakov interpreted this moment in

³⁰⁴ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 198, 202.

³⁰⁵ *The Burning Bush*, 151. Italics original.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 151-52.

salvation history as having an even more fundamental purpose. For him, this event served as the basis of the “sanctification and transfiguration of the world.”³⁰⁸ It was a pre-eminently sophianic event. That the dust of the ground on Calvary was mixed with the very drops of blood of the Incarnate Word meant that the whole physical universe was forever inextricably bound to Christ’s human substance. In a sense, it was here that the power of the Incarnation overflowed into all creation. As Bulgakov put it in *The Bride of the Lamb*, only in this way did the world “become capable of bearing the Pentecost, of receiving the fire of the Holy Spirit without being consumed by it.”³⁰⁹ Understood in this way, Pentecost becomes the means by which the sophianizing effects of the Incarnation are extended beyond humanity and to the whole creation. Creaturely life becomes capable of “bearing the Spirit” in such a way that it is “transmuted” to the sophianic plane – “borne into the world of grace of the future age, where God will be all in all.”³¹⁰

The dramatic account of the Spirit’s filling of the Apostles in the book of Acts, and their corresponding miraculous works, was taken by Bulgakov as a profound example of that transmutation could look like. However, this particular Pentecostal event was not to be understood as an isolated incident. While Bulgakov identified the Church’s sacramental ministry through things like bread and wine and water and oil as examples of this new creaturely bearing of the Spirit,³¹¹ he also insisted that, like the Incarnation, the effects of Pentecost could not be exclusively confined within the boundaries of visible Church in

³⁰⁸ Bulgakov, *The Holy Grail & the Eucharist*, 34.

³⁰⁹ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 419.

³¹⁰ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 220-221.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 267ff, 285ff.

history, nor to its ministers or ministries. As the prophet Joel was referenced in Acts 2, Bulgakov insisted on the coming of the Spirit upon *all* flesh.³¹²

Bulgakov named the ecclesiological volume of his trilogy *The Bride of the Lamb*, and the Church's identity as 'Bride' is essential to understanding the eschatological orientation of Bulgakov's thinking on the Church. Bulgakov points out a number of instances of nuptial imagery in numerous places in the New Testament, and of course title references the vision of the Book of Revelation where the bride, the Lamb's wife, is seen "descending out of heaven from God."³¹³ There is a clear resemblance between this vocabulary from Scripture and what we have seen in the language of Divine and creaturely Sophia and the sophianization in creation.

The explicitly ecclesiological portion of *The Bride of the Lamb* opens with a reference to the extra-canonical document of the early Church known as *The Shepherd of Hermas*.³¹⁴ In a lengthy footnote which seems intended to function more or less as an epigraph to the material that follows,³¹⁵ Bulgakov references two visions which appear in the Hermas narrative. The first is of an old woman who comes to give him a book. When Hermas asks who the woman is he is told, "it is the Church," and is further informed that she is old because "[s]he was created first of all... [a]nd for her sake was the world made."³¹⁶ A second episode has Hermas looking up at a great tower, which the woman also explains "is myself,

³¹² Ibid., 292-93.

³¹³ Ibid., 263-65. See Revelation 21 for the biblical reference.

³¹⁴ "The Shepherd of Hermas," <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/shepherd-lightfoot.html>, accessed July 22, 2012. I am in agreement with Aidan Nichols that this mysterious text provides the key insight towards understanding Bulgakov's sophiological ecclesiology. See Nichols, *Wisdom From Above*, 197.

³¹⁵ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 253n1.

³¹⁶ *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 4[8]:1.

the Church.” When Hermas asks whether construction on the building is complete he is strongly chided: “Foolish man! Do you not see the tower yet building? When the tower is finished and built, then comes the end.”³¹⁷

In these contrasting perspectives we come upon the heart of Bulgakov’s sophiological ecclesiology. Like Sophia, the Church can be said to exist from before creation, and not yet at the same time be fully formed. Bulgakov was very fond of these kinds of apparent paradoxes, or ‘antinomies’ as he regularly spoke of them. As we will see, it was precisely this unresolved tension between the realized and the potential Church upon which his ecumenically oriented ecclesiology was built.

The ecclesiological implications of Bulgakov’s reading of Incarnation and Pentecost are profound. In Bulgakov’s own words: “The limits of the Church mystically or ontologically coincide with the limits of the power of the Incarnation and Pentecost; but these limits *do not exist at all*.”³¹⁸ With the Incarnation, “all human beings belong to Christ’s humanity. And if this human condition is the Church as the body of Christ, then, in this sense, all humanity belongs to the Church.”³¹⁹ This by itself is an exceptionally wide vision, but Bulgakov will go even further: “The whole universe belongs to the Church,”³²⁰ because in uniting with and transforming human nature precisely *as creaturely* there was a union between the Divine and creatureliness in general. At this level of reflection, therefore, the Church, for Bulgakov, is basically synonymous with creaturely Sophia. The implications for ecclesiology and

³¹⁷ Ibid., 8[16]:9.

³¹⁸ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 266. Italics original.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 266.

³²⁰ Ibid., 267.

ecumenism, to say nothing of inter-religious dialogue, are clear: “The existing boundaries [of the Church] have not an absolute but a pragmatic character.”³²¹

One thing we have not yet touched on in connection with Bulgakov’s ecclesiology is his eschatology. This was indeed another subject with tremendous relevance to his vision of the Church. As we have already seen, the driving force behind much of Bulgakov’s theological imagination was the notion of the unity of all things in God. Sophiology is his attempt to provide a foundation for that way of thinking. Sophiology, it could be said, is every bit as much about the end of history as it is about the beginning, if not more so.

Paul Gavriilyuk has called Bulgakov’s eschatology “ontological universalism,”³²² and indeed this seems like a very apt description. What this means is that, for Bulgakov, the nature of God and of creation and of their relation to one another dictated that human salvation and the restoration of all things in God must be universal. To claim otherwise, he argued, would be to permit a “dualistic Manichaeism.”³²³ Bulgakov wrote at some length about the role of human agency in the ‘synergistic’ unfolding of the Divine plan.³²⁴ He decisively rejected deterministic articulations of God’s sovereignty, such as Calvinism, which, in his opinion, posited a “fictitious, illusory freedom.”³²⁵ However, he ultimately had to conclude that creaturely freedom could not eternally oppose God’s will and God’s grace, nor could creaturely Sophia escape its eventual becoming in time of its eternal image. Bulgakov,

³²¹ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 314.

³²² Gavriilyuk, “Universal Salvation in the Eschatology of Sergius Bulgakov,” 128ff.

³²³ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 486.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 193-250.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 237.

therefore, rejected all notions of the eternity of hell,³²⁶ and even wrote on the necessity of the eventual restoration of Satan.³²⁷ All of this was grounded in the sophianic origins of creation. As Bulgakov wrote, “God’s providential activity with respect to the world is its sophianicity *in actu*, ongoing sophianization.” In this sense, “Divine Sophia is the Guardian Angel of the creaturely world.”³²⁸ Rather than dwell on the soteriological conclusions of this eschatology, in this case Bulgakov adopted an attitude of pious silence. As he wrote:

It pleases the Lord to shroud in obscurity the ways of salvation and the eternal destinies of those to whom, in our age, the holy gospel has not been revealed and baptism has not been given... [Therefore,] the Church does not judge those on the outside but keeps silent... [and] her practical attitude toward them consists of the duty of preaching.³²⁹

The picture we have just sketched might be called Bulgakov’s ecclesiology ‘from above.’ There is no question that it departs in some very significant ways from other more familiar and traditional theologies of the Church. Some have criticized, or at the very least observed with curiosity, the relative lack of interest in questions of hierarchy and authority in Bulgakov’s ecclesiology.³³⁰ He can certainly be challenged for his clear preference for speaking of the Church in an ideal, invisible, eschatological sense, to the neglect of the actual Church on the ground (such as the reality and seriousness of confessional division).

³²⁶ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 487-490, 497-500.

³²⁷ Sergii Bulgakov, Joanna Reitlinger and Boris Jakim, *Apocatastasis and Transfiguration*, (New Haven, Conn: Variable Press, 1995).

³²⁸ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 223. As Gavriilyuk points out, Bulgakov’s optimism in this regard struck some of his contemporaries as reminiscent of Marxist notions about the inevitability of progress. See Gavriilyuk, “Universal Salvation in the Eschatology of Sergius Bulgakov,” 129.

³²⁹ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 313.

³³⁰ Aidan Nichols suggests that Bulgakov’s own charges against the abstract idealism of Khomiakov’s ecclesiology may also be applied to him as just as well. See *Light from the East*, 123. Rowan Williams also notes this common criticism. See Williams, *A Margin of Silence*, 33.

As if anticipating his critics, Bulgakov was quick to acknowledge that a misrepresentation of his sophiological ecclesiology left him wide open to numerous legitimate objections.³³¹ He readily admitted that his main mode of ecclesiological reflection was done “outside of historical concreteness, outside the limits of space and time, outside of specific church organizations”³³² in a way that “gives too much, and therefore too little.”³³³ Although, as Rowan Williams observes, one can detect “a slightly dutiful character” in the paragraphs he gives to these topics,³³⁴ Bulgakov was also sensitive to the need to speak of the Church as a sacramental and hierarchical organization, and of the ecclesial uniqueness of Orthodoxy. However, the ecclesiology contained in *Bride of the Lamb* was not Bulgakov’s only word. As a matter of fact, he found it perfectly suitable to speak of the Church in more than one way.³³⁵ It was the built-in duality of realized and unrealized sophianization which allowed Bulgakov to make the apparently minimizing claims about hierarchical ministry and the limits of the Church on the one hand, without letting his ecclesiology devolve into anti-historicism or total ecclesial relativism on the other.

If what we see in *Bride of the Lamb* is Bulgakov’s ecclesiology from above, then the straightforwardly named text *The Orthodox Church*³³⁶ is a representative example of his ecclesiology from below; an attempt to bring some balance to the overall picture. *The Orthodox Church* was written as an apologetically aimed introduction to Orthodoxy for Western Christian readers. This helps to account for its decidedly different tone in

³³¹ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 268ff.

³³² *Ibid.*, 266.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 268.

³³⁴ See Williams, *A Margin of Silence*, 33.

³³⁵ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 268.

³³⁶ Sergiei Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, Lydia Kesich, trans., (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997).

comparison to Bulgakov's other ecclesiological writings. In the narrative of this text, Bulgakov speaks of the Church using categories and terms which are more familiar to ecclesiological discourse from an Orthodox perspective. The Church of *The Orthodox Church* is a distinct society with a beginning in history; it is a sacramental and hierarchical institution; it is the only door to salvation; it is one.³³⁷ There most certainly was, in Bulgakov's mind, a "world that lies outside the Church," and indeed that world lay, as Scripture puts it, "in darkness and in the shadow of death."³³⁸ Bulgakov had no trouble concluding that "not the whole of the human race belongs to the Church,"³³⁹ or even judging that "not all Christians belong [to the Church] in the fullest sense – only Orthodox."³⁴⁰ Throughout his career Bulgakov never ceased to confess the conviction that "Orthodoxy is the Church of Christ on earth."³⁴¹ Any suggestion that the Church could be fragmented into the equally representative branches of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Anglicanism was to "abandon the promise of Our Lord."³⁴² "The Church is one," he declared, "and consequently unique, and this one unique Church, this true Church, which possesses the truth without spot, and in its plenitude... is Orthodoxy."³⁴³

Typical of his handling of many issues, Bulgakov saw an "antinomy" of thesis and antithesis in the realm of ecclesiology and ecumenism. He would comment on this in the short essay, "By Jacob's Well," saying: "There are two aspects in the relation of Orthodoxy to non-Orthodoxy: a repulsion in the struggle of truth with an incomplete truth, and a mutual

³³⁷ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 9ff; Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 268-271.

³³⁸ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 268.

³³⁹ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 9.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 87-88.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 88.

attraction of Church love.”³⁴⁴ In saying this, Bulgakov did not wish to minimize the seriousness of heresies or schisms which had occasioned the formal divisions from the visible Church, nor of the consequences which resulted. He continually held that Christian confessions divided from the Church did not completely participate in the realized sophianization of the Church because of certain heterodox doctrines or historically formed schismatic hostilities. However, this did not mean that they could be completely cut off from the effects of the Incarnation and Pentecost.³⁴⁵ As Bulgakov reasoned, “[t]he notion of heresy only exists within the limits of the Church and not outside it, and it implies a defectiveness in Church life... [I]f heresy is only partial damage we must take into account... not only that which is heretical but also that which is Orthodox.”³⁴⁶

Bulgakov used Kantian language of “noumenality” and “phenomenality” to describe the relationship between the two senses of Church.³⁴⁷ “[T]he Church as a society, an institution, an organization, the ‘visible’ or empirical Church,” he acknowledged, “does not wholly coincide with the Church as Divine-Humanity, with its noumenal depth.”³⁴⁸ As he put it: “[r]ecognizing all the relativity and pragmatic significance of these divisions, we must nevertheless examine them in the light of the supra-empirical, noumenal unity of the

³⁴⁴ Bulgakov, “By Jacob’s Well,” 101. Michael Plekon notes, with reference to Brandon Gallaher, that this essay, originally published in 1933, was a reworking of the earlier article published in English in 1931 as “The Church and non-Orthodoxy,” *American Church Monthly* 30.6 (1931): 411-23 and 31.1 (1931): 13-16. See Plekon, “Still By Jacob’s Well,” 127.

³⁴⁵ This same conviction is maintained in Bulgakov’s view of non-Orthodox sacraments. For Bulgakov, as we would expect, belief that non-Orthodox sacraments were effective is grounded first upon his understanding of the Church as Sophia, a Church which ultimately transcends all human and institutional boundaries. Yet he also argued for it on the basis of Orthodox canonical practice. Even the canons recognized, Bulgakov noted, “that certain of the sacraments performed outside Orthodoxy,” namely, “baptism, chrismation, ordination, and marriage,” were “unrepeatable and therefore valid.” Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 310.

³⁴⁶ Sergius Bulgakov, “By Jacob’s Well,” in *Sergius Bulgakov: A Bulgakov Anthology*, James Pain and Nicolas Zernov eds., (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976), 108.

³⁴⁷ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 270.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 272. Italics original.

Church.³⁴⁹ It was his ability to differentiate between these two modes, without separating them from one another entirely, which allowed him at once to hold on to a staunch loyalty with respect to the fullness of Orthodox tradition and Church life, while at the same time manifesting a tremendous openness and optimism towards ecumenical engagement. His ecumenical activity would not have been the same without it, and it is a conviction clearly rooted within a sophiological ecclesiology.

5.3 One, Holy, Sobornaia

The nineteenth century Russian cultural and intellectual movement known as Slavophilism was briefly alluded to in the previous chapter. Of the many developments coming out of this period, one of the most notable in terms of ecclesiology was the renewed attention to what was believed to be the quintessentially Russian soci-political and religious-philosophical ideal of *sobornost*.

The word *sobornost* is sometimes translated into English as ‘conciliarity’ or ‘communality.’ The adjectival form, so Aidan Nichols contends, seems to have come into theological use initially as a replacement of *kafolicheskaya* (catholic) in the Slavonic version of the Nicene Creed following the Russian rejection of the Council of Florence.³⁵⁰ According to Peter Christoff, it is a term that has connections to the spontaneous order and deeply interrelated communal life of the rural village.³⁵¹ Extended into the realm of the Church it conveys a

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 293.

³⁵⁰ Aidan Nichols, *Light from the East*, 116.

³⁵¹ For a good general introduction to agrarian origins of the Slavophile movement see Peter Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Slavophilism I*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1961), 152-53.

sense of natural unity in love against notions of enforced union through canons and hierarchy.

5.3.1 Khomiakov and Sobornost'

We spoke briefly about Aleksei Khomiakov in the previous chapter as one of Bulgakov's ecumenical role models. Khomiakov's greater influence on Bulgakov, however, was his ecclesiology, in particular the principle of *sobornost'*. Khomiakov was a layman, and his publication output was limited. However, as Ernest Skublics has shown, the impact of the *sobornost'* principle on twentieth century ecclesiology, Russian and otherwise, was nevertheless immense.³⁵² In fact, as Peter Vogt contends, it is accurate to say that it was Khomiakov who “discovered [a] distinct understanding of the Church” for Orthodoxy.³⁵³ An appreciation for the Khomiakovian elements in Bulgakov's vision of the Church is certainly essential for interpreting Bulgakovian ecumenism.

While there are few direct uses of the word *sobornost'* in Khomiakov's writings, the concept was most certainly at the core of his thought about the Church. To borrow an insight from Joost Van Rossum's helpful summary of Khomiakov's ecclesiology, his thinking on the

³⁵² Skublics traces the lineage from the Slavophiles to Nicholas Afanasiev, John Zizioulas, and Alexander Schmemmann in the East, as well as Henri De Lubac and Yves Congar in the West. Ernest Skublics, “The Rebirth of Communion Ecclesiology within Orthodoxy: From Nineteenth Century Russians to Twenty-First Century Greeks,” *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 46, nos. 1-2 (2005), 95-124.

³⁵³ Vogt explains that Orthodox ecclesiology had remained largely unwritten until the nineteenth century engagement with Western theological developments. See “The Church as Community of Love According to Alexis S. Khomiakov,” 393.

Church can be characterized by the dynamic of two opposing themes: unity and freedom.³⁵⁴ In Roman Catholicism, Khomiakov argued, unity was achieved only by means of the structurally imposed obedience demanded by the papacy. This was seen to be a transgression against the Church's true nature. Protestantism, as an inevitable reaction to the Roman distortion, was seen as elevating freedom by emphasizing the role of personal judgement on the meaning of Scripture, but at the expense of unity. In Khomiakov's usage, the word *sobornost'* described a spiritual bond of mutual love and reciprocity. It was a supernatural connection that impelled Christians to surrender freely their individual doctrinal opinions to the judgement of the unified whole in a way that did not presume uniformity or destroy uniqueness but rather enabled unity in diversity.³⁵⁵ As Van Rossum puts it, *sobornost'* is a "mysterious unity of experience that precedes any kind of dogmatizing and institutionalizing."³⁵⁶ This miraculous gift of natural unity, Khomiakov insisted, must always be an internal quality.³⁵⁷ In Khomiakov's view, therefore, though Roman and Protestant paths might appear to be opposite approaches at first glance, they were, in fact, quite similar.³⁵⁸ Both inappropriately tried to place something external over and above the Church, be it either the papacy or the bible. In Khomiakov's opinion, all attempts to do this could only render a false unity. The Orthodox Church, therefore, showed itself to be the true Church because its ecclesiological constitution maintained both real interior unity and

³⁵⁴ Joost Van Rossum, "A. S. Khomiakov and Orthodox Ecclesiology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 35 (1995), 69. See also Joost Van Rossum, "The Notion of Freedom in Khomiakov's Teaching on the Church," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 49.3 (2005): 297-312.

³⁵⁵ Khomiakov, *L'Eglise latine et les protestantisme au point de vue de l'Eglise d'Orient*, 290ff.

³⁵⁶ Van Rossum, "A. S. Khomiakov and Orthodox Ecclesiology," 71.

³⁵⁷ Vogt, "The Church as Community of Love According to Alexis S. Khomiakov," 401-404.

³⁵⁸ See Khomiakov's "On the Western Confessions of Faith" in *Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought*, ed. [Fr.] Alexander Schmemmann (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 31-70.

freedom. “The Church,” Khomiakov wrote, “does not recognize any other teaching [mechanism] other than herself in totality.”³⁵⁹

That Bulgakov developed his ecclesiology squarely in the wake of Khomiakov was highly significant in the unfolding of his attitudes towards ecumenical activity. This will be elaborated further below. However, Bulgakov was certainly not entirely uncritical of Khomiakovian ecclesiological thought. In the aftermath of the Revolution, Bulgakov underwent a period of personal soul searching in connection with his views about the Russian Church and its lack of centralized teaching authority and decision making. A record of Bulgakov’s struggle during this time can be seen reflected in the allegorical but nearly autobiographical book *U sten Khersonisa*,³⁶⁰ as well as in his personal diaries from the period.³⁶¹

In Bulgakov’s opinion, Khomiakov’s Church of “dreams” and “phantasms” had been exposed by the “paralysis” to which the Russian Church had fallen prey.³⁶² The apparent inability of the Russian Church to respond in the face of the Communist challenge seemed to him to be an indication that Russia needed a pope. Bulgakov would later speak of this as the

³⁵⁹ Khomiakov, *L’Eglise latine et les protestantisme au point de vue de l’Eglise d’Orient*, 49-54.

³⁶⁰ Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov, *U sten Khersonisa*, (Sankt Peterburg: Dorval, 1993). Available in French translation as *Sous les remparts de Chersonèse*, Bernard Merchadier trans., (Geneva: Ad Solem, 1999). Chersonesos was a Greek colony on the Crimean peninsula in present day Ukraine. It is believed to have been captured in the 980s by Vladimir, the Grand Prince of Kiev. In exchange for peace with the Byzantines Vladimir was promised marriage to Emperor Basil II’s sister, on the condition that he get baptized. This event served as a symbol in the history of the Slavic people as their moment of choice for Greek rather than Latin Christianity. Bulgakov saw this choice as having introduced to Russia its particular theological curse. Choosing Byzantium over Rome inaugurated a history of unending, often nationalistically motivated struggle to accept structures of unifying ecclesial authority; a struggle still ongoing in the inter-Church power struggles following the Council decisions and the Bolshevik Revolution.

³⁶¹ Myroslaw Tataryn does a tremendous scholarly service by offering a summary of Bulgakov’s diaries during this period. See “Between Patriarch and Pope,” 137-159. Tataryn also offers helpful commentary on the contents of *U sten Khersonisa* in relation to the diary entries.

³⁶² Bulgakov, *Sous les remparts de Chersonèse*, 71-72, 82-84. Translation mine.

product of a certain “infatuation” or “infection” with Roman Catholicism,³⁶³ something which he later became embarrassed about. However, Bulgakov eventually came to understand this phase as an important dialectical moment in his development,³⁶⁴ and there can be little question that by the time Bulgakov’s ecclesiology was given mature expression, it was heavily reinvested with Khomiakov’s contribution.

Aidan Nichols’ identifies three main themes in Bulgakov’s later ecclesiology which are clearly consistent with the Khomiakovian framework: 1) The emphasis on the invisible Church over the visible; 2) The understanding of each local church as a total manifestation of the Church in totality; and 3) The rejection of canonically or structurally enforced subordination between local churches by external ecclesiastical mechanisms.³⁶⁵ I concur with Nichol’s assessment, and will identify evidence of each of these traits in what follows immediately below.

³⁶³ L. A. Zander records a brief translation of Bulgakov’s thoughts about this period. Bulgakov writes: “But at that time, in the face of the historical testing of Russian Orthodoxy, I set my hopes on Rome—in spite of my somewhat Slavophil past. I began reconsidering the Church’s general attitude towards its earthly structure and papal supremacy... Under the impression of what was happening to the church in Russia and of my own studies I began inwardly, silently, and unbeknown to anyone, to incline more and more towards Catholicism (this trend of thought is reflected in my dialogues *At the walls of Khersones*, of course unpublished). Just at that time I was exiled from Russia... Needless to say, I got over my Catholic infection... I do not repent of my infatuation with Catholicism for I think it was a dialectically inevitable stage in the development of my conception of the church, and indeed I believe it was salutary for me if only as a preventive inoculation. The chief thing is that I have lost, I think forever, the spiritual taste for papacy.” See the introduction to Bulgakov’s essay *The Vatican Dogma*, http://www.orthodoxchristianity.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&catid=14:articles&id=39:the-vatican-dogma, accessed March 12, 2014.

³⁶⁴ On this see Tataryn, “Between Patriarch and Pope,” 156-157.

³⁶⁵ Nichols, *Light from the East*, 122-23.

5.3.2 A Sobornaia Church

There are two main features of Bulgakov's *sobornost'* ecclesiology that have a bearing upon his ecumenical convictions: 1) His appreciation for a spiritual bond of love as a necessity for all forms of doctrinal agreement; and 2) His understanding of the proper relationship between the authority of people of the Church and the ministry of the hierarchy.

Bulgakov was drawn to the *sobornost'* ideal not only because of its influence in Russian theological circles, but also because it was consistent with the basic ecclesiological principle that we saw emerge from his postulate of creaturely humanity as a multi-unity in the Divine-humanity of the Logos. In *The Bride of the Lamb*, Bulgakov interpreted the "mysterious unity of humanity" which he saw throughout St. Paul's writings as analogous to "the principle of gathering (Russ. *sobiranie*) and gatherdness (Russ. *Sobrannost'*)."³⁶⁶ He used the term *sobornost'* in his own writings to describe a "state of being together," a "harmony,"³⁶⁷ and the "oneness of many in love and freedom."³⁶⁸ In effect, *sobornost'* was a "subconscious" or "superconscious"³⁶⁹ spiritual affinity that created the conditions necessary for Christians to agree on the meaning of the Gospel. For Bulgakov, agreement on dogma was a spiritual reality, ultimately possible only by the action of the Holy Spirit which united believers to one another in the humanity of Christ. "Sharing a unity of life," he wrote, "tends necessarily to unity of thought and doctrine."³⁷⁰ As we will see, this understanding would

³⁶⁶ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 262.

³⁶⁷ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 61.

³⁶⁸ Bulgakov, "One Holy, Catholic & Apostolic Church," in *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius* 12 (1931), 26.

³⁶⁹ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 65.

³⁷⁰ Bulgakov, "One Holy, Catholic & Apostolic Church," 26.

become critical to his ecumenical approach, paving the way for his emphasis on common prayer and worship as the most appropriate path to reunion. A sense of love and connection would have to be created between people prior to any discussion of doctrinal accord, and such efforts must never be thought of as ancillary or even merely complementary to the ‘official’ work of reunion. In fact, they were precisely what made all other forms of ecumenical engagement possible and credible.

Bulgakov also drew from the *sobornost*’ tradition a number of implications about the exercise of authority in the Church. In Bulgakov’s opinion, the *sobornost*’ of the Church represented a natural and spontaneous sense of mutual accountability between the members of the Church by virtue of their multi-unity in the humanity of Christ. For Bulgakov, this “organic and creative life of the Church ontologically precedes the hierarchical principle.”³⁷¹ “Hierarchy arises only on the basis of the universal priesthood,” Bulgakov argued, and “while supporting the body, this backbone also belongs to and is generated by the body.”³⁷² “Orthodoxy,” he asserted, “is grounded in *sobornost*’, the communality of the body of the Church, and not in episcopacy, the bishop, or bishops alone.”³⁷³ This ontological “prius”³⁷⁴ must never be forgotten, and at no time must “the institution... [be allowed to] suppress the ontology.”³⁷⁵

Owing to these conclusions, Bulgakov never shied away from criticizing certain exercises of authority by bishops or other structures of Church order. Bulgakov would even refer to

³⁷¹ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 262.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 281.

³⁷³ Bulgakov, “The Episcopate,” in *A Bulgakov Anthology*, 15.

³⁷⁴ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 281.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 263.

himself as “a little Russian Luther” because of his regular protests against the episcopate as he had experienced it. The all too frequent problem, as Bulgakov saw it, was “papalism,” which he defined as a “peculiar kind of exaggeration” of the episcopal office leading to an attitude of “autocracy and absolutism.”³⁷⁶ In Bulgakov’s opinion, the foundation of the Church’s authority in *sobornost’* suggested that bishops were not to think of themselves as rulers of the Church. Christ alone ruled the Church and any notion of bishops as ‘vicars’ of Christ could lead only to the error of “hierarchical anthropotheism.”³⁷⁷ Neither were bishops to be considered the teachers of the Church, but rather simply as those given the responsibility of expressing the Church’s *sobornost’*. Authority in the Church, then, rested with the people, not just the bishops. “The hierarchy,” Bulgakov constantly asserted, “cannot act without their people.”³⁷⁸

Bulgakov was also rather suspect of organs of the Church such as councils or the papacy which purported to speak for the whole Body. “There is no place in the *sobornost’* of the Church for a dogmatic oracle,”³⁷⁹ Bulgakov wrote. He understood this to be a foreign concept to any true ecclesiology, calling it a “superstition” which must be set aside.³⁸⁰ “It is unthinkable,” Bulgakov argued, “that the mind of the Church should belong to only one among its members, [or] to a hierarchy placed above the body of the Church and announcing to it the truth.”³⁸¹ Bulgakov would object vehemently to the Roman papacy and his understanding of its “pretensions” of personal infallibility, suggesting that “the question of

³⁷⁶ Bulgakov, “The Episcopate,” in *A Bulgakov Anthology*, 15.

³⁷⁷ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 277.

³⁷⁸ Bulgakov, “The Episcopate,” in *A Bulgakov Anthology*, 17.

³⁷⁹ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 78.

³⁸⁰ Bulgakov, “One Holy, Catholic & Apostolic Church,” 27.

³⁸¹ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 59.

an exterior organ of infallibility in the Church by its very form faces us with heresy.”³⁸² This challenge could be interpreted as an attack on Roman Catholicism, and I have little doubt that it was. However, as was typical, Bulgakov’s criticism was more wide ranging than that. He was equally scathing in his opposition to what he called the “collective papalism” of the Orthodox Church.³⁸³ It was true, he acknowledged, that councils of bishops were “the tangible expression of the spirit of conciliarity.” However, “not all assemblies are true councils.” Only when they “actualize the conscience of the Church” do they “become, consequently, true councils.”³⁸⁴ As Bulgakov put it: “We must distinguish between the proclamation of the truth, which belongs to the supreme ecclesiastical authority, and the possession of the truth which belongs to the entire body of the Church... The latter is reality itself; the former only a judgement passed on reality.”³⁸⁵ To think that councils make decrees and the people simply obey them as *de facto* authoritative was a dangerous distortion in Bulgakov’s mind. A council was only a council if it gave genuine expression to the *sobornost’* of the whole Church.

None of this is to suggest that Bulgakov was in any way interested in getting rid of the structures of Church authority such as bishops and councils. “It is not a case of denying or diminishing the rights and obligations of the [hierarchy]” he wrote, “but of interpreting it correctly.”³⁸⁶ “My ‘Lutheranism,’” Bulgakov clarified, “is a struggle not against but for episcopacy, a striving to reclaim it in its true dignity, to free it from the contamination of

³⁸² Ibid., 160.

³⁸³ Bulgakov, “The Episcopate,” in *A Bulgakov Anthology*, 15.

³⁸⁴ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 74-75.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 77.

³⁸⁶ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 279.

despotism, based on slavish psychology.”³⁸⁷ Thus while Bulgakov was certainly not afraid to push bishops to respect the limitations of their office and act accordingly, he always strove to do so in a way that was appropriately obedient to that office. Both his nuanced criticism and his nuanced respect were expressions of his *sobornost*’ thought.

5.4 A Primacy in Prophecy

In the chapter above, we discussed the apocalyptic dimension of Bulgakov’s ecumenical commitment resulting from his experience of the Revolution and his subsequent exile from Russia. There we noted an emerging sense in Bulgakov’s writings that a special responsibility to seek the reunion of Christianity in the face of the growing persecution had been thrust upon him. Bulgakov frequently spoke with a certain prophetic edge about the utmost seriousness with which he held matters of Church division and reunion. As we will see, he would come to justify some of his bolder ecumenical steps on the basis of his prophetic sensibilities. For this reason, it is important to spend some time dealing with Bulgakov’s understanding of the ministry of prophecy. Bulgakov spoke about prophets and the nature of prophecy in various places in his work. However, the category takes on an ecclesiological note in connection with the subject of primacy. It is to this subject which we now turn.

Bulgakov more or less followed a standard Orthodox line of thinking when it came to the issue of Roman primacy. He agreed that the Orthodox Churches would be willing to acknowledge the primatial standing of the Church of Rome as it was understood and

³⁸⁷ Bulgakov, “The Episcopate,” in *A Bulgakov Anthology*, 15.

enshrined in connection with the canons of the early ecumenical councils. In order to be acceptable to the Orthodox, however, such a primacy would have to be a primacy of honour or a primacy among equals, rather than the universal jurisdictional authority to which Rome was seen to have had laid claim.³⁸⁸ In this regard, Bulgakov's thought offers nothing especially new or unique.

Where Bulgakov adds an interesting dimension to the primacy discussion is in his view that there are, in fact, multiple forms of primacy, exercising leadership in different aspects of Church life. In 1926, Bulgakov wrote a brief reflection on the subject of what he saw as two distinct New Testament primacies:³⁸⁹ The primacy of St. Peter and the primacy of St. John.³⁹⁰ Bulgakov thereby advanced the primacy conversation by asking us to consider not only the notion of primacy in the singular, but of primacies in the plural. One of the primacies to receive significant attention in Bulgakov's work is what he referred to as the primacy of prophecy.

As Paul Valliere suggests,³⁹¹ Bulgakov was likely led to consider the ecclesiological meaning of St. John the Evangelist through his awareness of Soloviev's enigmatic and allegorical dialogue "A Brief Tale of the Anti-Christ."³⁹² In this curious text, Soloviev had created the character of John the Elder, a man who was made to act as the personification of

³⁸⁸ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 76.

³⁸⁹ Sergei Bulgakov, *Sviatye Petr i Ioann*, (Paris: Y.M.C.A. Press, 1926). This title is available in English as "St. Peter and St. John" in

³⁹⁰ One of the only interpreters to focus on the dogmatic implications of this essay is Paul Valliere. Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 301-03.

³⁹¹ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 302.

³⁹² Vladimir Soloviev, "A Short Story of the Anti-Christ," in *War, Progress and the End of History*, Alexander Bakshy, trans., (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990): 159-93.

the so-called Johannine character of the Church.³⁹³ Soloviev's narrative also included the Roman Catholic Pope Peter II, and the Protestant Professor Pauli. Each of these characters was supposed to be illustrative of different key principles of ecclesial life. Bulgakov was clearly inspired by elements of this story, as evidenced by his discussion of the "professorial" aspects of twentieth century Protestantism.³⁹⁴ It seems very likely that his development of the Johannine ideal, not to mention his thoughts on the contrasting Petrine principle, also originated from Soloviev's tale.

For Bulgakov, Petrine primacy was understood very much in the traditional sense familiar to most Western ecclesiologies. Bulgakov acknowledged that any serious study of the New Testament had to recognize that "St. Peter really had the first place among the twelve apostles."³⁹⁵ While Bulgakov wished to highlight that Peter's primacy "belonged to him in conjunction with all the others and not apart from or without them," it was undeniable that Peter had received a "priority" from Christ.³⁹⁶ Bulgakov saw Peter's primacy consisting primarily in the "affirmation of faith," the safeguarding of the Church's authentic confession.³⁹⁷ Valliere defines it as "the voice of authoritative tradition."³⁹⁸ Bulgakov agreed that this primacy was essential to the Church. Although he would question the straightforward notion of succession from Peter to the bishop of Rome,³⁹⁹ he was very

³⁹³ For an interpretation of this story see Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, "Soloviev on Salvation: The Story of the Short Story of the Antichrist," in *Russian Religious Thought*, Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard Gustafson eds., (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996): 68-87.

³⁹⁴ Bulgakov, "A Professorial Religion," in *A Bulgakov Anthology*, 73-76. The Solovievian origins of Bulgakov's reflection are directly acknowledged in this essay. Bulgakov saw one of the key weaknesses of Protestantism as being its apparently overly intellectualized approach to religion.

³⁹⁵ Bulgakov, "St. Peter and St. John," 79.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 82.

³⁹⁸ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 303.

³⁹⁹ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 278.

comfortable asserting that some form of this same Petrine function was intended to continue in the unfolding history of the Church for all ages.

However, Bulgakov was not content to leave the discussion there. Almost in the same breath as his acknowledgement of Peter, Bulgakov would quickly proceed with a levelling strategy designed to keep the Petrine principle in proper perspective. Bulgakov's approach, in effect, was to problematize Peter by attending to Paul. St. Paul, of course, was not among the disciples of Jesus. As such, he was not subject to the role of headship which Peter was given over that particular group of the twelve. As Bulgakov put it, Paul was "chosen and made an apostle by Christ himself... outside Peter's province and without any relation to him."⁴⁰⁰ For Bulgakov, this was evidence of the fact that Petrine Primacy was never intended to be completely universal. Paul had his own distinct apostolic mission, and, according to the text of Galatians, he waited "fourteen years" before he travelled to Jerusalem to meet with Cephas and the other "pillars."⁴⁰¹ "Paul's preaching," Bulgakov argued, "marks the first boundary of Peter's primacy." For Bulgakov, this ecclesiological fact was confirmed by the intuition of the ancient Church in the decision to celebrate the Petrine feast conjointly with the unique apostolate signified by St. Paul.⁴⁰² As he put it:

Providence decreed that they should both be primates of the Church of Rome where they suffered martyrdom. Thus, the primacy of Peter in the first place where it was directly and most clearly manifested proved, in fact, not to be absolute, because it found its limit in the figure of Paul.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ Bulgakov, "St. Peter and St. John," 79.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. This time-line of events is laid out in Galatians 1 and 2.

⁴⁰² Bulgakov cites the liturgy of the so-called 'Apostle's Lent,' which declares the two apostles to be 'equal in grace and rank. Ibid., 80.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

Bulgakov seems to have extrapolated from here the possibility that if the Petrine primacy could be balanced by a Pauline principle, perhaps this line of thinking could also be extended to include other leading figures in the early Church. Indeed this is exactly what Bulgakov would go on to do. Bulgakov began his case for what he would call a “Johannine primacy” by suggesting that “the Gospel *according* to John” was not just a Gospel written by John and/or his community, but also “the Gospel *about* John.”⁴⁰⁴ The fact that this particular Gospel narrative made some interesting observations about the beloved disciple in relation to Jesus, Peter, Mary, etc., was, in Bulgakov’s opinion, in no way an accident. For Bulgakov, these references were included for theological and indeed ecclesiological reasons. John runs faster to the tomb on Resurrection day, but Peter is the first to enter. John is the first to recognize Jesus walking on the water, but Peter is the one to get out of the boat and meet him. John regularly defers to Peter as the first to speak or act, but it is typically John who is often the first to apprehend what is going on. These were not meaningless details for Bulgakov. They appeared in Holy Scripture precisely because they were intended to teach us about a Johannine principle that is intended to carry on in the Church in perpetuity alongside the ministry of Peter.⁴⁰⁵ The Johannine impulse in the Church, therefore, is taken to be one of prophetic insight; of apprehending the leading edge of what God is doing or about to do. Without it, the ministry of Peter was bound to become distorted.

We can gain a greater appreciation for what Bulgakov meant by a Johannine prophetic primacy by paying attention to his understanding of prophecy in general. One of the best ways to do this is to consider his thinking on the essentially prophetic mandate of the

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 82.

theologian. Bulgakov held that prophecy was an essential part of the theological enterprise. “Without [prophecy],” Bulgakov claimed, “theology loses its inspirational power and becomes abstract scholasticism.”⁴⁰⁶ The Church, therefore, should not only tolerate but seek to cultivate new directions and fresh expressions of dogma for new times and new situations; “not new dogmas but a new knowledge of them.”⁴⁰⁷ There was, then, for Bulgakov, ample room for theological creativity. Those in positions of authority must not endeavour to over-regulate that creativity in the name of canon and Tradition. The prophetic spirit “bloweth where it listeth.”⁴⁰⁸

As Tataryn notes, Bulgakov always took a special interest in promoting intellectual freedom.⁴⁰⁹ As we have seen, Bulgakov knew first-hand how easy it was for those in positions of authority to miss what God was doing out of zeal to preserve tradition.⁴¹⁰ Bulgakov was well aware that to do so could mean robbing the Church of new opportunities to bring the Gospel to bear in every new place and within every diverse culture. Dogma needed to be constantly confronted with the reality of what was actually happening in the world, otherwise it would become dead. Indeed this was confirmed by the fact that there had been more than one occasion in Church history when the Church was “discovered actually to be in possession of a certain doctrine before it [found] specific expression... It is not the dogma which prescribes Church practice, but the latter which is the foundation of dogma.”⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁶ Bulgakov, “The Spirit of Prophecy,” in Williams, *Sergeii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, 291.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ Tataryn relates Bulgakov’s early defence of a movement of monks on Mount Athos – the so called ‘name worshippers.’ Tataryn, “Between Patriarch and Pope,” 140.

⁴¹⁰ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 292.

⁴¹¹ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 67.

Bulgakov would never tire of reminding his Orthodox colleagues of this point, and remained a champion of this Johannine mindset throughout his life.

Another way of understanding the Johannine aspect of the Church is to consider Bulgakov's discussion of a closely related but more familiar concept within Orthodoxy, that of the principle of 'economy.' Working with economy, in the ecclesiological sense, refers to the Church's right to forgo the strict imposition of Church regulations in certain instances on the basis of pastoral sensitivity. A biblical example which serves to illustrate what an application of economy looks like is the decision of the Church in Acts 15 to limit the required observances of the Jewish food laws for Gentile converts to Christianity. Orthodox thinkers, both in Bulgakov's time and now, have sometimes sought to frame ecumenism as a form of economy.⁴¹² The thinking, in effect, is that the Church can, when it finds it expedient, opt to accept relax its rigors with respect to certain canons and principles in order to make the reunion of Western Christians to the Church an easier task.

Bulgakov agreed with this argument to a point, but with a clearly Johannine qualification. Economy, Bulgakov argued, was not a viable long term option for dealing with the new or the irregular. Although it enabled occasional exceptions, it served more to confirm the old negative judgements rather than to move past them. For Bulgakov, economy did not mean simply that the Church had the right to break its own rules if it saw fit in response to special circumstances. "The principle of economy," he wrote, "expresses a dynamic, creative power in the life of the Church, whereas the canonical principle is static." A decision based on

⁴¹² For a recent reflection on some of the ecclesiological issues involved in this Orthodox practice see Tamara Grdzeldze, "Using the Principle of *Oikonomia* in Ecumenical Discussions," *The Ecumenical Review* 56.6 (April 2004), 234-46.

economy was “not an exception to a general rule but rather a way of applying in life an abstract rule.” For Bulgakov, “Law is always abstract, and life is always concrete and complicated.”⁴¹³ Situations change, sometimes rendering canons obsolete. The Johannine colouring of these words is obvious.

As an ecclesiological office, Bulgakov was convinced that the ministry of prophetic primacy was always meant to stand side by side with the Petrine office of authority and tradition. The purported over-attention to the Petrine primacy through much of Church history was attributed to a Roman conflation.⁴¹⁴ Bulgakov saw the two roles as equally necessary, and as reciprocally requiring one another. “Prophecy is dynamics, movement in the life of the Church,” Bugakov wrote, “whereas hierarchism is its statics.”⁴¹⁵ “[T]here is not one but two primacies, or rather it is one, but a twofold composite primacy.”⁴¹⁶ As Paul Valierre describes, Petrine primacy is retrospective and most concerned with succession in the apostolic Tradition, whereas Johannine primacy is prospective, provisional, and experimental, though also in its own way apostolic.⁴¹⁷ Unlike the Petrine primacy which operates under the “order of succession” (i.e. through a regulated transmission in institutional forms), the Johannine primacy “is individual... and is not handed down in succession,”⁴¹⁸ it always carries with it an unexpected character. This provides us with yet another ecclesiological piece which will help us to understand the shape of Bulgakovian ecumenism.

⁴¹³ *Extract of Letter Received by P. B. Anderson from Rev. S. Bulgakoff*, Jan. 12, 1932. Lambeth Palace Archives, London UK.

⁴¹⁴ Bulgakov, “St. Peter and St. John,” 84.

⁴¹⁵ Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 292.

⁴¹⁶ Bulgakov, “St. Peter and St. John,” 82.

⁴¹⁷ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 303.

⁴¹⁸ Bulgakov, “St. Peter and St. John,” 84.

5.5 An Ecclesiology of Friendship

Bulgakov's ecclesiology of friendship owes itself in large part to the theological work on the subject of friends carried out by Pavel Florensky.⁴¹⁹ Unlike some of the other personal influences we have mentioned thus far, Bulgakov was personally acquainted with Florensky. In fact, their association was considerably more than that; they were friends. Bulgakov attributed his conversion to Orthodoxy in considerable part to his experience of the grace-filled aspects of Fr. Pavel's life.⁴²⁰ Like Soloviev, Florensky also contributed to Bulgakov's development in the area of sophiology, and Bulgakov referred approvingly of Florensky's use of liturgical and iconographical sources as a means of grounding speculations about Sophia within the spirituality of Orthodoxy.⁴²¹ However, with the ecumenical orientation of this study in mind, it is another theme within Florensky's thought that will be the subject of our attention here. This topic is one that is full of significance for the ecumenical movement, and indeed highly relevant for understanding Bulgakovian ecumenism.

Florensky's book, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*,⁴²² is considered by many to be his most important religious publication.⁴²³ The book was written as a series of twelve letters addressed to a friend. In typical form for a polymath thinker like Florensky, the text is a

⁴¹⁹ For a general introduction to Florensky's life see Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius*, (New York: Continuum, 2010). See also Robert Slesinski, "Fr. Paul Florensky: A Profile" in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 26.2 (1982): 67-88.

⁴²⁰ See Sergius Bulgakov, *Avtobiograficheskie zametki* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1946), 158, and Sergei Bulgakov, "Svyashchennik o. Pavel Florenskij," *Vestnik russkogo khristians-kogo studencheskogo dvizheniya* nos. 101-102 (1971), <http://www.vehi.net/bulgakov/florensky.html>, accessed October 9, 2013.

⁴²¹ Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*, 4, 10.

⁴²² Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, Boris Jakim trans., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁴²³ Robert Slesinski offers a helpful summary of Florensky's text with his book *A Metaphysics of Love* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).

rather eclectic amalgam of diverse philosophical and theological topics. The subject of one of the letters was the topic of friendship, or, more specifically, of the basis for and meaning of love between friends. For Florensky, friendship, as a technical term, was an instance of realized sophiology.⁴²⁴ That is, it represented a unique partial manifestation of the ultimate unity of all things within Sophia as both the origin and *telos* of created existence. As Florensky put it:

[Friendship] erases, if only in a preliminary and conditional way, the bounds of selfhood's separateness, which is aloneness. In a friend, in this other I of the loving one, one finds the source of hope for victory and the symbol of what is to come. And one is thus given preliminary consubstantiality...⁴²⁵

Florensky contrasted this to the concept of “brotherhood,” which he saw embodied in the relationship between all members of the Church with one another. Whereas brotherhood was largely the product of an “*agapic* love” (which Florensky defined as a “rational love, which is based on the valuation of the loved one, and which is therefore not passionate”), friendship depended upon “*philein*” (a love which emerges from personal closeness and intimate relationship).⁴²⁶

Between Christians, friendship was taken by Florensky to have an ecclesiological content:

The gathering of two or more in the name of Christ, the co-entering into the mysterious spiritual atmosphere around Christ, communion with His grace-giving power, transforms them into a new spiritual essence, makes of two a particle of the Body of Christ, a living incarnation of the Church... ecclesializes them.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Robert Slesinski explains that, for Florensky, “friendship is metaphysical in nature, and thus must be viewed not only psychologically and ethically, but, more importantly, ontologically and mystically.” See Slesinski, *A Metaphysics of Love*, 221-22.

⁴²⁵ Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 286.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 303.

According to Florensky, the medieval Orthodox Church had a rite by which to recognize this redemptive and ecclesial significance of friendship – a rite known as *adelphopoiesis*.⁴²⁸ In the ceremony, the Church recognized the universal significance of the personal relationship of two particular individuals. *Adelphopoiesis* was a case in which the *agapic* and *philein* aspects of Church love were enabled to merge in a special way, much like, but distinct from, marriage.

The primary purpose of this liturgical celebration, Florensky explains, was in the interest of strengthening Christian friends for what Florensky called “co-asceticism, co-patience, and co-martyrdom.”⁴²⁹ However, while we tend to think of a friendship’s value as primarily effectual in the personal lives of the friends involved, Florensky would push his argument further to suggest that it was perfectly acceptable for some friendships to obtain a corporate or ecclesial significance. Indeed, in some sense, in the Church, all friendships had a collective meaning.

As Florensky wrote:

In the Church there cannot be anything that is not pan-ecclesial, just as there cannot be anything that is not personal. Every phenomenon of church life is pan-ecclesial in its meaning, but it has a center, a point of special application, where it is not only stronger but even qualitatively wholly other than in other places.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁸ Florensky produces a description of this rite for the benefit of his readers. It reads: “(1) the brothers to be are positioned in the church before the lectern, upon which rest the Cross and the Gospel; the older of the two stands to the right while the younger stands to the left; (2) prayers and litanies are said that ask that the two be united in love and that remind them of examples of friendship from church history; (3) the two are tied with one belt, their hands are placed on the Gospel, and a burning candle is given to each of them; (4) the Apostle (1 Cor 12:27 to 13:8) and the Gospel (John 17:18-26) are read; (5) more prayers and litanies like those indicated in 2 are read; (6) Our Father is read; (7) the brothers to be partake of the presanctified gifts from a common cup; (8) they are led around the lectern while they hold hands, the following troparion being sung: ‘Lord, watch from heaven and see’; (9) they exchange kisses; and (10) the following is sung: ‘Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!’ (Ps. 133:1).” *Ibid.*, 327.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁴³⁰ Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 329.

Bulgakov adopted a great deal of Florensky's insights about friendship and seems to have made use of them at various places in his dogmatic theology. Bulgakov's treatise on John the Baptist, which forms part of his minor trilogy, was entitled *The Friend of the Bridegroom*. For Bulgakov, the fact that Jesus, the Incarnate Word, had someone in his life that could be described as a "friend" was not just a sentimental curiosity. Rather, it was an important Christological assertion. Christ's friendship with his cousin John is testimony to his fullness of humanity.⁴³¹ Human beings find themselves in relationships of otherness with their fellow humanity. Indeed, the redemption of human nature in Jesus Christ also included, for Bulgakov, the redemption of the human relationship of friendship;⁴³² it made human friendship a vehicle for ascent to friendship with God.⁴³³ John's friendship with Jesus was meant to serve as a model of the fullness of human friendship because John's friendship was an ascetic one. He gave himself over completely to Jesus so as to become entirely transparent to his friend; in effect, he became united as one person with Christ through friendship.⁴³⁴

Already we can begin to see an ecclesial quality to the notion of friendship with Christ. Friendship, Bulgakov claimed, was something that was "rooted in the life of the Church," a fact made clear by Jesus' use of the term "friends" to describe his new relationship to the disciples at the Last Supper (John 15:14-15).⁴³⁵ The goal of friendship between members of the Church, Bulgakov, argued, was to create a special form of "churchly love" between two particular individuals; a communion of persons realized through "pair-syzygy."⁴³⁶ Echoing

⁴³¹ Bulgakov, *The Friend of the Bridegroom*, 8.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴³⁶ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 320.

Florensky, friendship had the capacity to erase “personal self-enclosedness” and, in effect, to create “two persons, but with one soul.”⁴³⁷ In other words, Christian friendship was a visible manifestation of the Church, and was capable of creating an experience of ecclesial *sobornost*. When this unique kind of bonding occurs, Bulgakov argued, the Church most certainly can, and indeed should recognize it as something only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴³⁸

Bulgakov had several of these kinds of friends, in this full Florenskian sense of the word. As we saw above, Paul Anderson, who was called the guardian angel, certainly fits this description in Bulgakov’s life. We also saw the ways in which the wider community of exiled Russians in Paris benefited tremendously from its many ecumenical friends – John Mott, William Temple, and others – and how these relationships positively impacted the work they were able to do together. We observed similar effects within the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius. For Bulgakov, ecumenical friends became a motivator of ecumenical methodology, and a source of ecclesiological reflection.

5.6 Conclusion

We now have a good sense of some of the major ecclesiological and ecclesiological elements that serve to aid our understanding of Bulgakov and his ecumenical approach. Bulgakov was clearly an individual with a unique confluence of life experience and theological opinion that fit him well to taking a leadership role as a key Orthodox actor in the

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 321.

⁴³⁸ Bulgakov also advocates for a recovery of the practice of *adelphopoiesis*. Ibid., 322.

first few decades of the twentieth century ecumenical movement. To this point we have not discussed Bulgakov's actual ecumenical career in any detail. This will be my next task. In these concrete instances of Bulgakovian ecumenism in action we will be able to recognize many of the formative precursors derived above.

Chapter 6 **Lived Ecumenism**

6.1 Ecumenism in Action

As noted in the literature review in the first chapter, other studies of Bulgakov's ecumenical history tend to devote the bulk of their attention to the Anglican-Orthodox Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, and especially to his proposal of the possibility of Eucharistic sharing between its members. This research is invaluable, and I am in agreement with my fellow scholars that the issues surrounding that event do represent the fullest picture of what is distinctive about Bulgakovian ecumenism. However, Bulgakov would not have felt it possible to propose intercommunion if it were not for the experiences and convictions of his earlier forays into the ecumenical realm.

With the above qualification in place, there are four notable milestones in Bulgakov's ecumenical career: 1) His activity within the Russian Student Christian Movement; 2) His involvement at the 1927 Lausanne Conference of the Faith and Order Commission; 3) His founding role in early years of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius; 4) The Fellowship intercommunion proposal. My aim in this chapter is to provide a unified picture of Bulgakovian ecumenism, focusing on the related strands of thought that appear throughout it at its various stages of development. As will become clear, the common features found in each stage were the product of both Bulgakov's unique personal history, and of the specific ecclesiological convictions which we have observed above. Outlining how these aspects of

Bulgakovian ecumenism can contribute something to several of the major methodological issues facing the ecumenical movement today will be my task in Part 3 further below.

6.2 The Russian Student Christian Movement

The Russian Student Christian Movement (RSCM) had its origins in the earlier history of Christian student associations formed during the nineteenth century. These included organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA),⁴³⁹ as well as the closely related World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).⁴⁴⁰ The first YMCA was founded in London in 1844, with the goal of providing biblical and spiritual formation for young working class men. In 1855 the World Alliance of YMCAs was created, incorporating hundreds of YMCAs from all over Western Europe, North America, and various regions of the British Commonwealth. The Alliance took as its motto the words of the famous ecumenical text John 17:21, "that they all may be one." This same motto was also adopted by the WSCF when it was formed in 1895. The so called *Paris Basis*, a document outlining the mission of ecumenical youth discipleship, was also shared by the WSCF and the YMCA.⁴⁴¹ Each of these organizations can be seen as important impulses leading towards the formal ecumenical movement in the twentieth century.

⁴³⁹ For a history of the earlier years of the YMCA see for example Sherwood Eddy, *A Century with Youth: A History of the Y.M.C.A. from 1844 to 1944*, (New York: Association Press, 1944).

⁴⁴⁰ For a history of the WSCF see for example Suzanne de Dietrich, *Fifty Years of History: The World Student Christian Federation (1895-1945)*, (Geneva: WSCF, 1993) and Phillip Potter and Thomas Wiser, *Seeking and Serving the Truth: The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997).

⁴⁴¹ The *Paris Basis* reads: "The Young Men's Christian Association seeks to unite those young men (sic) who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be his disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of his Kingdom amongst young men."

The RSCM was created in 1899 through the shared initiative of the YMCA and the WCSM. Its mission, like that of its Western counterparts, was to provide a Christian influence among the increasingly secularized youth and student populations.⁴⁴² However, it was in the 1920s, among the exiled Russian community first in Berlin and then in Paris, that the YMCA's Russian mission began to establish itself. As Donald Davis notes, the YMCA's early work among the Russian Diaspora was to provide for material needs. However, very quickly it expanded to include efforts to help the Russian Christian community to survive in its isolation. It did so by supporting education,⁴⁴³ and through the publication of religious and theological books in the Russian language.⁴⁴⁴ The YMCA created a correspondence school for exiled Russians, and would later sponsor the formation of a school of religious philosophy in Berlin under the auspices of one of Bulgakov's former colleagues, Nikolai Berdyaev. As we will see in the next section, this educational support role continued among the community of Russians in Paris as well. The YMCA Press was also involved in the publication of many of the classic texts of modern Russian Orthodoxy, including nearly all the first editions of Bulgakov's theological writings.

According to Robert Bird, Bulgakov first became known to the YMCA and WCSF leadership as early as 1906. At that time he was seen as an intellectual critic of Russian Marxism, as well as an emerging voice of Christian influence among students.⁴⁴⁵ At this time Bulgakov was likely not yet formally self-identifying as an Orthodox Christian, although

⁴⁴² On this work see Donald E. Davis, "The American YMCA and the Russian Emigration," *Sobornost* 9.1 (1987): 24-41.

⁴⁴³ Davis, "The American YMCA and the Russian Emigration," 24. Later it would support a similar initiative in Paris, which we will discuss below.

⁴⁴⁴ See Matt Miller, "The Russian YMCA Press: Preserver and Patron of Russian Orthodox Culture," *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 15.3 (Summer 2007): 2-4.

⁴⁴⁵ Robert Bird, "In Partibus Infidelium," *Symposium: A Journal of Russian Thought* 1 (1996): 93-121.

religious themes were already heavily influencing his thought. When the YMCA and the WSCF gathered again in 1923 in Czechoslovakia, Bulgakov would find himself drawn into contact with these movements yet again. By this time, he had been ordained to the priesthood and was growing in prominence as a leader in Christian and academic circles among the Russians abroad. As such, he was a prime candidate to take up a major role in the renewed RSCM in exile.

From its earliest days, the RSCM was held in some suspicion by the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church because of its close association with the largely Protestant funded and led YMCA and WSCF. Addressing this challenge was one of the first ecumenical issues on which Bulgakov would cut his teeth.

Bryn Geffert outlines the history of the tensions well, describing the ongoing battle between those who wished to see the RSCM remain an inclusively Christian organization and those who demanded that it identify itself explicitly with Orthodoxy and place itself more firmly under the control of the Russian Bishops.⁴⁴⁶ The fear on one side was that young Russians might be proselytized by non-Orthodox confessions through their contact with Western Christians. Those on the opposite side feared the creation of an isolationist attitude that would rob young Russian Christians of the opportunity to grow in their faith as well as bring the Orthodox voice into greater contact with the wider Christian world.⁴⁴⁷ Bulgakov was among those who tried to carve out a middle ground.⁴⁴⁸ He was sensitive to the reality that

⁴⁴⁶ See Geffert, *Anglicans and Orthodox Between the Wars*, 116-123.

⁴⁴⁷ For more on the inter-Orthodox politics of these disputes see Nicholas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963).

⁴⁴⁸ Bird, "In Partibus Infidelium," 105.

the student movements were almost exclusively a Protestant phenomenon, and he saw the importance of maintaining the Orthodox integrity of the Russian participants. He strongly opposed a connection with the YMCA which would subject the Russian students to Western proselytism. According to Geffert and Davis, he also seems to have been concerned to negotiate a concession on the part of the YMCA to allow the RSCM to maintain a distinct status within the wider student movement.⁴⁴⁹ In this respect he appears on the conservative side. However, Bulgakov was equally frustrated with the opposite attitude that viewed any friendly and cooperative contact with Western Christianity as a betrayal of Orthodoxy, or tried to turn the student movement into an official office of the Orthodox Church.⁴⁵⁰

Already at this stage it seems Bulgakov was learning how to articulate a nuanced position with regard to non-Orthodox Christians and the ecclesial self-understanding of Orthodoxy. He maintains the sense that Russian Christians should hold on to their uniqueness, and seek to present the fullness of the Church to those outside. However, that did not mean that ‘outside’ was an utter void of churchly grace. Bulgakov was eager to recognize that there was much to be gained from contact with Western Christianity, for both sides. Such contacts should not be feared or opposed, but given room for freedom and creativity to explore fruitful outcomes.

Nicholas Zernov points out a second Bulgakovian intervention in the RSCM, one which he argues set an important precedent for later ecumenical engagement. Early RSCM meetings

⁴⁴⁹ Geffert, *Anglicans and Orthodox Between the Wars*, 119. Davis, “The American YMCA and the Russian Emigration,” 29.

⁴⁵⁰ Geffert records Bulgakov’s annoyance over those who took issue with the fact that the word Orthodox did not appear in the RSCM designation. See Geffert, *Anglicans and Orthodox Between the Wars*, 120.

had been characterized by an emphasis on bible reading. It was Bulgakov who, though not opposed to this aspect of the gatherings, sought to bring the Eucharist to the forefront by encouraging the students to begin their gatherings with its celebration. This gave the RSCM a more distinctively Orthodox feeling in comparison to its other national counterparts, and served as a means for introducing Orthodox liturgy and spirituality to Western Christians. Zernov also suggests that Bulgakov's leadership in this regard "laid the foundation" for a "eucharistic approach to reunion work."⁴⁵¹ Many of the early RSCM leaders would go on to hold influential positions in later ecumenical initiatives, and, in many cases, would try to bring this practice with them. We will see more about this in the section below which traces the evolution of the RSCM in connection with the beginnings of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius. Suffice it to say here that Bulgakov's ecumenical sensibilities were already well on their way to resembling some of the very same attitudes which he would display later in life.

6.3 Faith and Order

The agenda of the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh was to facilitate greater cooperation and effectiveness between the various Protestant confessions and para-Church mission agencies in the work of global evangelization. As such, the discussion of doctrinal differences was, for the most part, intentionally avoided. As Jürgen Schuster has put it, the conveners of Edinburgh 1910 instituted a "self-imposed limitation not to discuss any differences of doctrine and church order" in order to allow the widest possible

⁴⁵¹ Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*, 228.

participation in a conference dedicated to global missions.⁴⁵² However, talk of a conference which would focus on theological concerns between the churches did emerge out of this earlier meeting. The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches owes its origins to this impulse. Organizational challenges and the disruptions of WWI put off this gathering for some time. However, the first Faith and Order Conference would finally meet in 1927 in Lausanne, Switzerland. This was a landmark event in the history of the Ecumenical movement, especially with respect to the doctrinal side of the task.

The Patriarchate of Moscow signalled the first official Orthodox interest in the formal ecumenical movement as early as 1920.⁴⁵³ The Moscow Patriarchate, however, continued to oppose involvement in ecumenism until the late 1940s. Yet, because of their unique political, ecclesiastical and geographical situation, the Russians in exile have a different story. They were not only able, but eager to participate. Metropolitan Evlogii chose Bulgakov to accompany him as a delegate to Lausanne as part of a twenty-nine-member Orthodox contingent. This was his first foray into the formalized ecumenical movement. Bulgakov offers some of his own reflections on Lausanne in several of his essays dealing with ecumenism and ecumenical themes,⁴⁵⁴ and Evlogii's diaries also fill in some interesting details.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² Jürgen Schuster, "Edinburgh 1910 and Beyond: Mission in Unity," 4, <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/files/edinburgh2010/files/Resources/UBS%20Schuster-%20Newbiggin%20%20Mission%20in%20Unity.pdf>, accessed Oct. 14, 2013.

⁴⁵³ Encyclical of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, *Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere*, (1920).

⁴⁵⁴ In particular the previously cited "By Jacob's Well," as well as "The Papal Encyclical and the Lausanne Conference," *The Christian East* 9.3 (1928): 116-27.

⁴⁵⁵ *Put' moei zhizni: vospominaniia Mitropolita Evlogiia (Georgievskogo)*, izlozhennye po ego rasskazam T. Manukhinoi, (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, Izdatel'skii otdel vsetserkovnogo pravoslavnogo molodezhnogo dvizheniia, 1994).

As with his earlier role in connection with the first Orthodox involvements in the Christian student movements, Bulgakov and his colleagues faced some considerable criticism from the wider Orthodox community for even agreeing to attend such a Conference. Bulgakov was certainly aware that such a decision would be unpopular and potentially misunderstood. Bulgakov took care to assure those who might be suspicious of the Orthodox delegation that they were participating in the ecumenical movement carefully and consciously. “It goes without saying,” he wrote, “that the participation of representatives of the Orthodox Church in the reunion movement is only possible on the condition that the fullness and purity of Orthodoxy is safeguarded.”⁴⁵⁶ He knew full well that the Orthodox canons condemned any association with heretics, and yet he would attend just the same. “The time has already passed,” Bulgakov argued, “when we could lock ourselves in and isolate ourselves from the world as if inside a monastery fence.”⁴⁵⁷ In Bulgakov’s opinion, such a ‘Pharisaic’ application of the existing canons was no longer appropriate.⁴⁵⁸ The world had changed, and a new response to divided Christianity was required.

Here again we see two related themes that are very characteristic of Bulgakov’s overall ecumenical approach: Fidelity to the notion of Orthodoxy as the fullness of Church, alongside a serious effort to stretch the boundaries of the permissible on the basis of prophetic revelation. These sentiments continue to appear in Bulgakov’s other ecumenical endeavours, and especially in his work with the Fellowship. As we saw above, they rest firmly upon two of Bulgakov’s central ecclesiological and ecclesiological influences: 1)

⁴⁵⁶ Sergius Bulgakov, “The Papal Encyclical and the Lausanne Conference,” 120.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴⁵⁸ Bulgakov suggested that to ignore the reality of the ecumenical movement on the grounds of the ancient canons would be the equivalent Jesus’ ridicule of the Pharisees who “strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.” *Ibid.*, 121.

His appreciation for the prophetic dimension of ecumenical work; and 2) The intentionally maintained tension between his sophiological universalism and his commitment to Orthodox unity.

Bulgakov is noted as having had two main interventions in the proceedings of the Lausanne Conference. The first was a paper which he presented dealing with *The Church's Ministry*.⁴⁵⁹ True to form he did not hesitate to state clearly and unequivocally the Orthodox position on the necessity of maintaining the historic episcopate as the means of safeguarding apostolicity,⁴⁶⁰ even though he had to know that his opinion would likely not be well received by a largely Protestant audience. However, Bulgakov was never the type to criticize what he saw as the shortcomings of non-Orthodox Christian communities without also highlighting certain positive features of their spiritual tradition. In the same presentation, he would take the opportunity to challenge his own tradition. This drew the ire of some of his Orthodox colleagues for suggesting that the Orthodox episcopate was plagued by its own distortions with respect to things like lack of consultation and collegiality.⁴⁶¹ Bulgakov certainly saw the Orthodox Church as having some important correctives to give to the Western Church, both to Protestants and Roman Catholics. However, he would never have countenanced the notion that Orthodoxy did not have a few things to learn in its own right from contact with other Christian traditions.

⁴⁵⁹ Sergeii Bulgakov, "The Church's Ministry," in *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement: Documents and Statements, 1902-1975*, ed. Constantine Patelos, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978): 166-71.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

Bulgakov also delivered a speech at Lausanne on the topic of Marian devotion. Bulgakov's was an exceptionally high Mariology, and the Mother of God played a very important role in many areas of his thought. According to Geffert, Bulgakov's first attempt to make this presentation was interrupted by the session chairmen because it was deemed to depart too far from the approved agenda.⁴⁶² Bulgakov was finally permitted to say his piece later in the Conference, but once again his words were not well received. Bulgakov was very critical of the neglect of the Blessed Virgin within Protestantism. For Bulgakov, even beyond the dogmatic implications of a de-emphasis of Marian doctrine, this "loss of feeling" for Mary was symptomatic of a generalized spiritual numbness.⁴⁶³ In Bulgakov's view, the Mother of God was a focal point of the Church's unity, and he attributed to her a unique mystical hand in drawing Christians together around her Son. Unless Protestants could overcome their bias against Marian spirituality, they would never be restored to unity with the Church.

Some might interpret this episode as an example of Bulgakov throwing a proverbial wrench into the ecumenical proceedings by insisting on making an argument which he knew would be almost completely unwelcome. I believe it is better to understand this episode in the context of Bulgakov's wider commitment to reunion through spiritual experience rather than simply through doctrinal consensus. The orthodoxy of Bulgakov's own Mariology is a matter open for theological debate.⁴⁶⁴ However, at the core of his comments on Mary and ecumenism was the simple conviction that there were real spiritual consequences resulting

⁴⁶² Geffert, *Anglicans and Orthodox Between the Wars*, 143.

⁴⁶³ "This lack of feeling [for the Virgin] continues up to the present time, and one of the most important preliminary conditions of the success of reconciliation is to overcome it." Bulgakov, "The Question of the Veneration of the Virgin Mary, at the Edinburgh Conference," *Sobornost* 12 (1937), 28.

⁴⁶⁴ See Andrew Louth, "Father Sergii Bulgakov on the Mother of God," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49.1/2 (2005): 145-164.

from the division in the Church. The extreme allergy to Marian doctrine within Protestantism was taken to be one of them, and perhaps rightly so. Ultimately I believe this statement was one of the first times that Bulgakov saw the necessity of the bonds of ecclesial *sobornost'* for doctrinal agreement and institutional reunion. He knew that any real work toward agreement on these matters would have to involve a supreme action of Divine grace, and his cry for a Protestant recovery of 'Marian feeling' was as much a prayer made before God as it was a plea for a change of mind in his listeners.

Though the paper on ministry and the speech on the Mother of God are interesting historical notes in Bulgakov's ecumenical story, they are not the most representative of his activity in the Faith and Order movement. While Bulgakov certainly did not wish to minimize the importance of such gatherings as an opportunity for Christians to discuss their doctrinal differences in a "comparative" as opposed to "denunciatory" fashion, he judged that the most important thing to come out of the Lausanne Conference was not to be found in the series of addresses and formal sessions. "[S]omething had happened," he reported, which was "above and beyond anything written down in the reports and minutes." There had been a "common spiritual experience of unity in Christ," an experience he would describe as "spiritual communion."⁴⁶⁵ To use the language we saw in the previous chapter, I believe Bulgakov understood this to be an anticipation of the recovery of the Church's *sobornost'*. This, for Bulgakov, was the piece that was so often missing from Christian reunion efforts. Yet, it was the very thing that was necessary if the ecumenical movement was to bear any real fruit. As Bulgakov put it: "[A]part from this kind of experience... there cannot be any Christian

⁴⁶⁵ Bulgakov, "By Jacob's Well," 106.

unity.⁴⁶⁶ No amount of meetings and discussions of doctrine could ever move things one inch closer to reunion without the desire for unity that can only come from the miraculous love for the other that comes from the *sobornost*' unity of the Body of Christ. That the Lausanne Conference had fostered the kind of atmosphere where this experience could take place was the real achievement to be celebrated.⁴⁶⁷

Bulgakov would continue to be involved in Faith and Order ecumenism for another twelve years following Lausanne. He was named to the continuation committee which would be responsible for planning towards the next major Conference that was to take place in Edinburgh in 1937, and he attended and participated in this important gathering as well. As Valliere suggests, Bulgakov can be assumed to have had some degree of involvement with initial decisions which would eventually lead to the creation of the World Council of Churches by virtue of his position within the Faith and Order movement.⁴⁶⁸ However, from 1927 onwards it seems that the real focus of Bulgakov's ecumenical energies would be directed elsewhere, turning more intentionally towards creating ways for separated Christians to share in the experience which he himself had at Lausanne. Nowhere else was he more active in this regard than in the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁶⁸ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 286. Valliere notes that Bulgakov's increasingly health problems in the late 1930s would eventually lead to his replacement as the key Orthodox figure in Faith and Order by none other than Fr. George Florovsky.

⁴⁶⁹ The best history on the formation of the Fellowship is that of former General Secretary and friend Bulgakov mentee Nicolas Zernov and his wife Militza. I will rely on it heavily as I outline some of the relevant details. See *The History of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius: A Historical Memoir by Nicholas and Melitza Zernov (1979)*, http://www.sobornost.org/Zernov_History-of-the-Fellowship.pdf, accessed Jan. 4, 2014.

6.4 The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius

The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius had its beginnings in connection with the RSCM, which was discussed above. In 1926, the General Committee of the WSCF met in Nyborg, Denmark. Present at the meeting were the leaders of the recently re-established RSCF in exile – Bulgakov among them – along with the leadership of numerous other national student Christian groups. During the course of their time together, several meaningful contacts were made or renewed between the heads of the British Student Christian Movement (BSCM) and the Russian contingent. Based on some emerging mutual interest, it was decided that a joint meeting between the Russian and British student organizations might be a fruitful endeavour to explore. Such was the basis for the first Anglo-Russian Student Conference held some thirty miles north of London, in January of 1927.

The first gathering of what would become the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius was rather modest in attendance. There were roughly twenty delegates from the British side, and the Russian contingent, led by Bulgakov, numbered twelve. Conversations were difficult, and differences in orientation many. Geffert's account based on several first-hand reports indicates that the Russians were somewhat put off by the English interest in questions of science and biblical criticism, as well as their rather naively positive assumptions about the connections between the Christian socialism movement in the West and what was taking place with Russian Communism.⁴⁷⁰ In spite of these challenges, the experience of being together led to a mutual feeling that the Conference had been a success and second gathering

⁴⁷⁰ Geffert, *Anglicans and Orthodox Between the Wars*, 156-159.

was scheduled for the following year. This time around there would be 70 attendees, and an equal measure of energy and excitement.

Following these first two meetings, delegates from both groups began to speak of a desire for more regular contact than one annual conference would allow. A proposal was fashioned by a young student named Nicolas Zernov calling for the formation of a ‘Fellowship’ – an official mechanism for the furtherance of Anglican and Russian Orthodox friendship and rapprochement. The name decided upon for this group was that of two shared saints of the undivided Church, St. Alban and St. Sergius, the patrons of Britain and Russia respectively. Two bishops would be named co-presidents: Bishop Walter Frere on the Anglican side and Metropolitan Evlogii for the Orthodox. The man appointed vice-president and director of the Fellowship was none other than Fr. Sergei Bulgakov.

There are several significant characteristics of the Fellowship’s early history that reveal unmistakably the hand of Bulgakov at work. One of these is the emphasis on the building of grassroots relationships between regular Christian people. Early on, the Fellowship worked closely with the Russian Church Aid Fund, an organization which, as Nicholas Zernov describes it, “aimed at bringing before the English Christians the problems and needs of the Russian Church.”⁴⁷¹ Through the Fellowship, Christians who had previously had little or no contact with one another were able to serve each other at the level of the most basic practical needs. Many who had been involved in or assisted by the Fund would go on take up an active ecumenical involvement as Fellowship members. In many ways it was an investment in the ecumenical future.

⁴⁷¹ *The History of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*, 7.

There are other interesting examples of the relational dimension of the Fellowship worthy of note. One of these is the summer exchange program which allowed exiled Russian students from all over Western Europe to visit English theological colleges, to board with English families, and to experience first-hand the worship of the Anglican Church. Similar trips were arranged for English students to visit Russian communities in France or the Balkans.⁴⁷² The content of the earliest issues of *The Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius* (JFAS), which was at first something like a newsletter, are also fascinating to observe in this regard. They routinely contain editorial notes or brief letters updating membership on things like travel plans for certain members, requests for practical needs such as short term lodging or help purchasing books, and the solicitation of prayers for certain individuals who were known to be sick or who were soon to be ordained to the priesthood, etc.⁴⁷³ In both cases I think we can see traces of Bulgakov's later theological and ecclesiological appreciation for the significance of Christian friendship to ecclesial reunion.

Those who participated in the Fellowship were also not necessarily the typical kind of ecumenical professionals we might expect today. Unlike Bulgakov's experience in Faith and Order, where the participants were largely made up of bishops, priests, theologians, heads of para-Church organizations, and other official representatives, the Fellowship represented a far more mixed group. Of course there were people who held offices in their respective churches or who were academic theologians,⁴⁷⁴ but there were also a lot of young people, students, laity, etc., who began to attend the Fellowship conferences. The decision to publish

⁴⁷² *The History of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*, 8.

⁴⁷³ See volumes 6, 7, and 8 of the *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*.

⁴⁷⁴ Notable Anglican theologians who were involved in the early years were Michael Ramsey and Eric Mascall. The Orthodox contingent included such names as Bulgakov, Georges Florovskii, Nicholai Berdyaev and Anton Kartashev.

a quarterly magazine to report on the major themes of its gatherings also helped to popularize its efforts to a wider audience than might otherwise have had no knowledge of the Fellowship's work. Zernov, who was himself initially employed part-time by the Fellowship to act as secretary, was sent out on a wide ranging series of speaking engagements and church visits around England to promote its efforts. This led to the formation of a number of smaller local satellite fellowships, primarily made up of interested laity.⁴⁷⁵ In the opinion of Paul Anderson, the Fellowship's wide ranging membership was clearly the product of Bulgakov's leadership.⁴⁷⁶

A second distinctive feature of the Fellowship was its practice of placing prayer and joint worship at the centre of its work rather than theological dialogue. The Fellowship was not solely unique in this regard, but it certainly was qualitatively notable for the time. Of course this is not to say that doctrinal questions were not on the table. Those who came to the Fellowship conferences were of course also highly interested in theology, and the discussion of doctrinal agreements and disagreements was certainly on the agenda. A review of the articles listed in the first offerings of JFAS reveals that the early agenda of the group centred on such common ecumenical discussion topics as the Eucharist, the Church, Mary, sin and justification, etc. However, even in this vein the most frequent subjects of interest seem to have been topics more generally associated with Christian spirituality. The first three issues of JFAS contain papers and speeches about the lives of the saints.⁴⁷⁷ A few years later there

⁴⁷⁵ Zernov lists Birmingham, Shrewsbury, Stoke-on-Trent, Stafford, Cambridge, Oxford, Leigh-on-Sea, Winchester, Leicester, Wakefield, Hertford, Newquay and Leamington as towns which held local conferences.

⁴⁷⁶ Paul Anderson, "Father Sergius Bulgakov," *Living Church* 9 (November 1935), 485.

⁴⁷⁷ See volumes 1, 2, 3 of the *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*.

seems to have been a great deal of attention given to ascetic practices.⁴⁷⁸ There are also several articles about Church music, including musical scores and lyrics of translated Russian Christmas hymns for the benefit of the English readership.⁴⁷⁹ For the members of the Fellowship, the spiritual dimension was not viewed as simply a nice accompaniment and theological discussion the really important work. Rather, any successful understanding or convergence through doctrinal dialogue was seen as possible largely as a result of the prior experience of shared spiritual connection.

The heavily spiritual orientation of the Fellowship is confirmed by reading first-hand accounts of Conference proceedings from early participants. Two Russian delegates who had attended the second conference in 1928 spoke about “a feeling of spiritual friendship sanctified by the invisible presence of Christ,” and “a yearning that our unity which we had experience in the spirit of worship might become fulfilled both spiritually and bodily.”⁴⁸⁰ One of the Anglican students in attendance, Arthur Turner, described how although there were many excellent lectures and debates to enjoy, “the Chapel was the real meeting place, for it was there that we experienced such an inexpressible feeling of unity.”⁴⁸¹ These impressions were not formed by chance, but by design. Several years later the Fellowship’s constitution would explicitly mandate, “the centre of the work of the Fellowship is liturgical worship.”⁴⁸² Though certain liturgical acts and forms of prayer were not able to be practices in common, nonetheless common prayer and the reading of Scripture represented unbroken

⁴⁷⁸ See volumes 8, 10, 15 of the *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*.

⁴⁷⁹ See volumes 3 and 5 of the *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*.

⁴⁸⁰ *Report of the Second Annual Anglo-Russian Student Conference Held at the Diocesan Retreat House, 28th Dec., 1927 to 2nd Jan., 1928*, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK.

⁴⁸¹ Arthur Turner, “Some Impression of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Fellowship of Ss. Alban & Sergius,” *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius* 9 (1930): 20-23.

⁴⁸² Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Constitution, Article 3.

bonds that could still unite Christians across their divisions. As Bulgakov put it “all Christians who call on Christ’s Name in prayer are actually one with Christ.”⁴⁸³ Likewise, “sincere and devout readers of the Gospels through this alone are already within the Church.”⁴⁸⁴ Statements like these reflect the same kind of sentiment which we saw forming in Bulgakov’s mind at Lausanne. It should be no surprise that they also represent the most important emphasis of the Fellowship phase of his ecumenical career.

6.5 The Intercommunion Proposal

The importance of the Eucharist within the Fellowship was the fullest fruit of prioritizing a spiritual approach to Christian reunion. Reminiscent of Bulgakov’s policy of centring the meetings of the RSCM on the celebration of Eucharist, the gatherings of the Fellowship also made a point of regular Eucharistic worship. In the context of an ecumenical body of mixed ecclesial membership, this obviously called for some creativity.

In the earliest years, alternating services of Communion were held each morning according to either the Anglican and Orthodox rites. The Orthodox would not receive from Anglican priests, and neither would the Anglicans from the Orthodox. However, both parties would participate as fully as possible in all the other elements of the service. This decision would come to represent what was probably the most distinctive aspect of the Fellowship’s ecumenical activity. As Zernov wrote:

[The Fellowship’s] first and main contribution is the emphasis on the Eucharist as the God-given basis for the realization of concord. Instead of exclusive reliance upon theological

⁴⁸³ Bulgakov, “By Jacob’s Well,” 104.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

debate as the means of restoring unity, the members of the Fellowship have tested their oneness at liturgical worship... The literature the Fellowship publishes, the studies which it sponsors, and the understanding and cooperation which it promotes are all the fruits of Eucharistic experience.⁴⁸⁵

It was Zernov's opinion that this Eucharistic emphasis owed itself exclusively to "the suggestion of Father Sergius"⁴⁸⁶ Openness to creative participation in the respective traditions was seen to be possible only because "Fr. Bulgakov's authority stood so high."⁴⁸⁷

Although the canons of the Church prevented *communio in sacris*, Bulgakov was convinced that God continued to use the sacraments to hold Christians in a measure of communion even across their divisions. As such, attendance and participation in another church's Eucharist was an ecumenical imperative.

As is so often the case, the early dynamism of the Fellowship did not last forever. Soon it began to face challenges and frustrations that would sap it of some of its earlier vigour. Bryn Geffert's history of the Fellowship documents evidence of this palpable loss of vigour even as early as the fourth year of the Fellowship's annual conferences.⁴⁸⁸ This seems to have resulted from a frustration over the lack of tangible results. In the earliest days of the Fellowship, there was a genuine and hopeful interest in the possibility of actual visible reunion between the Church of England and Russian Orthodoxy. Geffert describes how there seems to be a progressive loss of optimism about this goal as a serious pursuit. As Geffert also observes, by about 1930 the tone of the Fellowship's work became increasingly "didactic" and "catechismal," in sharp contrast with its initial character.⁴⁸⁹ Comparisons of

⁴⁸⁵ Nicholas Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter*, (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd, 1961), 192.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁸⁷ *The History of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*, 5.

⁴⁸⁸ Geffert, *Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans*, 143-157.

⁴⁸⁹ Geffert, *Anglicans and Orthodox Between the Wars*, 167.

doctrinal differences were interesting and moderately fruitful in their own right, but the real heart of the movement appeared to be losing steam.

Bulgakov seems to have been among the first to notice this shift in feeling. As he saw it, the Fellowship was becoming stuck in polite discussions of theological issues that could likely carry on indefinitely without finally getting anywhere. In other words, as described earlier in the analysis of the stages of development in social movements, it was at risk of losing the excitement and energy of its emergence and coalescence and experiencing the transition into bureaucratization and possible decline.

Having followed the development of Bulgakov's ecumenical logic to this point, the way he responded to this reality should not be completely unexpected. In the face of this loss of momentum, Bulgakov's ecumenical commitment did not wane. It did, however, lead him to become more convinced than ever about the methods by which ecumenical progress was sought. For Bulgakov, the unity of the Church would come "not by means of a new agreement or compromise, but by a new inspiration."⁴⁹⁰

For Bulgakov, that inspiration came from the Eucharist. In 1933, during the Fellowship's annual Conference, Bulgakov put forward his notorious proposal for the possibility of occasional Eucharistic intercommunion between the Anglican and Orthodox members of the Fellowship.⁴⁹¹ Reports and archival documents record that Bulgakov's proposal engendered

⁴⁹⁰ Bulgakov, "By Jacob's Well," 102.

⁴⁹¹ "General Report of the Fellowship Conference," June 1933, 12.

both profound excitement and heated debate. The subject would go on to occupy much of the Fellowship's agenda for nearly a decade.⁴⁹²

Bulgakov's case for intercommunion began, characteristically, not by appealing to Orthodox dogma and canon law, but by reflecting on his real life experience as a member of the Fellowship. As Sergei Nikolaev's study of Bulgakov demonstrates, the role of experience was the decisive feature of Bulgakov's ecclesiology: "The authority of the experience of spiritual unity was singularly critical in [the proposal for] initiating partial intercommunion."⁴⁹³ For Bulgakov, the fact that a group of long divided Christians were able to read Scripture together, pray together, and recognize a real presence of Christ in their midst was something that needed to be taken with the utmost theological seriousness. It was, in effect, a visible sign that God had not allowed the divisions of the churches to separate them completely, and this was now being made evident to this group of Christians in a real and powerful way. For those who had tasted the Spirit's work, Bulgakov claimed that something new was being demanded of them. As Bulgakov wrote:

⁴⁹² See for example "General Report of the Fellowship Conference," June 1933, *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban & St. Sergius*, no. 20 (1933); *Report of the Fellowship Conference at Heigh Leigh, 26-28 June*, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK; *Transcript of Discussion on Fr. Bulgakov's Proposal for Intercommunion*, n.d., Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK; A. V. Kartashev to the Executive Committee, 15 October 1933, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK; A. F. Dobbie-Bateman, *Confidential Note for the Executive*, 21 October 1933, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK; A. F. Dobbie-Bateman, *Memorandum of a Conversation with the Bishop of Truro at Truro on 17 August 1933*, 18 August, 1933, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK; A. F. Dobbie-Bateman, *Summary of Position on Partial Intercommunion*, 27 November 1933, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK, 2; H. L. Goudge, "Reunion and Intercommunion." *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius* 26 (December 1934): 4-6; *Georges Florovskii to the Executive Committee*, 16 October 1933, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK; A. G. Hebert, "Intercommunion and Doctrinal Agreement," *Sobornost* 4 (December 1935): 36-41; A. V. Kartashev, "Intercommunion and Dogmatic Agreement," *Sobornost* 4 (December 1935): 41-48; Nicolas Zernov, "Account of Brotherhood of St Sophia Meeting on Intercommunion to Fellowship Executive," November 3, 1933, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK; Nicholas Zernov, "Some Explanations of Fr. Bulgakov's Scheme for Intercommunion," n.d., Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK.

⁴⁹³ Nikolaev, *Church and Reunion in the Theology of Sergii Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky*, 229.

Our common prayer at these conferences is a revelation – we are people who have been separated from each other for ages, praying together. We are called by God to be together. It is spiritually dangerous to continue forever in mere discussion of differences. We have been led up to the high wall of partition and we cannot continue to stare at it... God calls us to action here and now.⁴⁹⁴

The reaction to Bulgakov's proposal was mixed. Some of his strongest supporters were Nicholas Zernov, Evgeni Lempert, and A. F. Dobbie Bateman. His most vocal critic was Georges Florovsky, the man who would receive the nickname of "anti-Bulgakov."⁴⁹⁵ As Nikolaev characterizes it, Florovsky's main line of attack was based on "accusing Bulgakov of employing psychological reasons [for communion] at the expense of intellectual and dogmatic ones."⁴⁹⁶ In Florovsky's opinion, Bulgakov had allowed his sentimentality to get the best of him, mistaking a feeling of "mere human love" towards a group of Anglicans as an experience of unity in faith.⁴⁹⁷ For Florovsky, complete agreement with the doctrine of the Orthodox Church was a necessary precondition for Eucharistic sharing;⁴⁹⁸ this was a non-negotiable. Even more important for Florovsky was his understanding of the Eucharist as the pre-eminent "catholic action."⁴⁹⁹ Ecclesial communion, he asserted, was, by definition, never something that could exist simply between individuals, but rather had to involve whole churches. The notion that individual Anglican Christians could be in ecclesial communion with individual Orthodox Christians without the full communion of their respective churches collectively was seen by Florovsky to be impossible within the framework of a properly

⁴⁹⁴ "General Report of the Fellowship Conference, June 1933," *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban & St. Sergius*, no. 20 (1933), 12.

⁴⁹⁵ See A. F. Dobbie-Bateman, "Footnotes (IX) – *In quos fines saeculorum*," *Sobornost* 30 (1944): 6-8. Florovsky's opposition first played itself out in the context of the debates within the Fellowship, but it also carried over to some of his wider ecclesiological publications written in subsequent years.

⁴⁹⁶ Nikolaev, *Church and Reunion in the Theology of Sergeii Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky, 1918-1940*, 11.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁸ See Georges Florovsky, "The Limits of the Church," *Church Quarterly Review* 117, no. 233 (October 1933), 117-31.

⁴⁹⁹ The Editors, "The Nature of Catholic Action," 15-16.

catholic ecclesiology. As he put it: “I regard as uncatholic, particularist and even sectarian an attempt to achieve intercommunion within the limits of an individual and arbitrary group.”⁵⁰⁰

For Florovsky, communion between Anglican and Orthodox Christians could happen only when Anglicanism took the necessary steps to purge itself from error, submit to legitimate ecclesial authority, and be reintegrated into the Church.

Bulgakov was not at all interested in being portrayed as a charismatic radical who could justify anything on the basis of experience. In the years following the initial proposal, Bulgakov made every effort to justify his thinking with respect to the offices of authority and the canons Church. He even went so far as to formulate a liturgical rite of episcopal blessing which would precede any act of intercommunion.⁵⁰¹ As Zernov explained on Bulgakov’s behalf, “Intercommunion must be canonically justified through the consent and blessing of the appropriate ruling bishop,” and bishops are always required to discern local circumstances “in contact and co-ordination with the whole Church.”⁵⁰² In Bulgakov’s opinion, however, this very recognition was entirely within the purview of the local bishop, since what would be acknowledged would be the experience of specific persons at the local level and not a corporate reunion of whole churches.⁵⁰³ Seeking higher sanction was, therefore, unnecessary, and essentially impossible given the ecclesiologies of both the Anglican and Orthodox churches.⁵⁰⁴ The experience of the Fellowship members was not a

⁵⁰⁰ Georges Florovskii to the Executive Committee, 16 October 1933, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK, 1.

⁵⁰¹ Gallaher reproduces a copy of Bulgakov’s notes in this regard, recently located in the Fellowship archives. See the Appendix to Gallaher’s “Great and Full of Grace,” 118-121.

⁵⁰² Zernov and Lempert, “The Fellowship and Anglican-Orthodox Intercommunion,” 12.

⁵⁰³ Zernov, “Some Explanations of Fr. Bulgakov’s Scheme for Intercommunion,” 1.

⁵⁰⁴ It was noted that neither the Anglican nor the Orthodox Churches had a single definitive authority such as the pope to whom such a consultation would be directed even if it was desired. See the *Report of Conference held at High Leigh* on “The Healing of Schism,” June 26-28, 1934, 6.

universal one for the Anglican Communion or the Orthodox Church, and therefore experience could not function as a source of authority for all Anglicans or Orthodox. For those who had really experienced unity, however, local bishops should not brush this aside so easily, as Florovsky seemed to suggest.

As Fellowship executive member Eric Fenn put it, the majority of the Fellowship responded to the proposal by “trying to do something correct.” Bulgakov, on the other hand, was attempting to “do something new in obedience to a real spiritual conviction.”⁵⁰⁵ There was a strong prophetic edge to much of Bulgakov’s ecumenical reasoning, and he acknowledged that what he was proposing was intended as a “prophetic” act.⁵⁰⁶ Prophets, of course, are usually controversial, rarely popular, and sometimes wrong. Without the prophetic push, however, new life rarely happens. Thus, while the rules and canons seemed to say that what he had in mind was impossible, life itself seemed to be proving things otherwise. In Bulgakov’s own words: “[I]t is important to make a beginning with Church Reunion in those points where it is possible, and so ultimately to carry the problem forward beyond the existing deadlock.”⁵⁰⁷

The intercommunion proposal never came to any concrete fruition. Bulgakov would continue to push for it for several years, and some Fellowship members (Zernov, Lempert, Dobbie-Bateman, etc.) would persist in their support even after he had abandoned it as a serious option. Discussion continued at least in some form until about 1940 or thereabouts. However,

⁵⁰⁵ Eric Fenn, Letter to Dobbie-Bateman, 18th December, 1933.

⁵⁰⁶ Bulgakov, “Ways to Church Reunion,” 28.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

as Geffert puts it, by that time, “the wind was gone from the sails.”⁵⁰⁸ Still, regardless of its ultimate demise, without question this episode stands as the most dramatic expression of the core principles of Bulgakov’s ecumenical thinking pushed to their fullest conclusion.

6.6 Conclusion

Part 2 of this project is now approaching its close. We have studied the sources of Bulgakov’s ecumenical method, and we have seen how they have impacted his life and work in practice. We have touched on his big ideas such as the metaphysical unity of all things and the authentic operation of authority in the Church. We have explored less obvious notions about prophesy and friendship. Through all of this there has been the thread of unexpected relationships and surprising experiences coming out of the painful events of exile. All of this has hopefully expanded the understanding of readers and Bulgakov interpreters alike by giving a more comprehensive portrayal of the consistency between the various strands of Bulgakov’s ecumenical thought and work. It is now time to take stock of some of the lessons and insights that Bulgakov’s story has to offer, as well as respond to certain potential limitations to his usefulness. The next chapter will do just that, setting up for Part 3, where we will finally be able to place Bulgakov in a dialogue with contemporary ecumenism and draw on his resources.

⁵⁰⁸ See Geffert, *Anglicans and Orthodox Between the Wars*, 185-187.

Chapter 7

Bulgakovian Ecumenism

7.1 A Review

The previous three chapters have each approached the subject of Bulgakovian ecumenism from a slightly different perspective: history, theology, and practice. Bulgakov's ecclesiology developed over time, and his ecumenical career did also. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to derive some common features which, though not exclusive to him, held a place of influence in his mind and heart which gave his ecumenical approach a characteristic style. This summary chapter will identify those distinctive impulses before we proceed to bring Bulgakov into the conversation about the ecumenical future. In particular, I think we can identify three such representative traits: 1) His conviction that both the division and the reunion of the church are primarily spiritual and not doctrinal challenges; 2) His insistence that ecumenists must be prophetic, prioritizing a prospective rather than a retrospective view; and 3) His emphasis on real life relationships as key to the ecumenical task. Reflecting on these will be the subject of the first section of this chapter.

7.1.1 Spiritual Division, Spiritual Unity

If there was one thing Bulgakov became convinced of ecumenically it was his assertion that any agreement on the common understanding of the apostolic faith between Christians was the result of a supernatural love. 'Let us love one another in order that, with one mind, we may confess,' says the introduction to the Creed in the Divine Liturgy. Agreement could not be created through study and discussion, no matter how well intentioned, because it required

more than intellectual rigor to arrive at it. Although he does not appear to have elaborated on it in any formal philosophical sense, this appears to have been almost an epistemological principle for Bulgakov. Bulgakov was especially fond of underlining these words,⁵⁰⁹ and it is in these words that we discern the centre of his ecumenical heart. While Bulgakov was clear that such love was a gift, and one that only God could give, he did believe the conditions for love could be cultivated. Common worship and shared spiritual experience were the necessary means. Bulgakov would continually see opportunities for this kind of emerging spiritual communion as the most important part of his various ecumenical endeavours, and when he found them would take them with the utmost seriousness. Sometimes this was written off as sentimentality by his critics. I prefer to characterize it as a kind of ecumenical mysticism, of a sort that is only found in a few. It is a sensibility that is greatly to be desired within the ecumenical movement today, and, as we will see in the next chapter, one that accords well with many of the most promising proposals for a way forward into the ecumenical future.

7.1.2 Prophetic Ecumenism

Bulgakov's commitment to ecumenism emerged in the wake of an event he thought would never happen. For that reason, it altered the way he understood the Church. Bulgakov had a picture of his Church that was closely tied to his homeland. Then came the revolution, and suddenly that image was completely changed. With the certainties of his past gone, his only hope was to turn his gaze toward the certainties of the future. For this reason, he was always looking for unexpected acts of God opening up previously unheard of opportunities, and

⁵⁰⁹ Bulgakov, "One Holy, Catholic & Apostolic Church," 26.

constantly calling others (particularly hierarchical authorities in the Church) to do the same. In biblical fashion, Bulgakov seems to have seen himself as a member of an exiled remnant; as someone who had become uniquely responsible for the Church's future. What was his mission? It was nothing less than the reunion of the churches. Such ecumenical urgency seems to have stayed with Bulgakov throughout his life. This sort of apocalyptic sobriety would inevitably change the way we approach ecumenism as well.

Perhaps relatively few people are likely to experience literal exile. Surely, however, we all know what it is like to feel as though we are not in control, or are becoming displaced in some way. We may not experience the same apocalyptic pressure Bulgakov did, but the rapidly changing landscape of our world may well push the ecumenical movement to adopt a more prospective point of view that it has sometimes displayed. "There are no atheists in fox-holes," says the well-known adage of WWII combat journalist Ernie Pyle. If we stretch the metaphor, might we find that there is an ecumenical equivalent?

At times, it seems our ecumenical imagination has been limited by loyalty to rules and regulations which were formed by the conditions of the past. We have had, if you like, a heavily Petrine ecumenism. Bulgakov's Johannine ecumenism, on the other hand, stressed a sense of immediacy to the Church's eschatological future, and used that to determine how to proleptically prepare for that future in the present. Though the ecumenist must always operate with appropriate regard for the Petrine office, ecumenism, for Bulgakov, was always a Johannine enterprise at heart. I will have more to say on this Johannine ecumenical orientation further below.

7.1.3 Ecumenical Relationships

For Bulgakov and the exiled Russian Christians, making friends and forging alliances became a matter of necessity. They were not able to exist as an isolated community; they needed connections to a wider community in order to survive. We have already seen how this real need, and the genuine response to it, allowed the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius to become a place where a uniquely personal form of ecumenical friendship was able to take form. As we saw above, Bulgakov had learned, both from Florensky and from his own experience, never to take Christian friendship lightly. Indeed, he invested these kinds of relationships between followers of Christ with the utmost significance, seeing them as potentially capable of manifesting a bond that was inherently ecclesial in nature. Given what we now know about Bulgakov's theology of friendship it seems there is a good basis for concluding that part of what was going on in his push for the Fellowship to take greater steps towards visible unity was the value which he gave to the ecclesiological content of friendship.

In similar fashion, Bulgakov's understanding of ecclesial authority as residing within the *sobornost'* of the whole Church dramatically affected the way Bulgakov envisioned the Church's recovery from schism, as well as the role to be played by the laity in that recovery. From Bulgakov's perspective, trying to have Church leadership negotiate agreements and take steps toward reunion without involving the people of the Church in those efforts was a pointless endeavor because any statement or any decision would not be an expression of the Church's *sobornost'*. Only when the pronouncements of those in authority reflected the

experience of the people would they have any authentic binding force. Bulgakov knew this, and because of it he knew that the ecumenical movement must work harder to include the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of everyday Christian people as they lived the division and the unity of the Church on the ground. In fact, Bulgakov's testimony suggests that ecumenists and Church leaders must do more than simply include this data in their thinking; they must allow their agenda and their imagination of the possibilities to be driven by it. We will explore this claim further in chapter 8.

7.2 Drawbacks to Bulgakov as a Resource

This dissertation has intentionally focussed itself on identifying those areas of Bulgakov's ecumenical life, thought, and work which appear to offer important contributions to the ecumenical movement today. For that reason, I have not spent any time to this point recognizing the possibility of certain limitations and drawbacks within the Bulgakovian legacy. While I am convinced that on the whole Bulgakov represents a tremendous positive resource, it would be irresponsible not to take note of some of these obstacles. In this regard I believe there are three issues which much be acknowledged and addressed: 1) Bulgakov's somewhat tarnished reputation as a result of the condemnations of his sophiology; 2) The question of whether accepting Bulgakov's sophiology is necessary in order to receive his ecumenical logic; and 3) The fact that most of Bulgakov's ecumenical experience was confined largely to a particular form of British Anglicanism.

7.2.1 Bulgakov's Reputation

While defining the limits of theological conjecture is surely necessary for the life of the Church, it does come with some negative consequences. Out of zeal to protect the truth, Christian thought has undoubtedly robbed itself of numerous useful insights needlessly left behind on the ash-heap of history. Bulgakov is one relatively recent Christian theologian who knew well what it was like to be tagged with the heretic label, and to have his work unduly neglected because of it.⁵¹⁰

As we saw above, the years 1935/36 saw Bulgakov's writings hastily investigated and roundly condemned by two separate Russian Orthodox jurisdictions. Bulgakov was accused of a list of errors in these proceedings, among them Gnosticism, Origenism, and the creation of a fourth hypostasis in addition to the three persons of the Holy Trinity. Such charges have continued to cast their shadows over Bulgakov's project right up to the present time. In the forward to *The Orthodox Church*, which, as previously indicated was a book intended as an introduction to Orthodoxy for Western readers, Fr. Thomas Hopko seems to characterize sophiology as something of an unfortunate appendage in Bulgakov's thought. It is an idea which he judges that, though likely well intentioned, is probably best left in the background as much as possible.⁵¹¹ The well-known English Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware has also observed this very tentative approach to Bulgakov's work. He argues that while it is certainly true that there are controversial elements in it, much of the contemporary hesitation to

⁵¹⁰ On this see Myroslaw Tataryn, "Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944): Time for a New Look," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 (1998): 315-38.

⁵¹¹ *The Orthodox Church*, Lydia Kesich trans., (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988).

engage Bulgakov is unfair and misplaced.⁵¹² These are but two examples, and are among the more measured attitudes towards Bulgakov that you will find from his critics. A cursory search of the internet will reveal that far more venomous denunciations abound.

Be it deserved or not, with this kind of mark against his legacy it is understandable that some might wonder whether proposing a figure like Bulgakov as an ecumenical role model might be counter-productive to the cause. It is important, therefore, to say a few things about the Sophia controversy and the present effects of the judgments that were levelled against him.⁵¹³

One important point that needs to be clarified is one of jurisdiction. At the time of the indictments against him, Bulgakov was technically not canonically subject to either of the ecclesiastical bodies that spoke out against him.⁵¹⁴ In the aftermath of the revolution there was a great deal of confusion as to exactly what the relationship of the exiled Russian Orthodox was to the hierarchy of the Church that remained in Russia, and who exactly was responsible to whom. As such, the inter-Orthodox politics of this period were highly complicated. While spending too much time trying to sort these issues out would be tangential, some sense of the dynamics involved in this regard is helpful for understanding the context out of which the declarations against sophiology emerged.

⁵¹² "Introduction" by Bishop Kallistos Diokleia to Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above*, ix.

⁵¹³ For more on the 'Sophia controversy' see N. T. Eneeva, *Spor o sofologii v russkom zarubezh'e 1920-1930 godov* (Moscow: Institut vseobshchei istorii RAN, 2001), Bryn Geffert, "The Charges of Heresy Against Sergii Bulgakov: The Majority and Minority Reports of Evlogii's Commission and the Final Report of the Bishops' Conference," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49.1/2 (2005), 47-66, and Alexis Klimoff, "Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49.1/2 (2005), 67-100.

⁵¹⁴ For more on this see Pospelovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 219-227.

According to the history provided by Dimitry Pospelovsky, Metropolitan Evlogii had been given episcopal jurisdiction over all the Russians in Western Europe by Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow prior to his death. However, following the exile of a large number of pro-Monarchist Russian bishops and clergy, a temporary emergency governing synod was also assembled, first in Turkey (with the approval of Moscow) and then ultimately in Karlovci Serbia (without permission). This Karlovci synod would later come to be known as the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia (ROCOR). The Karlovci bishops were led by the Metropolitan Antonii, and their relationship of communion with the Moscow Patriarchate would soon break down. Antonii, therefore, began to stake a claim for primatial authority over the entire exiled Russian community spread across Europe. They also consistently disobeyed or acted without the consent of the Moscow Patriarch.⁵¹⁵

Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow died in 1925 and was replaced by the *locum tenens* of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Sergii. In the eyes of the exiled Russians, Sergii had been compromised by his loyalty to the Soviet government. Metropolitan Evlogii would be suspended by Sergii in 1927 following his refusal to swear of an oath of loyalty to the Soviet state. In response, Evlogii had sought to place himself and those in his episcopal care under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.⁵¹⁶ Tensions also understandably existed between those Russians outside Russia who were loyal to Evlogii, and those who aligned themselves with the Karlovci Synod under Metropolitan Antonii.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 219-227.

⁵¹⁶ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 280.

⁵¹⁷ Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, 173

All of this is to say that the time of the indictment Bulgakov was technically not canonically subject to either ecclesiastical jurisdiction that sought to censure him. In addition, as Rowan Williams suggests, there is every reason to assume that the investigation of Bulgakov was as much, if not more so, an attempt by Moscow to challenge and discredit the authority of Evlogii and his community in Paris as it was a principled concern for Orthodox doctrine.⁵¹⁸

Equally important to our assessment is some understanding of the lack of due process which Bulgakov was afforded. From all accounts, the process was anything but fair and unbiased.

As Valliere reports:

The case against Bulgakov was brought without his knowledge; he had no opportunity to defend himself before judgment was rendered; the assessment of his views was based on decontextualized excerpts from his writings cobbled together by his opponents; and judgment was passed without consultation, publicity or debate.⁵¹⁹

Vladimir Losskii, one of Bulgakov's contemporaries, provides us with a commentary on the proceedings, as well as a report of Bulgakov's response to the decrees against him.⁵²⁰ It is immediately clear in reading Bulgakov's reply that his main line of defence is ecclesiological.⁵²¹ Bulgakov was not so much interested in addressing the perceived doctrinal problems identified in his work. Instead, he took the opportunity to protest the inappropriate manner in which the hierarchy had operated in making the decree. For this reason Valliere concludes that, "[w]hatever one thinks of Bulgakov's sophiology, no one who values

⁵¹⁸ Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, 173-74.

⁵¹⁹ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 395.

⁵²⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *Spor O Sofii: 'Dokladnaia Zapiska' prot. S. Bulgakova i smysl Ukaz Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*, (Parizh: 1936).

⁵²¹ This is also noted in Nichols, *Light from the East*, 67. See also Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, 176.

intellectual freedom will find it easy to admire the procedures employed by his opponents to attack it.”⁵²²

Regardless of the likely politically motivated bias against Bulgakov, as well as the rather slapdash ‘investigation’ of him, Metropolitan Evlogii still felt morally compelled to take the decrees seriously. He did so by appointing a committee from among the French-based Russian theological community to look into the charges and prepare a response. Here too, however, there is a great deal of uncertainty as to exactly what the conclusions of this committee were. A majority report was produced which essentially exonerated Bulgakov of the allegations of heresy. However, in a twist which none of the major interpreters of these events can seem to adequately explain, somehow only the minority report of the members who had expressed the more serious reservations about the acquittal was submitted.⁵²³

Ultimately Evlogii would clear Bulgakov to continue in his teaching position, and his freedom to publish would not be hindered. Yet, by this point, the damage to his reputation had already been done.

As Valliere so helpfully articulates, a lot of the present tension surrounding Bulgakov today is probably best understood as the product of an ideological debate between two different camps of Russian Orthodoxy. Valliere includes Bulgakov along with Archimandrite Feodor (Bukharev), Vladimir Soloviev, and Pavel Florensky as major representatives of what he calls “Orthodox theology in a ‘new key.’” Valliere places this “Russian school” in contrast with what has tended to be the more dominant project which is commonly associated with

⁵²² Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 395.

⁵²³ On this see Geffert, “The Charges of Heresy Against Sergii Bulgakov: The Majority and Minority Reports of Evlogii’s Commission and the Final Report of the Bishops’ Conference,” 49.

the names of Bulgakov's foils such as Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, etc. To employ Valliere's simplification of the basic difference between these two Russian Orthodox approaches to doing theology, the former seeks to go "beyond the fathers," whereas the latter is more concerned with going "back to the fathers."⁵²⁴ As with any Church figure who finds themselves for a time standing on the fault lines between 'liberal' and 'conservative,' it is difficult to expect that they will receive a fair hearing by those who have already decided that they have nothing to learn from the other side. Until recently, this seems to have been Bulgakov's lot.

As the narrative above hopefully makes clear, there has been no authentic consensus of the Church regarding the truthfulness or error of Bulgakov's form of sophiology; not from the Communion of Orthodox Church, nor of the churches more broadly. Perhaps one day it will be deemed a departure from the Church's faith; perhaps it may come to be understood as a necessary and consistent development of prior tradition. Until then, it will remain at the level of every other doctrinal exploration undertaken by a systematic theologian. Ecumenical theologians of varying stripes will likely continue to find reasons to praise it, and reasons for caution. In the meantime, interpreters should feel free to mine Bulgakov's material without fear. Doing so may enable Bulgakov's reputation to receive the kind of rehabilitation that it needs, and indeed there are signs that precisely such a shift in attitude is on its way.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁴ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 376.

⁵²⁵ Rowan Williams has called Bulgakov "one of the most searching and moving, as well as one of the most complex of modern theological minds," and expects to see ongoing fruitful discovery and rediscovery of his work over the coming decades in contemporary Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox circles alike. See Rowan Williams, "Forward," viii. Kallistos Ware has spoken of "a veritable 'Bulgakov renaissance,'" one where Bulgakov is at last "becoming recognized in his true stature as a profound and creative thinker." See Kallistos Ware, "Introduction," in Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above*, ix.

7.2.2 The Necessity of Sophiology

There is another potential concern around Bulgakov's ecumenical accessibility which must be answered. While we have seen numerous potential ecumenical insights and inspirations that come to us from various quarters of Bulgakov's canon, a key element in our reflection on Bulgakovian ecumenism is the rather complicated and most certainly novel doctrines of Russian sophiology. Sophiology is not the easiest thing to make sense of, and it requires a fair bit of work in order to avoid serious misunderstanding. It could be rather easily imagined that someone interested in the potential of Bulgakov's ecumenical witness could find themselves put off by the prospects of having to engage with what is likely an entirely unknown dimension of theological reflection in order to reach the fruit which he has to offer. The question must be faced, therefore, as to whether or not it is necessary to adopt the particularities of Bulgakov's sophiological dogmatics in order to properly appreciate the ecumenical directives which his legacy offers.

The suggestion that sophiology was a central impetus for Bulgakov's ecumenical activity is not my own. It was Bulgakov himself who identified Sophia as the decisive factor behind both his ecumenical optimism, and the specific ways in which he approached the ecumenical task. As he wrote:

Again and again will the separated churches dash in vain against the walls which divide them, in tragic realization of their helplessness, in the face of the objective impossibility of genuine reunion. There is, nevertheless, one true way, which is that of learning to know and understand the Church as revealed Divine-humanity, Sophia the Wisdom of God.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁶ Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*, 19.

On the basis of this quote, it would seem that at least some acceptance of the core ecclesiological conclusions that are suggested by sophiology is required in order for someone to fully receive Bulgakov's central ecumenical ideals. What then is that basic ecclesiological premise, and does it require a comprehensive sophiological understanding of God and the world in order to be embraced?

Recall above how, for Bulgakov, the essential rootedness of the created world within the Divine image of Sophia meant that the unity of all things in God was an eschatological guarantee. Creation has the freedom to cooperate synergistically, or resist in the manner of its becoming. It certainly exhibits signs of opposition throughout human history. However, especially in light of the watershed moments in the realized creaturely sophianization represented by the Incarnation and Pentecost, the sophianization of the world was an already-not-yet reality. The Incarnation makes all humanity to share in the sophianized humanity of Jesus. All of creation becomes Pentecostal, capable of bearing the Holy Spirit in a new way. Because of these sophiological realities, "the power of the Church can extend (or rather cannot fail to extend) beyond the institutional Church: *ecclesia extra ecclesias*."⁵²⁷ From this perspective, Bulgakov's world finds itself never in a situation of dualism between Church and non-Church. Rather, everyone and everything stands somewhere on a continuum between Church and pre-Church.

It was this tension between universally effected and not yet universally actualized ecclesiality which allowed Bulgakov to acknowledge the existence of degrees of churchness beyond the canonical boundaries of the Orthodox communion. It was also why he was able to take the

⁵²⁷ Bulgakov, "By Jacob's Well," 101.

ecclesiological reality of these other communities very seriously. That Christians could pray together, hear the proclamation of Scripture together, sing together, confess sins together, fast together, etc., was not just sentimentality; it was hard evidence of the fact that, in spite of all the actions and wishes and signs to the contrary, the Church was not really divided at all; or at least that the divisions did not reach all the way to heaven.

It is certainly possible to provide a theological basis for the importance of spiritual ecumenism without sophiology. A person can arrive at the same conclusion about the importance of local and lay involvement in Christian reunion without reflecting on the uncreated nature of God and its relation to the world. However, the kind of prophetic hopefulness about the God given unity of the Church which was the driving force of everything else Bulgakov did ecumenically does have to be grounded in theological bedrock rather than simply human optimism. Sophiology, with all its Trinitarian, cosmological, Christological, and anthropological associations, was a way for Bulgakov to do that. Thus, while it may be possible to learn a great deal from Bulgakov's ecumenical example without adopting the sophiological edifice, it is clear that, for him, Sophia is what tied his ecumenical experiences and ecumenical imagination together in a particularly inspiring way.

7.2.3 Bulgakov and Anglicanism

Although it has not been directly addressed to this point, it is certainly obvious from the survey of Bulgakov's ecumenical career that he was especially preoccupied with British Anglicanism. While he did have some interactions with Roman Catholics, this is not where

his heart was. Neither would the same kind of formal ecumenical engagement with Catholicism have been possible given the overall cautious attitude of the Roman Church towards the emerging ecumenical movement during the of the 1920s and 30s. Although some of Bulgakov's contacts through the Student Christian movements and the Faith and Order conferences were Methodists and Presbyterians, etc., even there he seems to have been frequently associated with Anglican names. Certainly the ecumenical project which really bore the stamp of Bulgakov's creative inspiration and touch, the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, was an Anglican-Orthodox enterprise through and through.

On top of this, the majority of the Anglicans which Bulgakov and many of his fellow Russians were involved with were of a particular stream of high Church Anglo-catholic sensibility with regard to things like the Church, bishops, sacraments, and so on. Bryn Geffert notes that the Russians found themselves somewhat perplexed by this during the first few gatherings of what would become the Fellowship, with the Russians surprised to find out that there was such variety even within Anglicanism.⁵²⁸ Bulgakov acknowledged that many of the points at which the members of the Fellowship had arrived at spiritual communion would not have been possible in the same way with other Christian communities. In particular he made it clear that his thoughts about the unifying effects of the Eucharist only applied in situations where there was "an apostolically ordained hierarchy" and a "rightly ordained priesthood" (i.e. Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and, at least in Bulgakov's opinion, Anglicanism).⁵²⁹ All of this is to say nothing of the fact that, in the eyes of most, Anglicanism has changed significantly since the 1920s and 30s, to the extent that the church

⁵²⁸ Geffert, *Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans*, 144-145.

⁵²⁹ Bulgakov, "By Jacob's Well," 111.

with which Bulgakov had such high hopes for ecumenical rapprochement no longer exists in quite the same way.

There are reasons why Bulgakov was drawn to the Anglicanism of his day, but not many of them are properly theological. In my opinion, it seems just as likely to be the product of a series of accidents of history. We have seen how Khomiakov was interested in Anglicans largely because of their mutual rejection of Roman centrism. I suspect that Bulgakov's affinity for Anglicans can be traced in part to this influence, as well as to Bulgakov's own unease with contemporary Roman pronouncements about Papal Infallibility and the Immaculate Conception of Mary.⁵³⁰ There are personal reflections which reveal how Bulgakov was left with a bad taste in his mouth for Roman Catholicism going back to the time of his personal crisis of ecclesial conscience immediately following his exile.⁵³¹ Yet, above all of this, it seems the most decisive factor in Bulgakov's choice of dialogue partner was the tangible help provided by English Christians to the exiled Russian Christian community scattered in the West. This, more than anything else, is why Bulgakov was inspired to work towards greater unity with Anglicans and Anglicanism. After everything we have seen about Bulgakov's life and work, this should seem rather consistent.

⁵³⁰ Bulgakov made a point of publishing rather direct criticisms of both of the Roman dogmas. See Sergius Bulgakov, "The Catholic Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God," in Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush*, 47-63. See also Sergii Bulgakov, *The Vatican Dogma*, (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Press, 1959).

⁵³¹ Bulgakov looked back disparagingly of his "experience of Catholic propaganda" given to him and to other Orthodox Russians in exile by "a certain Lithuanian priest, persecuted by the Poles, a good Catholic, a convinced and enlightened papist, who had received his theological training in Rome." See the introduction to Bulgakov's the essay *The Vatican Dogma*, 1, http://www.orthodoxchristianity.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&catid=14:articles&id=39:the-vatican-dogma, accessed March 12, 2014.

It is true that his intercommunion proposal would not have been possible had he not deemed the Anglican Eucharist valid because it was celebrated by priests within the apostolic succession. However, the basic orientation of his ecumenical conviction remained with reference to Protestantism, seeing a continued ecclesial communion through the sacrament of baptism, and in things like common prayer in the name of Jesus, the joint listening to the reading of Scripture, shared practices of spiritual life. Thus, Bulgakovian ecumenism should not be understood as something limited in its application to the conditions of British Anglo-catholicism in the 1930s. The core principles encapsulated within it can still be readily applied to contemporary Protestantism (including Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism), to Roman Catholicism, and to modern Anglicanism.

7.3 Conclusion

This concludes our foray into the ecumenical landscape of Sergei Bulgakov. Now at our disposal are some crystalized principles that serve to summarize what that legacy was all about. Harkening back to Part 1 of this text, however, it must be repeated that all the interest shown in Bulgakov has been for a purpose beyond just advancing familiarity and comprehension of Bulgakov's work in and of itself. The intent has always been to deploy our discoveries about Bulgakov's ecumenical thought as a way of commenting on some of the areas of ecumenical challenge uncovered in the last couple of decades. This constructive element of our appointed tasks is the subject of Part 3.

Part 3
And is Now Come

“[Bulgakovian ecumenism] is complementary to the official meetings of Bishops and theologians, and prepares the body of the faithful for the day when synods and councils may discover and formally declare the healing of division... [This represents] a new, if not a revolutionary approach to the problem...”

– Paul Anderson, *Living Church* 9 (November 1935)

Chapter 8

Bulgakov and the Ecumenical Future

8.1 Bulgakovian Resources

With Bulgakov's ecclesiology, ecclesiology, and practical ecumenical activity now well in our minds, it is now possible to reflect on what this valuable resource has to say in light of the methodological issues being debated around the future of the ecumenical movement. I will be focusing on four areas of contribution which directly relate to the ecumenical challenges identified in Part 1 above: 1) Bulgakov and Wider Ecumenism; 2) Bulgakov and Local/Grassroots Ecumenism; 3) Bulgakov and Spiritual Ecumenism/Ecumenism of Life; and 4) Bulgakov and Ecumenical Eucharistic sharing.

8.1.1 Bulgakov and Wider Ecumenism

In my opinion, Bulgakov would have readily affirmed the expanded involvement of Christians and ecumenical organizations in co-operation with non-Christian religions seeking human rights, social justice, and peace. It would have been natural for him to see such efforts unfolding alongside the work for unity between the churches, and he would not have seen the increased emphasis on one as a competition or threat to the other. In other words, the move toward wider ecumenism would not have been an enemy. However, Bulgakov's ecclesiology suggests that it is misguided to accept the binary that Christians must eschew Christ's salvific universality in order affirm and support such efforts.

We have observed above how Bulgakov's assertions about the relationship between God and the world led him to reject notions of a sharp dualism between the Church and the world. Instead, Bulgakov seems to have conceived of all created life as falling somewhere on the same continuum between more or less fully realized sophianization. A similar spectrum is created by Bulgakov's notion of the Son as the Divine Human, the man from heaven. For Bulgakov, there can be no total division between creaturely humans and the Divine Human. Therefore, any development in history that is truly 'human,' within the full scope which Bulgakov uses that word, has some connection with the God the Son, and must be understood as a becoming in time of the type as a more complete reflection of the eternal proto-type. However, Bulgakov's humanism is not a vague descriptor of human progress according to a particular ideological platform. Because of the Incarnation, human nature as a whole has a concrete template: the person of Jesus of Nazareth. As Bulgakov puts it, "the history of humankind after Christ... [is] the history of Christ's humankind."⁵³² In other words, not everything human is properly to be called human, but only that which corresponds to humanity as it is revealed in Christ. This is a Christological and anthropological claim, and an ecclesiological one as well.

Paul Valliere provides some helpful terminology for speaking about Bulgakov's understanding of the relationship between what we could call the Church *in actu* and 'churchness' *in via*. Valliere calls the ongoing realization of the former the "christianization" of the world, and the latter "christification."⁵³³ The former refers to the expansion of the Church in the traditional sense. The latter can be applied to the progressive becoming of

⁵³² Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 431.

⁵³³ Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 347-48.

humanity in general, in a manner consistent with its image as revealed in Jesus Christ. While the properly Christian dimension of history that unfolds within the limits of the Church – i.e. ‘christianization’ – must be distinguished from human history in general, it can never be completely cut off from it. The lynch-pin holding together humanizing ‘christification’ and ecclesializing ‘christianization’ is the humanity of Jesus Christ; a humanity that is of course shared by ‘churchly’ and ‘non-churchly’ humanity alike. The ramifications for ecclesiology are clear: not everything is Church per se, but there is quasi-churchness in everything genuinely human.

This rather optimistic conclusion is broadened even further when we recall Bulgakov’s contention that the sophianizing effects of the Incarnation and Pentecost were not just extended to Christian humanity, or even to humanity in general, but rather to ‘createdness’ as a whole. Although, as we also saw, Bulgakov would at times render judgments about where the Church was to be found at a particular moment in history, it is clear that his primary mode of speaking about the Church was what we would be justified in calling an eschatologically universal ecclesiology.

It is this manner of thinking which provided the basis for Bulgakov’s very positive appraisal of non-Christian religions. By way of example, Bulgakov occasionally speaks in his writings of the notion of the “pagan Church” from which Christianity received much of its philosophical foundations.⁵³⁴ Bulgakov also states explicitly his conviction that “*all* true religions that contain the experience of Divinity, [and] necessarily have a ray of Divinity, the

⁵³⁴ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 234. Bulgakov first begins to speak of something like a pagan Church in *Unfading Light*, 330, 386.

breath of the Spirit.”⁵³⁵ In a manner somewhat akin to later theories of anonymous Christianity,⁵³⁶ Bulgakov even seems to affirm a kind of ‘pan-Christ-ness’ within the spiritual strivings of humanity.⁵³⁷

Bulgakov’s reflection on the threefold mission of Christ is also helpful in understanding his approach to the necessary distinguishability yet ultimately indissoluble unity of the Church and the world. In a lengthy tangent towards the end of his Christology, Bulgakov outlines what he believes we are supposed to take from the Scriptural indicators that have Jesus taking up the roles of prophet, priest and king. The prophetic mantle includes Christ’s public proclamations about himself and the Kingdom of God, as well as his miraculous signs.⁵³⁸ His work as priest is to be found in the sacrificial, redemptive, and deifying effects of the Incarnation, passion, death, Resurrection and Ascension, all of which he endured as the priestly representative of humanity.⁵³⁹ Christ, Bulgakov asserts, fulfilled these first two ministries during his earthly sojourn, and they continue to be extended as fruits of that work in and for the world through his Body. This is especially so with regards to the Church’s preaching and sacramental ministry.

The kingly or royal ministry refers to the establishment of the rule of God over all creation.

For Bulgakov, this was a ministry which was only glimpsed in brief during the earthly life of

⁵³⁵ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 241. Italics original.

⁵³⁶ Bulgakov’s view of non-Christian religions does bear some comparison with the inclusivism of Karl Rahner and the theology of Vatican II and the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*. I have chosen to hyphenate Christ-ianity in this instance because of Bulgakov’s distinction between christification and christianization. To my knowledge Rahner does not make a terminological distinction between the presence of Christ in ecclesial Christianity and the presence of Christ in anonymous Christianity, but the idea is certainly consistent with his thought.

⁵³⁷ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 243.

⁵³⁸ Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 321-333.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 333ff.

Jesus.⁵⁴⁰ While Bulgakov affirmed that, especially with the sign of the Ascension, Jesus had been named the king of creation by virtue of having definitively established his spiritual victory over all the powers of this world, Christ’s “enthronement” as the world’s king was something that would be progressively realized in history.⁵⁴¹ While Bulgakov affirmed that it was Christ himself who, through the Spirit, prepared the world to accept his ongoing enthronement as king, he also held that this process was carried out in part through Christ’s humanity – i.e. post-Incarnation humanity.⁵⁴²

This claim had no small implications. For Bulgakov, it

[laid] the foundation for a religious evaluation of the common work of humanity in the world... [A]ll worthy human creative activity, ‘culture,’ is called to transfiguration in the Kingdom of God... The humanization of the world... refers to the manifestation of man’s royal ministry in virtue of his participation in Christ.⁵⁴³

That meant that so-called ‘secular’ dimensions of human society – things like politics, science, art, economics, etc. – also had a critical role to play in the return of Christ and in the culmination of the world’s sophianization in the same ways as the expressly ecclesiastical mission. They too were part of his enthronement. In Bulgakov’s view, to deny this was, in effect, to be guilty of Christological heresy; the limiting of his royal ministry to only a segment of humanity and a portion of human history.

It should be clear from this discussion that Bulgakov would have had no patience for what he would have understood as a false dichotomy between a Christocentric basis of unity and a

⁵⁴⁰ The visit of the Magi and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem are examples. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 410-417.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 417-441.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, *The Lamb of God*, 438-439.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 437.

Trinitarian or Pneumatological or anthropological one. From Bulgakov's perspective, therefore, both ecclesial ecumenism and wider ecumenism can be viewed as two sides of the same sophiological coin; they are both intimately connected with the Word and Spirit, but unfolding in different ways. Ecclesial ecumenism represents an aspect of concern for the fuller extension of the fruits of Jesus' prophetic and priestly ministries through christianization, whereas wider ecumenism, or what we might better term 'christic ecumenism,' is the work of advancing the christification of the world towards Christ's royal enthronement. According to Bulgakov, this aspect of the sophianization of the world will unfold outside of the Church and Christian humanity. However, for Bulgakov, all that is truly 'human' in human history can never be separated from its eternal sophianic foundations in the person of the Divine-human, Jesus Christ.

The move towards 'wider ecumenism' was defined above as a conceptual shift in the foundations of the work for Christian unity away from a paradigm of 'Christocentric universalism' in favor of one that was described as a 'Pneumatological' or 'Trinitarian' model. On this issue I paid particular attention to the writings of Konrad Raiser, with references also given to the work of Wesley Ariarajah, Raimon Pannikar, and Stanley Samartha. Each of these individuals, all in their own ways, has sought to expand the ecumenical horizon to include dialogue and cooperation with non-Christian religions, including a particular concern for common action in social justice and ecological responsibility. Particular attention was paid to Raiser's claim that a paradigm shift was taking place; one that was based on a move away from the so-called limitations of the Christological foundations of the ecumenical movement in its earlier years, towards a

Trinitarian conception of unity that was more accommodating of global diversity. I had previously also highlighted some of the tensions which emerged in the WCC around this perceived shift, especially those coming from the Orthodox membership in the Council as well as the constituencies represented by the authors of the *Princeton Proposal*.

My initial comment on this debate was to agree with Michael Kinnamon's conclusion that the ecumenical movement is equally impoverished by too sharp a division between the goals of ecclesial unity and human unity as it is by a complete enfolding of the two aims. I also echoed the plea of the Strasbourg Ecumenical Institute of the need to preserve the "integrity" in the ecumenical movement rather than pitting its various arms of activity against one another. This engagement with Bulgakov serves to affirm the position that there can and should be an integration of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, even as there is a clear basis for retaining a distinction of the two. Although Bulgakov's thought and activity were far more squarely confined to matters of specifically inter-Christian relations, his ecclesial logic certainly shows that he would have been very insistent on both sides of this point just like some of the more recent commentators. We now have additional theological reasons for following this advice.

8.1.2 Bulgakov and Local/Grassroots Ecumenism

Quite early on during his ecumenical career Bulgakov had identified an approach to Christian reunion which he felt was overly dominated by the principles of "reunion from

above”⁵⁴⁴ or “hierarchical centralism.”⁵⁴⁵ “It is taken for granted,” Bulgakov lamented, “that Reunion may be achieved merely between the higher organs of the hierarchy, without any active participation of the people of the Church.” In this regard, Bulgakov frequently liked to draw attention to examples of the apparent failures of this model of reunion, pre-eminent in this regard being the abortive East-West reunion sought at the Council of Florence.⁵⁴⁶ In Bulgakov’s mind, Florence had failed because it was an attempt by the hierarchy of the Roman Church to establish something from the top down which did not accurately reflect the lived experience of Christians, either in the East or the West. As such, while by all accounts it fulfilled the juridical requirements of an authentic conciliar decision, it was not received this way in the East.⁵⁴⁷ For Bulgakov, we must not attempt to repeat the same error. Such an approach,” he wrote, “is no less utopian than it was in the fifteenth century.”⁵⁴⁸

We have seen above the experiential and theological factors which contributed to Bulgakov’s ecclesiology. He was absolutely certain of the fact that, without the people of the Church, the Church’s hierarchy could not act when defining and deciding matters of importance about doctrine or governance. The same was true with respect to his understanding of the work for ecclesial reunion. This was not just a conceptual conviction for him. Bulgakov’s preference for what will shortly be discussed as ‘bottom up ecumenism’ appears in his strong commitment to the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius. One of the clearest statements on Bulgakov’s understanding of the role of the Fellowship can be found in a description penned by Paul Anderson for a readership of English Christians. As Anderson put it: “[For

⁵⁴⁴ Bulgakov, “Ways to Church Reunion,” 13.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁴⁶ The Editors, “The Nature of Catholic Action,” 17.

⁵⁴⁷ Bulgakov, “Ways to Church Reunion,” 8.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Bulgakov,] the Fellowship is complementary to the official meetings of Bishops and theologians, and prepares the body of the faithful for the day when synods and councils may discover and formally declare the healing of division.”⁵⁴⁹ In Anderson’s opinion, this represented “a new, if not a revolutionary approach to the problem [of division].”⁵⁵⁰ This approach, he suggested, was one based entirely on the Bulgakovian insight that “unity will not be satisfied until the members of the Church find it.”⁵⁵¹ As the ecumenical movement struggles with lack of reception, these words sound with the same ring of truth today as they did in Bulgakov’s time.

Bulgakov was also convinced that the reunion of the Church would not happen in the same way or at the same rate in every place. “Catholicity and unity may be realized differently in different places,”⁵⁵² he decisively declared. On the basis of his reading of Church history, this was true not only across time, but also geographically. Key examples of the fact included the variegated nature of communion between bishops and local churches in different parts of the world during the Donatist schism or the Arian controversy.⁵⁵³ As such, Bulgakov could see little hope that full communion could happen between entire national or international churches all at the same time, since the division had certainly not taken place in that way. In one of his more polemic moments, Bulgakov even declared “the doctrine of reunion only on the basis of whole churches is Roman.”⁵⁵⁴ In other words, he decisively rejected the ‘every

⁵⁴⁹ Paul Anderson, “Father Sergius Bulgakov,” *Living Church* 9 (November 1935), 485.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵² Report of the Fellowship Conference at Heigh Leigh, 26-28 June, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK. As quoted in Geffert, *Anglicans and Orthodox Between the Wars*, 184.

⁵⁵³ Zernov and Lempert, “The Fellowship and Anglican-Orthodox Intercommunion,” *Sobornost* 22 (1940), 11.

⁵⁵⁴ Report of the Fellowship Conference at Heigh Leigh, 26-28 June, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK.

local church all at once' approach to reunion as something methodologically alien to a true understanding of the nature of the Church.

One of Bulgakov's disciples, Evgeny Lempert, used the term "molecular reunion" to describe Bulgakov's vision of how the Church would see its unity restored. In essence, Bulgakov imagined single, spontaneous, localized cells of unity forming between divided Christians in certain ways, solely on the basis of the particular local conditions which created and allowed for them. In his opinion, these cells should be given space to develop and creatively explore possibilities while remaining within the presently acceptable limits of the rest of the body. Over time, the possibilities might expand even further, potentially leading to the formation of new, larger cells, which could gradually affect the entire body. As Lempert described this Bulgakovian molecular vision of growth and renewal in the Church:

The life of the Church does not necessarily begin from above, in solemn declarations of hierarchy and councils. On the contrary, more frequently it begins in the lower levels of the Church, sometimes even at its extreme limits (e.g. the canonization of saints, 'reception' of certain dogmatic definitions, etc.). Often it is a spontaneous, self-begotten way, which either spreads with elemental power or is temporarily submerged... But when it emerges through an actual need in the life of the Church it can become really and truly catholic... and may then receive official, canonical expression in the Church.⁵⁵⁵

While this particular quote is given in reference to new spiritual movements in general, it is clear from everything we have seen that Bulgakov saw Christian reunion as one area of the Church's life which would undoubtedly move forward in precisely this way.

There is another ecumenical challenge which was discussed in chapter two above which I called the challenge of bureaucratization. This too is a relevant discussion in connection with

⁵⁵⁵ See Zernov and Lempert, "The Fellowship and Anglican-Orthodox Intercommunion," *Sobornost* 22 (1940), 11.

the ecumenical turn to the local. As we saw, the ecumenical movement was one that began with a significant unofficial and laity driven nature. This was true to the point that Michael Kinnamon could speak of it as originally possessing an inherent character of “protest” against the status quo of the Church. One of the unfortunate results of the fading of these early impulses is that ecumenism has become just another mandatory portfolio of Church business. Even more distressing is that it has increasingly become the territory of ecclesial representatives and theological professionals.

Reception, as we saw, is a necessary piece in the exercise of authoritative teaching in the Church. Characteristically, it is one that depends heavily upon the engagement of the laity. As we saw, in the ecumenical context reception refers in part to the process by which ecumenically agreed statements of doctrinal consensus are recognized as authentic agreements. Through it, such statements can be taken in to the collective consciousness of the various divided churches so that they can begin to actually influence their worship, their lived relationships, and their decision making processes. As noted, ecumenical reception has proven to be an especially difficult task. If the average lay person is aware of ecumenical literature at all, there is also the added difficulty of trying to translate the work of internationally articulated and formal theological statements to the real life situation on the ground. One of these proposals to the reception challenge which has been put forward from many quarters has been to refocus the emphasis of the ecumenical movement towards its local dimensions.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁶ Examples of some introductory surveys to the local ecumenical scene include André Birmelé, *Local Ecumenism: How Church Unity Is Seen and Practised by Congregations*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984), Thomas E. FitzGerald, “Local Ecumenism: The Challenge and Opportunity,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 41.2-3 (1996): 243-252, Henriette T. Hutabarat-Lebang, “Journeying Together: The

So-called “local ecumenism” refers to both conciliar and bilateral engagement at the national, diocesan or regional, parochial or congregational, and even person to person levels. As we saw when discussing the vision of the Church outlines in the 1961 New Delhi Statement, the ecumenical movement has always acknowledged that unity is something that has content only when it is concretely lived out among “all in each place.” Nevertheless, at times it has been a discussion which has unfolded at a measure of abstraction from the people and the places which it speaks for.

Acknowledgement of this divide between the ecumenical movement and the actual life of the churches is not new. It goes back at least as far as the WCC’s first General Secretary, the aforementioned Willem Visser’t Hooft. The ecumenical movement, wrote Visser’t Hooft, was like “an army with many generals and officers, but with too few soldiers.”⁵⁵⁷ We have already noted some of the same criticisms which appeared in the 1990s and 2000s. However, it was in 2006, at the Assembly in Porto Allegre, where this institutional reality came to the forefront as a topic of formal self-examination within the WCC.

Reflecting on the institutional crisis of the ecumenical movement, the report of the moderator found that a key problem in the loss of ecumenical passion at the ground level owed in part to the professionalization of its participants and leadership. As such, conciliar ecumenism had come to be viewed as something outside of or alien to the actual churches.

“Ecumenism,” so the report concluded, “is not something to be imported from the outside or

WCC’s Common Understanding and Vision, the Local Church and Local Ecumenism,” *The Ecumenical Review*. 50, no. 3 (1998): 285-291.

⁵⁵⁷ Willem Visser’t Hooft, “The General Ecumenical Development since 1948,” in Harold E. Fey (ed.) *The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, Vol. 2, 1948-1968, (Geneva: WCC, 1970), 26

developed on an institution-centred basis; rather, it must emanate from the very life of people and be owned by the people. It must touch the life of people in all its layers and dimensions.”⁵⁵⁸ If the ecumenical movement were to survive, a return to a “grassroots” approach to unity would be the way forward. More positively, however, the report was also able to conclude that while, from a certain perspective, it may appear that ecumenical vitality had waned, signs of these very grassroots initiatives had indeed been sprouting up in all kinds of places.

The language of the grassroots is echoed in the ecumenical vision that sees unity as something being built from the ‘bottom up’ rather than the ‘top down’. The phrase “ecumenism from the bottom up” is that of Roman Catholic Ecumenist Gary Reiersen.⁵⁵⁹ Much of Reiersen’s thinking in this regard is influenced by the ecclesiological reforms of the Second Vatican Council. For Reiersen, Vatican II was critical for the Roman Catholic Church because it began the recovery of the image of the Church as the whole people of God, and emphasized the importance of the unique apostolate of the laity for the Church of the future. Reflecting specifically on the Roman Catholic context, Reiersen argues that a similar renewal is needed for the ecumenical movement. The local and lay dimensions of ecumenical activity have always been recognized in official Roman Catholic teaching, as Reiersen admits. However, with the tremendous attention given to international dialogue and confessionally agreed statements, ecumenism has become, in effect, a little top-heavy. Bottom up ecumenism recognizes the significance of the lay faithful in working for visible

⁵⁵⁸ World Council of Churches, Document No. A01: Report of the Moderator, http://www.wcc-assembly.info/en/theme_issues/assembly-documents/2-plenary-presentations/moderators-general-secretarys-reports/report-of-the-moderator.html, accessed on 22 February, 2012.

⁵⁵⁹ Gary Reiersen, “Ecumenism from ‘The Bottom Up,’” *Ecumenical Trends* 11/43 (March, 2002), 11-15.

unity, not just the decisions of bishops and theologians. As Reiersen puts it: “[laity] may well, at the local level, possess a level of experiential knowledge not necessarily held by those at the level of the universal church, so their leadership on ecumenical matters is very important.”⁵⁶⁰ The importance of the bottom or base of the ecumenical movement should be affirmed, therefore, not merely as a platitude, but as the implication of a truly orthodox and catholic ecclesiology.⁵⁶¹ Another phrase which has emerged out of this line of thinking is the call to move away from “ecclesio-centric” to “people-centered” ecumenism. This terminology seems to have originated with His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia,⁵⁶² and was echoed more recently in 2010 by Cardinal Walter Kasper.⁵⁶³ As Aram I put it, people-centered ecumenism can take us

beyond reception and consensus-oriented models and methodologies to fellowship-building strategies, particularly on the local level, by generating mutual trust among people at the grassroots... It grows from the bottom to the top and calls to accountability the ecumenism that is imposed from the top to the bottom.⁵⁶⁴

As I read it, people-centred ecumenism is the product of an acknowledgement of the reality that churches are nothing other than real Christian people living in real places and facing challenges and opportunities as they strive to live the Church’s mission. What that means is that the ecumenical agenda should be set far more by the people of the Church and their experiences of the challenges and opportunities for the Church’s mission in their local setting

⁵⁶⁰ Reiersen, “Ecumenism from ‘The Bottom Up,’” 13.

⁵⁶¹ Both orthodox and catholic are deliberately left in the lower case to indicate adjectival usage rather than ecclesial nomenclature.

⁵⁶² Catholicos Aram I, “Ecumenism in Process of Transformation,” Consultation on Ecumenism in the 21st Century, Chavannes-de-Bogis, Switzerland, 30 November 2004, and Catholicos Aram I, “Towards a People-Centered Ecumenical Configuration,” *Reformed World* 55.2 (2005): 104-110.

⁵⁶³ Cindy Wooden, “Cardinal asks Dialogue Partners if an Ecumenical Catechism Might Work,” *Catholic News Service*, Feb. 8, 2010, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1000540.htm>, accessed March 22, 2011.

⁵⁶⁴ Catholicos Aram I, “Ecumenism in Process of Transformation,” 8.

instead of top level representatives speaking from Geneva or Rome. Too often the reverse has been true.

John T. Ford and Darlis Swan have co-edited a volume entitled *Twelve Tales Untold* in the mid-1990s which explores these issues in a very interesting way. The text is built on the premise that “[e]cumenism does not filter down from above,” but rather, “the vigor of the ecumenical movement comes from local situations where people are striving together toward further unity.”⁵⁶⁵ A series of historically based case studies are produced, presenting a variety of ecumenically challenging issues which are commonly faced at the parish level. These include, for example, the celebration of baptism in inter-church families, requests for Eucharistic sharing on major feasts, etc. Each chapter then tries to bring the tensions revealed in the case study into conversation with the most current results of theological dialogue. For example, the ecclesiological implications of a Lutheran baptized as an infant and re-baptized in a Baptist church as a young adult are explored as a way of reflecting on the degree of reception that has taken place in the churches around the mutual recognition of baptism as defined in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.⁵⁶⁶

The same methodology is employed on a number of other fronts. This, however, is not the most important contribution of the book. In my opinion, the real strength of the book is the reorientation of ecumenical methodology it sets forth. Rather than simply taking the occasion to try to show how the principles of the formal dialogue can be applied to real world problems, instead the authors endeavour to use the experienced realities of the practical

⁵⁶⁵ *Twelve Tales Untold*, John T. Ford and Darlis Swan eds., (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 1993), 2.

⁵⁶⁶ Michael Rogness, “Rebaptism of the Prodigal Son,” in *Twelve Tales Untold*, 19-25.

situations of people in the pews as a means of challenging and pushing ecumenical professionals to imagine new possibilities and come up with fresh solutions. This is truly a people-centred ecumenism, and one that seems to offer a lot of promise for a new kind of forward movement.

In my opinion, one of the most interesting avenues of what is being variously described as grassroots, bottom-up, or people-centred ecumenism is to be found in the ecclesial phenomenon known as the Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) or the Local Covenant. An LEP represents a creative arrangement between two or more partner confessions to share elements of their ecclesial life together. Local Covenant is simply the term more commonly used to describe a similar arrangement when it involves the participation of a Roman Catholic partner. According to a document from the Group for Local Unity of Churches Together in England:

A Local Ecumenical Partnership is defined as existing where there is a formal written agreement affecting the ministry, congregational life, buildings and/or mission projects of more than one denomination: and a recognition of that agreement by the Sponsoring Body, and authorisation by the appropriate denominational authorities.⁵⁶⁷

These arrangements are based on the principle that certain elements of common life may be possible across confessional lines in some locations even when they are not possible for all members of the particular confession at the global level. The LEP allows these creative steps to be taken where the situation calls for them, without mandating them for others. Typically there is the added hope that through increased contact and cooperation the relationship will

⁵⁶⁷ Elizabeth Welch and Flora Winfield, *Traveling Together: A Handbook on Local Ecumenical Partnerships*, (London: Churches Together in England, 2004), <http://cte.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=79461>, accessed August 14, 2013.

develop such that even greater possibilities for shared life become feasible. These kinds of ecclesial relationships seem to be especially common in England,⁵⁶⁸ but interesting examples also exist in all kinds of diverse places.⁵⁶⁹ Such arrangements function very much as laboratories of ecumenical experiment, and represent invaluable visible specimens for ecclesiological reflection. Although the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius did not have anything like this degree of formalized church partnership, some of its common life seems to anticipate the same kinds of things we are seeing today coming out of the experience of LEPs.

Some attention should also be given to what is frequently called a “unity-by-stages” model of reunion. As I see it, this vision of the procedure of ecumenical progress captures many of the same sentiments involved in the LEP movement. More importantly, it also seems to resemble some of the same reasoning found in Bulgakov’s molecular vision of reunion. To put it simply, the unity-by-stages approach to the ecumenical task is based upon the principle that unity need not be understood as something that will happen between whole churches all at once. Rather, it could be realized progressively through a series of stages unfolding in different places at varying degrees of pace.

⁵⁶⁸ A good early reflection on the local ecumenical situation in England can be found in Hugh Cross, “Local Ecumenical Projects in England,” *The Ecumenical Review* 44.1 (January 1992): 48-54.

⁵⁶⁹ One particularly noteworthy Local Covenant/LEP is that of the Church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes, UK. This unique gathering of Christians involves members of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of England, the Methodist Church in Britain, the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, and the United Reformed Church. The formal Covenant between the local congregations in this central England city dates back to 1990, and is renewed yearly. The members share a building and other resources, have a ministry team made up of ministers from each partner tradition, work together in mission, and regularly worship in common as fully as their individual regulations permit.

Scholarly engagement on the subject as a possible means of reframing the ecumenical goal in the face of obstacles is a relatively recent phenomenon. Anglican ecumenist Paul Avis has analyzed this subject in some detail, and he dates formal reflection on the subject of seeking unity by stages to the mid-1980s.⁵⁷⁰ Drawing on his knowledge and experience of Anglican-Lutheran ecumenical history, Avis identifies six stages in the progress towards ecclesial communion: A) General rapprochement; B) Agreement in faith; C) Mutual ecclesial recognition; D) Mutual commitment to shared life and common mission; E) Collaborative oversight; and F) Common ministry.⁵⁷¹ Using Anglicans and Lutherans as an example, one might plot their relationship on the scale somewhere between stages D and E, although the situation would likely vary somewhat depending upon whether we were speaking about the North American or the European context. Anglicans and Roman Catholics might stand somewhere between B and C. The Roman Catholics and Orthodox relationship could be located between C and D. Regardless of how we map out where the various churches fall on Avis' scale, the idea is that each stage represents varying degrees of real though imperfect communion. Rather than make no structural changes or do very little together until the churches have solved all the problems deemed necessary for full communion, the unity by stages approach tries to fully embrace what is actually currently possible for the divided churches and Christian Communion to do and say and be together at every step along the way. The idea is that increased contact and life together will gradually create the conditions whereby previously insurmountable differences may actually come to be seen in a new light. In many respects, the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius could be understood as an early and small scale attempt to adopt this same kind of approach.

⁵⁷⁰ Paul Avis, "Seeking Unity by Stages," *One in Christ* 36.1 (2000): 7-24 and E. Yarnold, "Reunion by Stages," in *Communion et Reunion: Melanges Jean-Marie Tillard*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995).

⁵⁷¹ Avis, "Seeking Unity by Stages," 15-24.

While Avis admits that it is a form of “ecumenical realism,” he does not agree with those who have suggested that this acknowledgment is simply the result of resignation in the face of ecumenical disappointment. Rather, it is an awareness that is rooted in the recognition that Christian unity is not primarily structural and political but rather always far more personal, relational, and spiritual in nature.⁵⁷² Because of this, it should be more or less self-evident that ecclesial communion can never be created all at once between churches and global Christian Communions as wholes. Instead it must grow according to local conditions, over time, through multiple shared encounters, and by real people.

A relatively early and provocative attempt to put a unity by stages understanding of reunion into practice can be seen in the 1984 proposal of Karl Rahner and Heinrich Fries. In their provocatively titled *The Unity of the Churches: An Actual Possibility*,⁵⁷³ Rahner and Fries set out to present an eight-thesis platform for a way to Church union that could be realistically achieved without inordinately impinging upon the integrity and current self-understanding of each partner church involved. In effect, they challenged the prevailing notion that all the divisive doctrinal issues needed to be dealt with before any concrete institutional steps toward visible communion could be taken. Basic to the union which Rahner and Fries envisioned was agreement on the contents of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. Beyond this core, however, no further theological agreement would be demanded. While the hope was that further convergence around enduring differences would develop as the result of the closer relationship, the precise terms were not to be demanded at the outset as a condition of

⁵⁷² Ibid., 11.

⁵⁷³ Heinrich Fries, Karl Rahner, Ruth C.L. Gritsch, and Eic W. Gritsch, *Unity of the Churches – An Actual Possibility*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985).

deeper relationship. Again, the experiment of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius certainly bears comparison.

As I have already acknowledged, Bulgakov does not really offer anything dramatically new to the discussion of local ecumenism. He is highly useful, however, for reflecting on this desired change of direction precisely because we are able to use his ecclesiology as a rationale for it. The increased involvement of the people of God in the ecumenical task is far from a panacea. Thomas Fitzgerald, for example, warns that local ecumenical initiatives seem especially susceptible to losing sight of their theological foundations, or of becoming counterproductive to the cause of unity by creating a false sense of friendly relationships and common action as a sufficient ecumenical goal.⁵⁷⁴ However, a return to the local does offer some hope towards dealing with the challenges of institutional stagnation and the difficulties of reception. The Church is the people of God, and it is there that a suitable foundation for unity must be recovered. Without it, the prefabricated pieces of top-down ecumenical construction will not find a secure place to stand.

8.1.3 Bulgakov, Spiritual Ecumenism, and Ecumenism of Life

Early on in this study, passing reference was made to the Second Vatican Council as a landmark of Roman Catholic ecumenism. The Council addressed the division and reunion of the Church in several documents, but especially in the Decree on Ecumenism title in Latin as

⁵⁷⁴ See Thomas Fitzgerald, "Local Ecumenism: The Challenge and Opportunity," 250. In some cases, local ecumenism faces the same kinds of challenges from bureaucratization and professionalization that is found at the international levels. On this see Gary E. Peluso, "The Crisis of Local and Regional Ecumenism," *Mid-Stream* 32.4 (1993): 1-14.

Unitatis Redintegratio. This text is important not only for Roman Catholics, but for the ecumenical movement for a whole. Indeed this is true for a whole host of reasons.

One especially interesting feature that is found in the Decree is its projection of two different tracks of ecumenical engagement. One of these is referred to as the task of ‘getting to know the separated brethren.’⁵⁷⁵ This, more or less, has been pursued through the work of multilateral and bilateral theological dialogue. As I have argued, it is this dimension of the ecumenical task that has received the lion’s share of attention over the first century of the movement’s history. Vatican II’s programmatic agenda is certainly one of the reasons for this.

In discussing some of the present challenges to ecumenical progress, the problem of consensus was identified as one of the pressing difficulties. As we saw, some commentators went so far as to suggest that doctrinal consensus be abandoned altogether as an ecumenical aim because they have deemed it unachievable when working from an already existing state of division. Although this scholarly debate postdates Bulgakov’s ecumenical career, his own ecumenical experience did in fact allow him to anticipate some of the discussions. This is particularly true, I think, in terms of what Bulgakov himself experienced with respect to intellectual barriers only being overcome through fresh spiritual experience. Here again, therefore, we find ourselves with an opportunity to interact between Bulgakov’s ecumenical career and some of what is being said in the present conversation about doctrinal consensus.

⁵⁷⁵ The Decree on Ecumenism “*Unitatis Redintegratio*,” paragraph 9.
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html (accessed Sept. 19, 2013).

In contrast to the ‘getting to know the separated brethren’ aspect of the ecumenical program, the Vatican Decree also referred to the importance of seeking a ‘change of heart.’⁵⁷⁶ There are numerous examples of inspirational Christians who have had their hearts captured by a sense of love and responsibility for their fellow Christians from whom they have been divided.⁵⁷⁷ In most cases, they have been animated by a desire to see Christians recover their spiritual connection to one another through coming together around things like joint prayer, the Scriptures, the lives of the saints, etc. Bulgakov is one of them; indeed perhaps pre-eminently so. This form of dialogue focuses not on the level of doctrine, but rather on the level of mutual spiritual experience. Such ‘spiritual ecumenism’ has always played an important part in the progress of the ecumenical movement, and it was given a special pride of place during the pontificate of John Paul II when he famously referred to it as the “soul” of the entire enterprise.⁵⁷⁸

One of the more well-known examples of someone who lived out this particular kind of ecumenical commitment is the father of the Week of Prayer for Christian unity, Fr. Paul Couturier, who, according to Peter Hocken, seems to have received his vocation to this form of ecumenical engagement through his own relationships with the exiled Russian community in France.⁵⁷⁹ For Couturier, the Church was in pieces because of spiritual failings, not theological opinions. Joint prayer, therefore, was not just a nice accessory to the real work of doctrinal ecumenism; rather, it was the sole foundation that could give life to all other forms

⁵⁷⁶ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, paragraph 8.

⁵⁷⁷ George Tavad discusses the evolution of this text and the influence which the experience of spiritual ecumenism at the Council itself between bishops, Cardinals, and the various non-Catholic observers influenced its final form. See George Tavad, “Spiritual Ecumenism and Vatican Council II, in *A Century of Prayer for Christian Unity*, Catherine E. Clifford ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁵⁷⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*, 25 May, 1995, paragraph 21.

⁵⁷⁹ On Couturier’s ecumenical legacy see Peter Hocken, “The Ecumenical Methodology of the Abbe Paul Couturier,” *One in Christ* 27.4 (1991): 299-307.

of engagement and dialogue. As Hocken puts it, for Couturier, “love creates the environment in which truth can be attained and known.”⁵⁸⁰

To this day, over one hundred years after its inception, the Week of Prayer remains the most significant regular opportunity for Christians to engage in spiritual ecumenism at the local and global levels.⁵⁸¹ Other prominent venues of spiritual ecumenism at the global level include organizations like the International Ecumenical Fellowship, or the Society of Interchurch Families. Equally deserving of special mention are the monastic communities of ecumenical prayer and worship such as Bose, Chemin Neuf, Chevetogne, Grandchamp, Niederalteich, and Taizé.⁵⁸² Likewise we must not underestimate the significance of certain symbolic actions between churches as a form of spiritual ecumenism. By way of example these include such gestures as the 1965 mutual lifting of excommunications by then Pope Paul VI and then Ecumenical Patriarch Athenegoras I, the act of Pope John Paul II presenting Anglican bishops with pectoral crosses, and the return of the relics of St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom stolen by Latin Crusaders. All of these are signs of the critical role of spiritual experience throughout the early and contemporary history of the ecumenical movement.

It would certainly be inaccurate to suggest that the spiritual side of Christian ecumenism has been neglected in the last one hundred plus years. However, if there could be an accounting

⁵⁸⁰ Hocken, “The Ecumenical Methodology of the Abbe Paul Couturier,” 304.

⁵⁸¹ For history of the week of prayer see Catherine E. Clifford (ed.), *A Century of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁵⁸² Sister Minke de Vries discusses the role of Monasticism within the ecumenical movement in her essay “Monasticism and Prayer for Christian Unity: The Community of Grandchamp,” in *A Century of Prayer for Christian Unity*, Catherine E. Clifford ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009): 97-114.

of where the bulk of time, personnel, and resources have been invested, I do not believe it is inaccurate to say that spiritual ecumenism has often been seen as playing accompanying role alongside the lead of its doctrinal counterpart. In my opinion, it is time for the spiritual dimension of the ecumenical task to catch up to the doctrinal. In fact, it may be long overdue to restore the spiritual side of the ecumenical movement to the forefront, with the latter being understood as something that results only when proper attention is being given to the former.

Walter Kasper has been the most high-profile recent advocate for greater focus on the spiritual dimension of the ecumenical movement. As experienced an ecumenical professional as one could hope to find, Kasper finds the basis for his preferential option for the spiritual not only in official Roman Catholic teaching, or even in systematic theology, but also in his own experience of how ecumenical dialogue works. He writes:

On the basis of my own experience, I can say that [for ecumenical dialogue to succeed], trust must be built and friendships established. Where this is not possible, everybody is sufficiently intelligent to find objections to opposing arguments. Such dialogues will never come to a conclusion... But when there is friendship and common spiritual ground, the situation changes. This may not, and normally does not, lead to an immediate consensus, but it helps us to understand better what the other really means and why a different position has been reached. It helps us to accept the other in his or her otherness.⁵⁸³

For Kasper, this opinion seems to be grounded in the Pneumatological and ecclesiological conviction that the Church's apprehension of the truth of the faith is always a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit and not an intellectual achievement. In this vein, he cites Vatican II's Constitution on the Church as his support:

⁵⁸³ Walter Kasper, *That All May Be One*, 170-71.

By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (Magisterium), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God, the faith once for all delivered to the saints.⁵⁸⁴

On the basis of this principle, Kasper essentially argues that we should expect the same to be true of the mutual recognition of the faith of the Church across denominational divisions.

The hard, careful, patient work of theological dialogue is indispensable to this process, but “[w]here ecumenical consensus has been possible, it has always been experienced as a spiritual gift.” Any future consensus which we might hope for between separated Christian communities “can only be bestowed as a renewed Pentecost experience.”⁵⁸⁵

Kasper will certainly recognize doctrinal dialogue as one element of the preparatory work that can be undertaken while awaiting the Spirit’s gift. However, it would seem that, in his opinion, the real preparation comes through a rediscovery of the depth of our spiritual communion despite our disagreements. It was in the interest of encouraging this kind of ecumenical encounter Kasper himself produced his *Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*, a booklet containing many practical suggestions for ways in which different groups of Christians can pray and worship together despite the various issues that currently prevent their full communion.⁵⁸⁶

As I understand it, drawing on the wisdom of Kasper, and others, there is deeply rooted within the vocation of spiritual ecumenism a strong sense of the Church’s need for Divine intervention, healing, and forgiveness. This seems to presuppose that part of the work of spiritual ecumenism will include the promotion of repentance and conversion – a certain

⁵⁸⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

⁵⁸⁵ Kasper, *That All May Be One*, 172.

⁵⁸⁶ Walter Kasper, *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007).

penitential character. The unofficial Reformed-Lutheran-Roman Catholic Groupe des Dombes has long been at the forefront of this call.⁵⁸⁷ The Dombes group was originally founded by Paul Couturier, and his ecumenical spirit continues to animate much of their work. Although they have addressed many of the same doctrinal topics commonly under discussion in other bilateral dialogues,⁵⁸⁸ the group is unique in its pronounced emphasis on the promotion of spiritual conversion as a means to doctrinal convergence.

One of the group's most well-known texts is titled *For the Conversion of the Churches*, a methodological reflection on their own history of dialogue. The text pays particular attention to the ways in which deep emotional and intellectual loyalty to one's respective confessional identity can prevent divided Christians from entering into a more complete visible communion. Although the Groupe does not envision the erasure of confessional identities, it does call the churches to a "confessional conversion" which "cleanses and enriches its own inheritance" through mutual commitment to the even more fundamental "Christian conversion" to which all Christians are continually called.⁵⁸⁹ Reflective of this general approach, texts from the Dombes community always include a section in which confessionally directed calls are made for specific self-examination and suggested reform. The basic point is that the best way to agreement with another is not by each side working to convince the other of the rightness of their own understanding; neither is it through mutual compromise. Rather, positive movement towards one another is most likely to come through

⁵⁸⁷ On the contribution of the Groupe des Dombes in general see the editorial introductions in Catherine E. Clifford, *For the Communion of the Churches: The Contribution of the Groupe Des Dombes*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2010).

⁵⁸⁸ See for example Groupe des Dombes, *Vers une même foi eucharistique?: accord entre catholiques et protestants*, (Taizé (Saône-et-Loire): les Presses de Taizé, 1972), Groupe des Dombes, *Pour une réconciliation des ministères; éléments d'accord entre catholiques et protestants*, (Paris: Presses de Taizé, 1973), Groupe des Dombes, *Marie: dans le dessein de Dieu et la communion des saints*, (Paris: Bayard Éditions, 1999).

⁵⁸⁹ Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Church*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993), 26-29.

each partner being convinced of their own weaknesses and imperfections and giving them up to Christ. Such is the path to true conversion and true consensus; it is a road that is spiritual rather than doctrinal.

Catherine Clifford has produced a lengthy study of the development of the Dombes ecumenical approach entitled, *The Groupe des Dombes: A Dialogue of Conversion*.⁵⁹⁰ In it, Clifford brings to bear cognitional theory of Canadian philosopher Bernard Lonergan as a way of distinguishing Groupe des Dombes dialogue with other more typical forms. According to Clifford, most traditional dialogues operate at the stage which Lonergan calls the work of “Dialectic,” the theological “functional specialty” which focuses on comparing points of conflict which emerge in the diverse interpretations of common source material. For Lonergan, dialectic seeks to determine whether conflicting interpretations are truly the result of contradictory horizons, or if they actually arise within the same basic horizon of meaning and are therefore merely complementary differences. In Clifford’s opinion, the Dombes theologians advance upon many other ecumenical dialogues because they push the churches past dialectic to the functional speciality Lonergan names “Conversion.” With conversion, in Lonergan’s sense of the word, biases are overcome and a new horizon of commonly accepted meaning becomes possible.⁵⁹¹ This Lonerganian reading of the Groupe des Dombes provides an anthropological and philosophical understanding of the difficulties involved in arriving at common meaning across divergent confessional identities and ecclesial cultures. In effect, Clifford uses Lonergan to point to the cognitive and social-

⁵⁹⁰ Catherine E. Clifford, *The Groupes des Dombes: A Dialogue of Conversion*, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005).

⁵⁹¹ See the previously cited *Method in Theology*.

communal aspects involved in reaching ‘consensus’ in ways similar to what was introduced above in connection with Minna Hietamäki’s research.

Where Lonergan is unique, however, is in the considerable attention which he gives to the notion of “conversion” within his cognitional theory. For Lonergan, this is not an intellectual breakthrough, but a work of Divine grace. A new interpretive horizon is received much like a gift. Clifford’s thesis is that the Groupes des Dombes’s greatest contribution to the ecumenical movement is in their insistence that dialogue should be first and foremost about preparing the churches to receive this gift. As she writes, the ecumenical dialogue, if it is to move beyond mere comparison, must learn to

take an active part in forming the collective consciousness of the churches, aiding them to move beyond confessionistic views, and educating them for an ecclesial realism. Only then can we expect the churches to undertake the repentance and reform that is truly required for a return to full communion.⁵⁹²

It is this forming of consciousness is precisely what spiritual ecumenism seeks to do.

Ephraim Radner’s sobering book, *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West*, takes the idea of the need for ecumenical conversion and pushes it to the point of penitential lament. For Radner, drawing on the ecclesiology of George Lindbeck, the divisions of the Church are “figurally” akin to the divisions of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. That is, we read the history of the people of God in the present according to the shape of the narratives of the people of God in the past. For Radner, the consequence of the sin of divisiveness for “partitioned Israel” was abandonment to the suffering of exile.⁵⁹³ The Church, in Radner’s understanding, can now be seen to be experiencing a similar kind of abandonment which he calls

⁵⁹² Clifford, *The Groupes des Dombes*, 259.

⁵⁹³ Radner, *The End of the Church*, 32-33.

“pneumatic deprivation.”⁵⁹⁴ As a result of this deprivation of the fullness of the Spirit, the Church has had its senses dulled and is, therefore, no longer able to properly hear the word of God, to see miracles, to discern holiness, to taste the body and blood of Christ, or to smell the incense calling them to sacrifice. Its present and apparently interminable inability to overcome its divisions are the product this loss of the senses.

Radner takes this rather dramatic claim and applies it to his analysis of the ecumenical movement. Although I cannot engage with the entire text, one example makes his point clear. In Radner’s view, the majority of the ecumenical efforts of the late twentieth century have relied upon what he describes as the “charitable discernment of positive commonalities among churches.” In doing so, he argues that they have largely sought to avoid the question of the “potential sins or ‘deficiencies’ or even ‘mortal wounds’ of divided churches.”⁵⁹⁵ This feature of the ecumenical enterprise, he asserts, is evidence of the Church’s stubborn resistance of repentance, and of the absence of the Spirit.

Radner does not doubt that traditional forms of ecumenism are motivated by “noble and courageous intentions,” and should be seen as “flames of grace to be cherished and fanned.” Nevertheless he insists that “we must be willing to allow the failure of their light.”⁵⁹⁶ Like the generation of the people of Israel which dies in exile, something of the Church may simply need to die before new life can be given. For this reason, Radner essentially proposes that the most appropriate ecumenical program is one that does not really involve *doing* anything at all, other than intentionally taking on the suffering our current state and pleading for redemption we likely

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 10.

will not live to see. For Radner, true ecumenism is a kind of penitential suffering, a “profound kind of staying put even while the place in which we stand is beaten down and reconfigured from its bottom up into a new household.”⁵⁹⁷ Needless to say, Radner sees this as something that we cannot create for ourselves; it can only happen at God’s initiative, and in God’s time.

Bulgakov does not use the language of pneumatic deprivation anywhere in his corpus. However, we have seen in this study, on several occasions, his deeply held conviction that only a radical intervention of the mercy of God could provide the kind of spiritual and intellectual conditions that would lead to a reconciliation of the divided churches. That is why Bulgakov always invested the primary emphasis of his ecumenical work into matters of spiritual experience and only secondarily on doctrinal discussion. It is also why he constantly sought to emphasize the submission of the ecumenical agendas of churches and theologians to the initiative of God. In this sense, some of Radner’s penitential tone seems to resonate rather well with the Bulgakovian ecumenical sentiment.

Another example of the emerging penitential side of spiritual ecumenism is the so-called receptive ecumenism project,⁵⁹⁸ and some attention needs to be given here. According to Paul Murray, a leading proponent of the work of receptive ecumenism, one of the pitfalls of traditional bilateral dialogue is that participants sometimes enter the conversation with the understanding that the reason they are there is to faithfully represent their own tradition and to

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., *The End of the Church*, 352.

⁵⁹⁸ A wide variety of essays on various dimensions of the receptive ecumenism project can be found in P. D. Murray and Luca Badini Confalonieri, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For some further reflection see also Paul D. Avis, “Are we receiving Receptive Ecumenism,” *Ecclesiology* 8, no. 2 (2012): 223-234, and Denis Edwards, “Receptive Ecumenism and the Charism of a Partner Church,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 43 (2009): 167-177.

express the distinctive insights of that tradition to their dialogue partners. Rather than promoting transformation, this methodological approach can end up serving a rather counter-productive purpose of “simply reinforcing each sponsoring church within its own current logic.”⁵⁹⁹

Receptive ecumenism tries to combat this tendency. It does so by taking as its starting point something Murray calls the “self-critical” question: “What, in any given situation, can one’s own tradition appropriately learn with integrity from other traditions?”⁶⁰⁰ Instead of going in with a “problem-driven strategy of conceptual and grammatical clarification” targeted to elicit the understanding of the other, receptive ecumenism is about listening. It is a preparatory stage, where one particular “host tradition” seeks to receive the critiques and concerns of their dialogue partners, and to receive them in an intentionally self-critical way. The goal is to “bring to the fore the prior necessary disposition” that will allow for the possibility of understanding and consensus.⁶⁰¹ In effect, it is an ecumenical method patterned on Jesus’ instructions of taking the plank out of one’s own eye before taking a speck out of the neighbour’s. We can definitely see parallels in this humble model of ecumenical engagement with what we observed in the earliest gatherings of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, before it devolved into a much more catechismal mode of engagement.

The work of spiritual ecumenism also has close connections to something the literature calls “ecumenism of life.”⁶⁰² In the same way that the agenda of ‘getting to know the separated

⁵⁹⁹ Paul D. Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning – Establishing the Agenda,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, 14.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁰² On this see for the volume of essays entitled *Ecumenism of Life as a Challenge for Academic Theology*, (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2008).

brethren' was said to require accompaniment by the equally essential task of 'changing the heart,' so too is the doctrinally focused 'ecumenism of truth' often paired with this contrasting phrase. In effect, ecumenism of life recognizes the fact that the people of the Church do not always experience both either their disunity or their unity with other Christians in the same ways or around the same kinds of issues as are commonly presupposed as the central issues in the official dialogues. The realities of life together sometimes change the dynamics of historical divisions, even when the official theologies say otherwise. An ecumenism of life seek to reorient the formal dialogue in such a way that it gives greater weight to the experiences of unity that actually take place in the day to day of Christian faith around the world. As the editors of a volume of publications coming out of the 14th Academic Consultation of the Societas Oecumenica summarize: "Practice is no longer to be considered the (mere) application of various aspects of ecumenical consensus. Practice itself must become a *locus theologicus*."⁶⁰³ The organized ecumenical movement certainly has a lot to learn on this score.

Geoffrey Wainright is one interpreter who strongly affirms this change of perspective. He agrees that the ecumenical movement must avoid being driven too one-sidedly by its traditional bias towards what some might call "responsible" or academic theology. The ecumenical movement, according to Wainright, should instead give renewed attention to the lived experiences of Christians out there in the world today, rather than simply trying to deal with the historically bequeathed doctrinal differences. Indeed it should seek to allow these to push the professionals and the office holders to a deeper apprehension of what the real points of division and the real points of connection are in our time. Wainright points to effects of

⁶⁰³ "Introduction," *Ecumenism of Life as a Challenge for Academic Theology*, 12.

the growing number of inter-church families on Roman Catholic Eucharistic theology as one such example where this is actually beginning to take place.⁶⁰⁴ However, Wainright also cautions against playing too strongly into the hierarchical versus populist dichotomies that often arise around such a discussion. Instead, he draws on the personalist thought of Pope John Paul II to aid in an understanding of the two impulses as overlapping elements of a single, genuinely human dialogue.⁶⁰⁵

In a similar fashion, Catherine Clifford calls for the greater linking of the search for theological consensus with an ecumenism of life.⁶⁰⁶ Clifford in no way advocates the abandonment of doctrinal dialogue, but she does suggest that the methodology of ecumenical engagement must become more “complex” and “differentiated” than it has typically been for much of the movement’s history.⁶⁰⁷ Drawing on the Lonerganian ecclesiology of Joseph Komonchak, Clifford reminds ecumenists that there are, as Komonchak puts it, “two sorts of data the ecclesiologist must investigate – authoritative statements about the Church and the concrete realization(s) of the Church.”⁶⁰⁸ The dialogue that goes on between churches and ecclesial communities must not limit itself exclusively to formal theological definitions to determine the possibilities for agreement. It must also include as relevant data the events, actions, gestures and experiences of Christian people. As Clifford writes reflecting on the Anglican-Roman Catholic report “Growing Together in Unity and Mission,” one of its

⁶⁰⁴ Wainright, “Responsible Theology and the Ecumenism of Life,” in Bernd Jochen Hilberath, Ivana Noble, Johannes Oeldemann, and Peter De Mey, eds. *Ökumene des Lebens als Herausforderung der wissenschaftlichen Theologie*, (Frankfurt: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2008), 195.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 187-190.

⁶⁰⁶ Clifford, “Linking Theological Consensus and Ecumenism of Life,” in Bernd Jochen Hilberath, Ivana Noble, Johannes Oeldemann, and Peter De Mey, eds., *Ökumene des Lebens als Herausforderung der wissenschaftlichen Theologie*, (Frankfurt: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2008): 209-23.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 217-223.

⁶⁰⁸ Komonchak, *Foundations of Ecclesiology*, 71, as cited in Clifford, 216.

strongest features is its proposal for means by which Anglicans and Roman Catholics might “live more closely together in our daily effort to place ourselves at the disposition of God’s Word in prayer, and to witness together in the world.”⁶⁰⁹ In Clifford’s opinion greater attention to this “inductive” side of the ecumenical equation is crucial for the ecumenical future, “something that will *prepare our hearts* to recognize more readily the living faith of the apostles in our ecumenical partners.”⁶¹⁰

In my opinion, Bulgakov’s greatest gift to the ecumenical world of his day were his efforts to try to foster the conditions that would enable Christians to rediscover their love for one another through common worship and shared life experience. This passion, I believe, was an expression of Bulgakov’s appreciation for the spiritual dimension of common confession of faith over against the strictly intellectual. Though doctrinal discussion was an important part of his contributions to Faith and Order and in the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, Bulgakov constantly sought to place greater emphasis on relationship and prayer. Bulgakov, it seems, wanted to fill a spiritual gap which he perceived in overly doctrinal-focused ecumenical endeavours. This was the case, I believe, because he had seen in his own ecumenical career how paying too much attention to dogmatic disagreements could in fact have a detrimental effect on ecumenical progress. Divided Christians, he observed, seemed always to be “acutely sensitive to their dogmatic differences,” while at the same time being strangely unable to “feel their mutual agreement in the same way.”⁶¹¹ “Spiritual life,” Bulgakov suggested, “in which the divine is really tasted, unites Christians to a far greater

⁶⁰⁹ Clifford, “Linking Theological Consensus and Ecumenism of Life,” 222.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. Italics mine.

⁶¹¹ Bulgakov, “By Jacob’s Well,” 107.

extent than does dogmatic perception.”⁶¹² For Bulgakov, then, the best way forward was not to begin with doctrinal dialogue, but to seek to re-establish those spiritual bonds of love. In other words, he was advocating for greater attention to spiritual ecumenism.

The turn towards recognition of the ecumenism of life also picks up on some of the same kinds of thinking that we encountered in connection with Bulgakov’s views on multiple primacies. The ecumenism of doctrinal truth, with its emphasis on doctrine and tendency to favor consistency with the past, would correspond well with the Petrine side of the ecclesiological equation. Ecumenism of life falls much more squarely into the Johannine mode, always keen to discern the signs of the times and press the Church to move forward. If we agree with the Bulgakovian conclusion that work for reunion is a movement of the Church standing within the prospective, prophetic, or Johannine purview, then a methodological priority for Christian unity as it is actually lived and experienced between real people on the ground is a direction that should be eagerly pursued.

Another possible synonym for ‘ecumenism of life’ might be found in the simple word friendship. Ecumenism of life, after all, is not much more than the treating of real Christian relationships as a source for theology. The role of friendship in ecumenism is another subject that has received new attention in some scholarly circles, and one excellent source of reflection on this front is the proceedings of the inaugural 2005 Conference of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies in Lviv, Ukraine.⁶¹³ The community at Lviv was founded with the specific purpose of creating means to restore Christian friendship. This was not done as

⁶¹² Ibid., 106.

⁶¹³ See *Friendship as an Ecumenical Value*, ed. Antoine Arjakovsky and Marie-Audie Tardivo (Lviv: Ukrainian Catholic University, 2006).

sentimental and wishful thinking, but as a genuine, theologically based methodology based on an appreciation for the role of the affect in any intellectual discourse.

Margaret O’Gara has noted this same phenomenon, paying attention to the great number of notable ecumenical friendships that have existed between high profile ecumenists throughout recent history.⁶¹⁴ She also spoke from her personal experience as a respected ecumenical practitioner of the way that ecumenical friendships exercised a cognitive influence within the process of dialogue. Of course, the restoration of friendship between divided Christians does not mean that there will no longer be disagreements. It does, however, aid in ensuring that disagreements that are uncovered are, in fact, real and substantive, rather than based on prejudice and bias. It puts an end to the desire to defend oneself or to win the discussion, instead taking joy in the mutual discovery of truth even when it uncovers personal error.

Bulgakov’s ecclesiology helps to more securely establish this acknowledgement of the ecumenical value of inter-church friendships. We saw above how Bulgakov developed the thinking of his friend Pavel Florensky on the subject of friendship. For both of these men, friendship was used as a significant theological category. In Bulgakov’s view, friendship between Christians was something far more profound than just a simple relationship between individuals. It was a category of relationship that was invested with ecclesiological content; a special means of sharing in ecclesial *sobornost’*. Florensky and Bulgakov both compared friendship to marriage, suggesting that certain friendships could in fact be liturgically recognized by the Church as divinely ordained means of grace that had significance not only

⁶¹⁴ Margaret O’Gara, “The Theological Significance of Friendship in the Ecumenical Movement,” in *That the World May Believe: Essays on Mission and Unity in Honour of George Vandervelde*, (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 2006), 125-132.

for the individuals involved but also for the whole Body of Christ. Friendship, for Bulgakov, was something that could be understood as a profoundly spiritual act. From a Bulgakovian perspective, therefore, we might say that ecumenical friendship is a supreme means of spiritual ecumenism, capable of concretely realizing in a more complete way than otherwise possible the visible ecclesial unity between two members of the body of Christ.

The doctrinal dimension of Christian division is one that can never be justly abandoned, and the work that has gone into the search for doctrinal consensus has not been in vain. However, it would appear that perhaps the ecumenical movement is beginning to come up against the limits of what can be achieved in this regard through traditional forms of theological dialogue. In the spirit of Bulgakov's desire to fill in an ecumenical gap, it is time for the spiritual climate of the divided churches to not only catch up with the purported convergence described in the agreed statements and common declarations, but to allow their spiritual desire for greater relationship to push the churches towards actual change.

8.1.4 Bulgakov and Ecumenical Eucharistic Sharing

This final section of this final chapter overlaps with some of the same connections that have been established between Bulgakovian ecumenism and the trends toward local ecumenism, spiritual ecumenism, and ecumenism of life. In effect, the subject of ecumenical Eucharistic sharing serves as a kind of testing ground for observing how these various impulses might affect our approach to a particularly pressing issue facing the churches today.

Christian unity finds its fullest expression in the sharing of the sacrament of the Eucharist. That is why the inability of all Christians to celebrate their communion with Christ because of their enduring lack of communion with one another is such an obvious scandal. For some, it is a scandal which the Church has been willing to bear far too lightly. Such is the position of those who advocate ecumenical Eucharistic sharing. Rather than holding out Eucharistic Communion as the end point of ecumenical progress once all the divisions have been healed, the Lord's Supper is seen as the food without which we will be unable to take the necessary steps to reach the journey's end. What is required to advance beyond the limits of what can be achieved through doctrinal dialogue is precisely the sacrament of unity. In other words, the Eucharist is understood far more as a means to the end rather than simply the end itself. A survey of the issues involved in this debate will reveal several points on which Bulgakov's ecumenical history finds additional application.

Before discussing the case for the Eucharist as a means to unity rather than simply a sign, some basic awareness of the official teaching of the various churches and ecclesial communities is necessary. There are many Protestant churches who continue to restrict access to the Lord's Supper to the baptized or to members of their particular denominational family of churches, including, for example, many so-called Strict and Primitive Baptists, most Mennonite and other Anabaptist churches, certain Confessional Lutheran Synodical bodies, and some Reformed denominations.⁶¹⁵ However, a number of Protestant and Anglican churches are now opening the invitation to Eucharistic fellowship to all baptized followers of Christ who are normally permitted to receive Communion in their own churches, including most Anglican and Episcopal churches, most Methodists, the United and

⁶¹⁵ This is not given as an official or exhaustive list.

Uniting churches in various parts of the world, most mainline Evangelical Lutherans, and many North American Reformed and Presbyterian churches.⁶¹⁶ Some mainline Protestant traditions are now beginning to do away with baptism as a requirement altogether, opting instead for what is called ‘Open Communion.’⁶¹⁷ For different reasons, certain Evangelical Protestant communities make expressed faith in Christ the sole criterion for receiving the Lord’s Supper.⁶¹⁸

For many non-Catholic Western Christians, then, increasingly the experience of being discouraged from receiving Communion when visiting other churches is one which they are most likely to encounter from the side of their Orthodox and Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. As such, my reflection on the subject of ecumenical Eucharistic sharing is written primarily with the current Orthodox, and especially Roman Catholic, principles and restrictions in mind.

The official position of the Orthodox churches is that there are no circumstances under which communion with non-Orthodox can be permitted.⁶¹⁹ The terminology of “Eucharistic hospitality” is even considered by some to be a profound offence.⁶²⁰ Antoine Arjakovsky provides a helpful summary of the logic behind this regulation. According to Arjakovsky,

⁶¹⁶ Again, these are only a few representative examples.

⁶¹⁷ On this see for example Thomas E. Breidenthal, “The Festal Gathering: Reflections on Open Communion,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 54, no. 2 (Easter 2011): 142-157, Ruth A. Meyers, “Who may be invited to the Table?” *Anglican Theological Review* 94, no. 2 (Spr. 2012): 233-244, and Kathryn Tanner, “In Praise of Open Communion,” *Anglican Theological Review* 86, no. 3 (Sum. 2004): 473-485.

⁶¹⁸ This tends to be the result of less emphasis on the ecclesiological implications of sharing in Communion.

⁶¹⁹ For a discussion of this subject with the ecumenical movement in mind see Robert G. Stephanopoulos, “Eucharistic Hospitality: Implications for the Ecumenical Movement,” *Ecumenical Review* 44 (1992): 18-28.

⁶²⁰ Paulos Mar Gregorios, “Not a Question of Hospitality,” *Ecumenical Review* 44 (1992): 46-47.

there are three main reasons typically given by Orthodox hierarchs against the practice.⁶²¹

First is the implication that receiving the Eucharist celebrated by another church or Christian community implies that the recipient has adhered themselves to the membership of that church. To participate in the Eucharistic worship of a heretical or schismatic confession, or to permit such persons to receive the Eucharist from the Orthodox Church, is, in effect, to enter into communion with heresy and schism. Second is the argument that Eucharistic communion signifies complete agreement on all matters of theology. Only when the totality of the Orthodox faith is professed and understood in common can table fellowship be considered genuine. Third is the caution that intercommunion with another church will lead to schism between those communities within one's own church which cannot accept such action. From an Orthodox perspective, therefore, it is a complete contradiction in terms for an individual to be considered an occasional participant in the Communion of the Church, only to return to their non-Orthodox communion at a later time. The principle of 'economy' which is sometimes extended to non-Orthodox Christians with regard to the usual demand for the (re)baptism of heretics and schismatics is not, therefore, to be extended with respect to the Eucharist, even in times of urgent need.

Of course, this is not to say that there have not been advocates of greater Eucharistic hospitality from within the world of Orthodox Christianity. Neither does it discount that instances of Eucharistic sharing across the lines of ecclesial division have taken place in the history of the Orthodox Church. Arjakovsky relates how instances of continued intercommunion between some Orthodox and Catholic Christians continued for centuries

⁶²¹ Arjakovsky, "God's Love as the Foundation of an Ecumenism of Life," 40.

after the East-West schism.⁶²² The Ukraine is said to have known regular cases of “double communion” Christians as late as 1755.⁶²³ In rare cases, Orthodox immigrants in America were sometimes given permission by their bishops to receive Communion and other pastoral ministrations from an Episcopal church.⁶²⁴ These are simply the officially recognized instances.

Arjakovsky also presents a line of past notable Orthodox ecumenists such as Aram I, Nikos Nissiotis, Gennadios Limouris, and Olivier Clement as historic proponents of the lifting of the ban on Eucharistic sharing, at least with Roman Catholics.⁶²⁵ He adds his own voice to these. For Arjakovsky, arguing that the assumption that intercommunion requires uniformity in doctrine is belied by the historical cases in the early Church of continued Eucharistic sharing in the face of serious doctrinal disputes. As he points out, in some cases today Eucharistic fellowship does not even exist between Orthodox Churches who hold to precisely the same articulations of faith; a sad reality which certainly seems to somewhat undermine confidence in the claim that agreement on doctrine is the *sine qua non* for sharing Holy Communion.⁶²⁶

On this basis, Arjakovsky has therefore asserted that, although the standard Orthodox prohibitions regularly reference the necessity of doctrinal agreement for Eucharistic communion, in fact the heart of the Orthodox tradition has always been to emphasize quality

⁶²² Arjakovsky, “God’s Love as the Foundation of an Ecumenism of Life,” 41.

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ One of the better-known examples is the 1910 pastoral letter of Bishop Raphael Hawaweeny of the Syrian Greek Orthodox Catholic Mission of the Russian Church in North America giving such permission by exception and in emergency situations.

⁶²⁵ Arjakovsky, “God’s Love as the Foundation of an Ecumenism of Life,” 41-43.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 42.

of relationship over dogmatic understanding. This intuition, he claims, is exhibited in the practice of having Orthodox infants immediately receive chrismation and communion following their baptism.⁶²⁷ Thus, in Arjakovsky's mind, it is profoundly Orthodox to pay attention to the realities of relationship as a consideration for participation in the Eucharist. If this is true, it does seem to represent a potential basis for a move to occasional Orthodox Eucharistic hospitality toward non-Orthodox, especially with respect to mixed marriages and possibly even members of ecumenical communities.⁶²⁸

It is certainly useful to identify counter-examples to the official line, and to be aware of how there one day might at least be a basis for a change in practice in this regard. However, there can be little debate that the overwhelming majority of Orthodox bishops and theologians remain adamant on this point: The sole way to a restoration of communion with non-Orthodox Christians is canonical reconciliation with the Orthodox Church through profession of the Orthodox faith and receiving the appropriate initiatory sacraments. Ecumenically motivated intercommunion with non-Orthodox Christians, therefore, continues to remain a non-starter from an Orthodox perspective.

Although ecumenical Eucharistic sharing is in no way encouraged as a regular norm in the Roman Catholic world, the possibility does at least exist, and there are regulations in place to assist in making decisions about it. These regulations have undergone a significant measure of development in the past few decades, particularly in the wake of the ecclesiological

⁶²⁷ Ibid.,” 41.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 45-46.

reforms of the Second Vatican Council.⁶²⁹ It is therefore incumbent upon us to trace these subtle shifts, paying attention both to what has remained the same, and what seems to have allowed for some room for change.

Vatican II's *Decree on Ecumenism* identified two purposes for Eucharistic worship: "the bearing witness to the unity of the Church" and "the sharing in the means of grace."⁶³⁰ While it was stated that the witness to the unity of the Church element "very generally forbids common worship to [divided] Christians," the *Decree* went on to acknowledge that "the grace to be had from it sometimes commends this practice."⁶³¹ With this second principle in place, the *Decree* then goes on to provide specific directives with respect to how this applies with respect to different non-Catholic Christian communions.

Because the Eastern Orthodox churches are viewed by Rome as "Churches" which "although separated from us, yet possess true sacraments and above all, by apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist,"⁶³² Eucharistic sharing is deemed a possibility. This is true both in cases where Orthodox seek to receive Communion from a Roman Catholic table, and vice versa. In fact, this is taken to be "not only possible but to be encouraged."⁶³³

When it comes to Anglican and Protestant churches and ecclesial communities, however, the possibilities are more limited. This is precisely because, in the judgment of the Council, these

⁶²⁹ For an exhaustive analysis of the pre-conciliar, conciliar and post-conciliar phases of the reform see Myriam Wijlens, *Sharing the Eucharist: A Theological Evaluation of the Post Conciliar Legislation*, (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 2000).

⁶³⁰ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, paragraph 8.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

⁶³² *Ibid.*, paragraph 15.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

communities have not retained the “proper reality of the eucharistic mystery in its fullness, especially because of the absence of the sacrament of Orders.”⁶³⁴ However, as we read, “the course to be adopted, with due regard to all the circumstances of time, place, and persons, is to be decided by local episcopal authority, unless otherwise provided for by the Bishops’ Conference according to its statutes, or by the Holy See.”⁶³⁵

After the Council, what was then the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity subsequently released, in two parts, *The Directory for the Application of the Decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican Concerning Ecumenical Matters*.⁶³⁶ This was done in order to provide practical directions for applying the Council’s principles to concrete circumstances. While the regulations with respect to the Orthodox Church were already relatively clear, there was a change from the usual strictures towards the separated brethren of the West. For the first time, there was an appreciation for the fact that there may be times when the grace to be received from sharing the sacraments with a non-Catholic Western Christian seemed to outweigh the importance of enforcing the canons to the fullest degree.

Thus we read:

... in danger of death or in urgent need (during persecution, in prisons) if the separated brother (sic) has no access to a minister of his own community and spontaneously asks a Catholic priest for the sacraments, so long as he declares a faith in those sacraments in harmony with that of the church, and is rightly disposed. In other cases the judge of this urgent necessity must be the diocesan bishop or the Episcopal Conference. A Catholic in similar circumstances may not ask for these sacraments except from a minister who has been validly ordained.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁴ Ibid., paragraph 22.

⁶³⁵ Ibid., paragraph 8.

⁶³⁶ The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Directory for the Application of the Decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican Concerning Ecumenical Matters*, (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1967).

⁶³⁷ *The Directory for the Application of the Decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican Concerning Ecumenical Matters*, paragraph 55.

This represents the first formal articulation of the regulations that essentially remain in place to this day.

The 1983 *Code of Canon Law* expanded upon this first *Directory*, making clarifications and cementing its principles. Canon 844.3 states succinctly that, under ordinary circumstances, “Catholic ministers administer the sacraments licitly to Catholic members of the Christian faithful alone, who likewise receive them licitly from Catholic ministers alone.”⁶³⁸ Only after this clear statement of the norm do the possible exceptions follow, highlighting their strictly limited and exceptional status. Canon 844.4 reads:

If the danger of death is present or if, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop or conference of bishops, some other grave necessity urges it, Catholic ministers administer these same sacraments licitly also to other Christians not having full communion with the Catholic Church, who cannot approach a minister of their own community and who seek such on their own accord, provided that they manifest Catholic faith in respect to these sacraments and are properly disposed.⁶³⁹

The language is almost word for word the same as is found in the 1967 *Directory*.

Although the regulations on Eucharistic sharing have remained essentially unchanged since the release of the foundational statements, subsequent decades have seen the emergence of a somewhat more sensitive and pastoral tone. In 1993, the previous *Directory* was updated and released under the title *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*.⁶⁴⁰ The document outlines in greater detail than any of the previous texts the ecclesiological and sacramental bases for both its restrictions and its exceptions. Notably,

⁶³⁸ “Code of Canon Law,” http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P2T.HTM, accessed April 11, 2012.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁰ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/general-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19930325_directory_en.html, accessed April 13, 2013.

special attention is given to the ecclesiological continuum that exists between baptism and Holy Communion. There is a direct encouragement of the continued establishment of local guidelines, as well as a greater emphasis on the importance of spiritual discernment when considering when to allow exceptions on a situational basis.⁶⁴¹ As Myriam Wijlens helpfully highlights,⁶⁴² there is also a renewed acknowledgement of the fact that there are some situations where Eucharistic sharing with non-Catholic Christians may not only be permissible but even “commended.”⁶⁴³

John Paul II’s 1999 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* seemed to echo this same positive note. The pope even expressed a feeling of “joy” in the fact that sometimes Catholic ministers may share the sacraments with Christians who are not in full communion with Rome.⁶⁴⁴ The optimism felt by some was more restrained, however, with the arrival of the 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, which again struck a cautious note.⁶⁴⁵ Here John Paul II expressed his disapproval of those who “indulge in Eucharistic practices contrary to the discipline by which the Church expresses her faith,”⁶⁴⁶ and explicitly stated that the sharing of the Eucharist as a step on the way to Christian reunion “would result in slowing the progress being made.”⁶⁴⁷ Pope Benedict XVI has carried on this same note of reservation, suggesting that we disrespect the Eucharist when we seek to use it as a “mere ‘means’” to attain unity.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴¹ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, paragraph 130.

⁶⁴² Wijlens, *Sharing the Eucharist*, 343.

⁶⁴³ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, paragraph 129.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ut Unum Sint*, paragraph 46.

⁶⁴⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Holiness *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 17 Apr., 2003, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html, accessed April 18, 2012.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, paragraph 10.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, paragraph 30.

⁶⁴⁸ Benedict XVI, Post Synodical Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Charitatis*, 22 Feb. 2007, paragraph 56.

As one might expect, inter-church families have long been at the forefront of the Eucharistic sharing discussion, and there is a fair body of literature on the subject from organizations representing people who live this particularly ambiguous ecclesiological reality.⁶⁴⁹ This is one area where some creative attempts have actually been made on the part of local bishops and bishop's conferences to interpret the guidelines more broadly within their own contexts.

In this respect, one relatively early example, which received a lot of attention at the time, is that of the French Archbishop Léon-Arthur Elchinger during the 1970s.⁶⁵⁰ As Avery Dulles translates and relates from the original instruction to Elchinger's Diocese,⁶⁵¹ Eucharistic hospitality with Protestants was deemed to be possible provided the following four requirements were met:

a) Fundamental agreement with the Eucharistic faith of the Catholic Church, including the real presence of Christ, the bonds between the Eucharist and the Church, and the authenticity of the ministries of those who preside; b) Real bonds with the life of the Catholic Church, for example through a spouse or children who are its members or through a community of life with Catholic brethren who are jointly seeking to restore full Christian unity; c) A genuine spiritual need to fortify the communities in which one is engaged; d) Obedience to the discipline of the Church of which the non-Catholic Christian is a member.⁶⁵²

Such explicit recognition of the 'real bonds' constituted by inter-church family situations is significant, especially given the quite early date of this particular instruction.

⁶⁴⁹ See for example "Sharing Eucharistic Communion in the Context of an Interchurch Family : Association of Interchurch Families Survey," *One In Christ* 19, no. 1: 42-87, Ladislav Orsy, "Interchurch Marriage and the Reception of the Eucharist," *America* 175 (1996) 18-19, Ruth Reardon, "Communion in interchurch families," *One In Christ* 19, no. 1 (1983): 31-41, Ruth Reardon, "One Bread One Body : A Commentary from an Interchurch Family Point of View," *One In Christ* 35, no. 2 (1999): 109-130.

⁶⁵⁰ On this see Gunars J. Ansons, "Intercommunion in anticipation of greater unity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 11, no. 2 (1974): 315-321, and Avery Robert, Cardinal, Dulles, "Ministry and Intercommunion: Recent Ecumenical Statements and Debates," *Theological Studies* 34, no. 4 (1973): 643-678.

⁶⁵¹ "L'Hospitalité eucharistique pour les foyers mixtes," *Documentation catholique*, no. 1626 (Feb. 18, 1973): 161-65.

⁶⁵² Dulles, "Ministry and Intercommunion: Recent Ecumenical Statements and Debates," 656.

Similar kinds of adaptations have appeared in other places in more recent years, with the noteworthy examples of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland collectively,⁶⁵³ South Africa,⁶⁵⁴ and Canada.⁶⁵⁵ However, in each of these provisions, Eucharistic sharing is considered feasible only in response to individual pastoral circumstances which tend to be familial in nature.⁶⁵⁶ Also, these directives only ever envision a one-way hospitality, with no allowances for Roman Catholics who may feel the same kind of need to occasionally receive Communion outside the Roman Church.

In addition to inter-church families, others who are trying to push the envelope of Eucharistic sharing even further are among those who have uniquely committed themselves to living out the ecumenical vocation. Following the 1991 Canberra Assembly of the WCC, an exhortation was made to all churches, including the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, to begin to consider more seriously the opportunities before them to engage in Eucharistic hospitality.⁶⁵⁷ In 2003 the Catholic Institute for Ecumenical Research in Tübingen, Germany, the Lutheran Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, and the Institute for Confessional Studies in Bensheim, Germany jointly produced the French text *Le partage eucharistique entre les Eglises est possible: Thèses sur l'hospitalité eucharistique*.⁶⁵⁸ In it,

⁶⁵³ The Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England & Wales, Ireland and Scotland, *One Bread, One Body: A teaching document on the Eucharist in the life of the Church, and the establishment of general norms on sacramental sharing*, http://www.iec2012.ie/downloads/One_Bread_One_Body.pdf, accessed May 28, 2012.

⁶⁵⁴ South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Directory on Ecumenism for Southern Africa*, <http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/journal/98su06.htm>, accessed May 28, 2012.

⁶⁵⁵ See *Sacramental Sharing Between Catholics and Other Christians in Canada: Pastoral Commentary to Assist Priests, Deacons and Lay Ministers in Determining Cases of Serious Need*, (Prepared by the Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations Commission for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000), <http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/journal/2001jan08.html>, accessed May 28, 2012.

⁶⁵⁶ *One Bread, One Body*, 76-77.

⁶⁵⁷ *World Council of Churches, Signs of the Spirit: Official Reports of the Seventh Assembly*, Michael Kinnamon ed., (Geneva: WCC, 1991), 174.

⁶⁵⁸ Centre D'études Oecuméniques, *Le Partage Eucharistique Entre les Eglises est Possible: Thèses sur L'hospitalité Eucharistique*, (Freibourg: Academic Press, 2005).

these three leading ecumenical think-tanks put forward the bold suggestion that individuals who find themselves in particularly deep relationships with their fellow Christians across confessional lines should be allowed the same kind of occasional permission to share the Eucharist in special cases. A similar call was made in the 2007 statement, *On Eucharistic Sharing*,⁶⁵⁹ produced by the International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF). A direct plea is made to Roman Catholic bishops, asking them to exercise their discretionary power to allow reciprocal Eucharistic sharing between IEF members during their Conferences.⁶⁶⁰ The rationale given is that there are unique realizations of visible ecclesial communion between their members which are not yet enjoyed by the wider churches.

Similar petitions have come from the leadership of some of the Roman Catholic Church's closest ecumenical partners. The Anglican bishops of the Church of England have described the continued ban on Roman Catholics receiving Communion in Anglican churches as an "ecumenical, theological and pastoral affront."⁶⁶¹ In recent years, they have asked for change in practice on the part of the Roman Catholic Church out of respect for the new quality of relationship that exists with the Anglican Communion as a result of their long and fruitful dialogue. In similar fashion, the current President of the Lutheran World Federation, Munib Younan, has pressed for a formal bilateral agreement that would allow for occasional and reciprocal Eucharistic sharing between Lutherans and Roman Catholics by 2017, the 500th

⁶⁵⁹ Nagypal Szabolcs and Rudolf Weth, *On Eucharistic Sharing: A Statement of the International Ecumenical Fellowship*, <http://www.koed.hu/nation/sharing.pdf>, accessed October 27, 2012.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, paragraph 23.

⁶⁶¹ House of Bishops of the Church of England, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of Unity*, (London: Church House, 2001), 16.

anniversary of the European Reformation.⁶⁶² These are but a few of the higher profile recent examples.

If, as we saw, there are occasions where Eucharistic sharing is possible, and even commended, then why is intercommunion in the service of ecumenical relations not considered one of them? Gerard Kelly provides what I believe to be the most convincing Roman Catholic answer to this question.⁶⁶³ Drawing in part on the work of Francis J. Moloney,⁶⁶⁴ Kelly suggests that the key consideration that must be faced is what will happen after the celebration is over. He writes: “Will those participating leave divided? If they will, then the objective union created at the table will be destroyed... [and] the Eucharist celebrated will have been a pretence.”⁶⁶⁵

For Kelly, this is the logic behind why inter-church marriages and inter-church families seem to lend themselves quite readily to occasional Eucharistic sharing. By virtue of the sacrament of marriage, and the unique relational bonds which endure between members of a Christian family, there is a uniquely realized visible unity that exists both before and after the Eucharist. In Kelly’s opinion, this legitimates the unity that is being expressed in sharing the Eucharist.

⁶⁶² Luigi Sandri, “Lutheran Leader Seeks Agreement with Pope,” *The Christian Century*, Dec. 17, 2010, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2010-12/lutheran-leader-seeks-communion-agreement-pope>, accessed November 3, 2012.

⁶⁶³ Gerard Kelly, “Intercommunion--Critical for the Future of the Ecumenical Movement and Church Unity,” *One In Christ* 34 no. 4 (1998): 307-319. See also Gerard Kelly, “Intercommunion and Eucharistic Hospitality,” in Margaret Press ed., *The Eucharist: Faith and Worship*, (Sydney: St Paul’s Pub., 2001).

⁶⁶⁴ Francis J. Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People: Eucharist in the New Testament*, (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1991).

⁶⁶⁵ Kelly, “Intercommunion--Critical for the Future of the Ecumenical Movement and Church Unity,” 316.

This same reasoning is what leads Kelly to conclude that the Eucharist should not be used for the purposes of aiding ecumenical fellowship. Unlike marriages and family life, members of an ecumenical dialogue are, by nature, fundamentally not in full communion. As Kelly writes: “The very fact of the meeting is surely an indication that the Churches who are meeting are divided. It would seem a little nonsensical... to want to share Eucharist with each other on such an occasion.”⁶⁶⁶ Thus while Kelly is willing to leave the question open as to whether there might be relationships beyond those of marriage and family life that realize ecclesial unity in a similar way so as to potentially make Eucharistic sharing possible, he does not include ecumenical relationships among them.

Bulgakov knew the standard arguments of his time against Eucharistic sharing very well. In fact, he spelled them out clearly in his own reflection on the subject: “The predominant formula runs, sacramental fellowship must be preceded by a preliminary dogmatic agreement.” However, like the many that have come after him whose life experience has caused them to question the existing regulations, Bulgakov too wondered out loud, “is this axiom so indisputable as it appears?”⁶⁶⁷ He balked at the notion of making doctrinal uniformity a requirement for communion, pointing out that such total agreement had never existed between even the Orthodox churches that remained fully united. Bulgakov also questioned whether a unity in faith could ever come from human effort. Disunity was a spiritual reality, and it required a spiritual remedy. “May it not be,” he would suggest, “that unity in the sacrament will be the only way towards overcoming difference?” Particularly in circumstances where there was considerable doctrinal agreement already present, and when

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 317.

⁶⁶⁷ Bulgakov, “By Jacob’s Well,” 106.

individuals had been given an experience of spiritual communion, to resist coming together at the Table was, for Bulgakov, a far more serious sin than any fear of ‘indiscriminate use.’ As he so forcefully put it: “Why should we not seek to surmount a heresy in teaching through superseding a heresy of life such as division? May it not be that Christians sin now by not heeding the common eucharistic call?”⁶⁶⁸ Again, with even greater insistence, he declared: “The way towards the reunion of East and West does not lie through tournaments between the theologians of the East and West, but through a reunion before the Altar.”⁶⁶⁹

The urgency and the radical tone of Bulgakov’s statements takes us back to the earlier discussion of Johannine prophecy and of what I described as his insistence on the prophetic nature of ecumenism. Recall how, for Bulgakov, the so-called Petrine principle in the Church was almost entirely a ‘retrospective’ ministry. It was one that could be seen at work in all those operations of ecclesial authority concerned to safeguard the common faith from novel innovations. It would only be natural, therefore, for such an ecclesial impulse to be highly cautious with respect to unprecedented adaptations. In contrast, Bulgakov’s proposed Johannine primacy was a prospective office. It existed to protect and champion the exploration of new inspirations and implications of the Gospel for new times and places. The inherent disposition of this ecclesial principle, as Bulgakov describes it, is to give freedom to creative local churches, forward thinking parishes, and charismatic individuals.

On this basis, I think it is only fair to ask, with Bulgakov’s witness in mind, whether the ecumenical movement been perhaps too dominated by the Petrine principle around issues of

⁶⁶⁸ Bulgakov, “By Jacob’s Well,” 106.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 112-13.

Eucharistic hospitality? The witness of Bulgakov's ecumenical style seems to reveal that he would have answered in the affirmative. A century of ecumenical relations have shown that perhaps more should be deemed possible than our guidelines currently allow. The time is ripe for a prophetic risk.

Bulgakov's ecclesiology of friendship also has something to contribute on the question of ecumenical Eucharistic sharing. There is no clear evidence that Bulgakov ever explicitly extended Florensky's understanding of friendship between Christian to include Christian friendship across confessional boundaries. However, based on what he did say, it does not seem to be all that large of a stretch to push his thinking a little further in that direction. If this can be fairly done, I believe Bulgakov provides a theologically grounded retort to Gerard Kelly's summary of the current dilemma from the Roman Catholic perspective. The purpose of the present Roman Catholic directives is to prevent Eucharistic sharing from being used 'indiscriminately'. In this regard, I can only view them as salutary. As the letter to the Corinthians cautions, there should always be a serious self-examination when coming to share at the Lord's Table with other Christians; a 'discerning of the Body' which is concerned with making sure that the communion that is enacted in the sacrament is not contradicted by the dissension which actually exists between those who partake.⁶⁷⁰ However, allowances are made when there are certain relational circumstances that create a greater inter-church bonds between divided Christians than the usual imperfect communion that endures between typical members. If the issue is that we want to make sure that the unity that lends itself to allowing Eucharistic sharing is not something that comes to an end when the parties leave the altar, then it would seem that a robust vision of friendship in the

⁶⁷⁰ See 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Bulgakovian sense would fulfill that requirement. Not every Christian has these kinds of friends within other churches and ecclesial communities, but no doubt there are many who do. Granted this is uncharted territory, but it would seem ripe with possibilities. If, as has been officially acknowledged, inter-church families live the ecumenical vocation in a way that is a kind of prophetic gift to the Church,⁶⁷¹ perhaps ecumenical friendships should be more formally recognized in the same way.

It is true that there are well founded arguments for understanding the Eucharist as the sign of full communion, and the rules around them must be respected. However, surely we have reached the point in our ecumenical relationships where the greater burden of proof lies on the question of Eucharistic hospitality now lies with those who would retain the status quo, rather than those who see life itself calling them beyond it. Bulgakov's contribution to the debate certainly suggests as much. Of course, even if such allowances were permitted on rare occasions, we would still remain a long ways away from the goal of full Eucharistic communion. It would, however, be a prophetic step in that direction. Such steps, though small, may, as Bulgakov put it, "serve as a mystical and religious *foundation* for the Reunion of the Churches,"⁶⁷² prefiguring and preparing the churches for the future to which they are being called.

⁶⁷¹ See for example John C. Bush and Patrick R. Cooney, *Interchurch Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), George Kilcourse, "Interchurch Families: Ecumenically Liberating the Church," *One in Christ*, 33 no. 1 (1997): 3-19, Ruth Reardon, "'A Source of Joy': *Ut Unum Sint* and Interchurch Families," *One in Christ*, 31 no. 3(1995), 280-286, Ray Temmerman, "Interchurch families as domestic church: more real than imperfect?" *Ecumenism* no. 171 (September 1, 2008): 4-13.

⁶⁷² Bulgakov, "Ways to Church Reunion," 15.

Chapter 9 This Leg of the Journey

9.1 Conclusion

Much of the commentary throughout this study has been prefaced on the claim that the ecumenical movement has slowed in recent decades, if not ground to a halt. In fact, talk of the end of ecumenical progress is not all that new. As the Institute for Ecumenical Research has observed, it seems to have been an undercurrent within the ecumenical movement for much of its history: “Every movement lives with the concern that it will grow tired or come to a stop before its goal has been reached... Within the ecumenical movement such a worry has been endemic.”⁶⁷³ The close of the twentieth century was different, however, in that talk about the concerns for the future became one of the central themes of the ecumenical agenda. The result of these worries over the apparent ecumenical standstill seems to have functioned as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, conjuring up and strengthening the exact thing that it has feared.⁶⁷⁴ Without wanting to trivialize the fact that there are real challenges, the Strasbourg scholars insist that the crisis must not be “over-dramatized.” Instead times where progress is difficult should be embraced, because in them the “spiritual depths beneath the ecumenical movement... become more clearly perceptible than during times of unclouded achievement and expectation.”⁶⁷⁵ As the statement concludes:

[The ecumenical task] is a journey which will take a long time and whose goal lies beyond the expectation and efforts of a single generation; a journey which does not proceed in a straight line or along an easily traceable path, but which is often winding and not seldom goes in circles; a journey which is not driven forward by its own achievements, because these very achievements are confronted with new or even again with the old difficulties and

⁶⁷³ *Crisis and Challenge in the Ecumenical Movement*, 1.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

obstacles. But it is a journey which in its motivation and its progress is borne by the promise and assurance of God; a journey in which even that which is experienced as a setback and which implants discouragement stands under the promise and thus is not a breakdown or a failure, but rather a way-station along the road.⁶⁷⁶

Some of the words that have been used to describe the current state of the ecumenical movement were mentioned in the second chapter: ‘Uncertainty,’ ‘stagnation,’ ‘tiredness,’ and even ‘crisis.’ A new favorite term is to speak of a climate of ‘ecumenical winter.’ The image, of course, is intended to evoke feelings of a season of death and dormancy inevitably following on the heels of the far more exciting seasons of growth and flourishing. In a 2010 interview on the subject of ecumenical history, Olav Fykse Tveit, the current General Secretary of the WCC, responded to the dreary forecast. The global *oikumene* is one that is made up of people from all sorts of climates, and Tveit spoke like a man very at home in the cold:

They say we are experiencing an ‘ecumenical winter’ right now, and I, being Norwegian, ask back, ‘What is so terrible about winter?’ We know that winter can be beautiful, and we know that winter is only one of four seasons. In winter, we have time for reflection, time to think about what we have experienced in the past and what we expect from the future, and, of course, how we can prepare for the future.⁶⁷⁷

To put this succinctly, challenges force us to reflect, to go back and retrace our steps.

Therefore, even on the coldest of days, we can still learn valuable lessons that prepare us again for spring. Russia is also a land known for its ice and snow, and, from what we have come to comprehend of the man through the course of this analysis, Bulgakov is someone who would be well suited as a companion during a season of ecumenical winter.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁷⁷ Transcript of radio interview (5 Dec. 2010), trans. by Christian Schreiner.

In the introduction to this dissertation I drew attention to what we can now undoubtedly recognize as a heavily sophianic promise of Jesus to the Samaritan woman at the well. In particular, I quoted the line: “The hour is coming, and is now come.” In that initial reference I alluded to the tension between the unity of the Church as already given, and as a not yet realized task. As we come to the conclusion of this study, I want to suggest that it can also be taken as a way of describing Bulgakov’s ecumenical legacy and its emerging relevance as a resource today. In Bulgakov’s time, some of his bold assertions about the ecumenical movement were not always welcomed. In my opinion, they seem to have been a little ahead of the curve. Yet, in numerous ways, they were highly consistent with the very same kinds of questions and challenges which the ecumenical movement as a whole is now being forced to face head on. As the ecumenical movement continues to reflect theologically on its past, its present, and its future, the story of Bulgakov’s ecumenism is one whose time has come.

For the most part, Bulgakov’s serves simply to confirm and to underpin theologically some of the new directions that are already well underway towards the ecumenical future. In particular: 1) We have seen how Bulgakov’s sophiology provided him with a way of distinguishing between Church and non-Church, but not separating the two. This gave us another perspective from which to comment on inter-confessional and inter-religious dialogue as a dipartite but mutually integrated tasks, rather than split and adversarial endeavors. 2) Our reflection on the role of authority in the Church has allowed us to more fully understand the move towards a recovery of the lay and the local and the grassroots in the face of institutional stagnation. In turn, this has made it possible for us to see the corresponding ecclesiological critique implied by lack of attention to the conditions for

ecumenical reception. 3) We have been able to further establish the philosophical call for renewed attention to the affective and spiritual obstacles to unity over against the intellectual and doctrinal through engaging the Slavic principle of *sobornost'*. 4) We have established a basis for seeing relationships of friendship as an ecclesiological category, which has thereby allowed us to comment on certain outstanding questions in the area of sacramental practice. In each of these cases, Bulgakov's witness, both in its personal, theological, and practical streams, has added some helpful insights and considerations. Even if it is acknowledged that Bulgakov is but one of several voices saying much the same thing, such anticipatory and confirmatory resources are no less valuable. The ecumenical adventure is a long one, and encouragement and direction are needed with every step. Sergei Bulgakov is one more individual whose memory is well suited to walk with us for this leg of the journey.

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