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Fr. Georges Florovsky's Ecumenical Task: From Dostoevsky to Neopatristic Synthesis

Abstract

Fr. Georges Florovsky's legacy is related to the term of neopatristic synthesis, although he never managed to fulfill the right content of his synthesis. The etymology of the term was not what exactly Florovsky himself had in mind to express, so it has been created a question in contemporary inquiry about the content of the term. Specifically, some views try to locate the background and the subject of the concept to be fully inspired by the trend of the Russian Religious Renaissance and its



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ambassadors. However, none of them anticipates that Florovsky's motivation came from his favorite Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky and his willing to create a synthesis between man and society to solve the ecumenical problem of Europe in his age. So the ecumenical task which Florovsky had adopted from the beginning of his theological career was to systematize that unaccomplished synthesis of the Russian litterateur and create an epistemological theory. This theory was the neopatristic synthesis which was applied in the ecumenical dialogue of his days to propose the holy-patristic¹ ecumenicity as a solution for the ecumenical problem.

Keywords

G. Florovsky, F. Dostoevsky, neopatristic synthesis, ecumenical task, holy-patristic ecumenicity

1 Introduction

There is one constant and unanswered question in a contemporary epistemological inquiry related to the thought of

¹ First of all I must inform here the readers of this article that I use the words *holy-patristic*, *holy-spiritual* and *holy-spirituality* instead of patristic, spiritual and spirituality because in my point of view the latter ones are limited only to a gnosiological interpretation and do not attribute to the perennial presence of the Holy Spirit in historical facts. Besides in nowadays there is some dubious noise about the need of post-patristic theology as a new theological paradigm, which encounters with patristic theology only on a grammatical level and misjudges her timeless value as an existential way of living with the goal of holiness. In the same way I consider that spiritual(ity) also must be accompanied with the prefix holy in order to remind us that it is a gift from above and not only a human venture.

Fr. G. Florovsky, namely the absence of a determination of his *neopatristic synthesis*². Indeed, the Russian theologian never gave an exact definition for this specific term and its content, besides the fact that his theology is worldwide well-known and has created the neopatristic theology school. However, recently there have been some remarkable attentions to identify the concept of neopatristic synthesis, in its background and subject, with the principles of Russian religious renaissance at the beginning of 20th century and put it out from its mainframe, which is patristic theology as the timeless dogmatic teaching of ontological relation between Christ and man.

Thus from one hand, Fr. M. Baker insisted that Florovsky was so influenced by V. Soloviev and his second version of utopian synthesis, that he considered neopatristic synthesis to be a continuity of the Russian philosopher's unfinished project³. From the other hand, P. Gavrilyuk in his recent book considers that the "standard narrative" which separates neopatristic

² See G.H. WILLIAMS, "The Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky", *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual. Orthodox Churchman*, (ed.) A. Blane, (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1993), p. 289; A. LOUTH, "The patristic revival and its protagonists", *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Theology*, (eds.), M. B. Cunningham & E. Theokritoff, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 193.

³ See M. BAKER, "'Theology Reasons' - in History: Neo-patristic Synthesis and the Renewal of Theological Rationality", *Theologia* 81:4 (2010), (81-118), pp. 104-105; "*Neo-Patristic Synthesis*": *An Examination of a Key Hermeneutical Paradigm in the Thought of Georges V. Florovsky*, Master Thesis, (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, 2010), pp. 28-29; "Neopatristic Synthesis and Ecumenism: Towards the 'Reintegration' of Christian Tradition", *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*, (eds.) A. Krawchuch & T. Bremer, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 235- 262, p. 236.

school from Russian (religiophilosophical) school is now under question because both of two trends had a common interest in patristic theology, but they interpreted in a different way in their days⁴. Also, Gavriilyuk tries to determine the subject of neopatristic synthesis as being fully inspired by the sophiological teaching of Bulgakov and P. Florensky. So, he insists that Florovsky did not adopt patristic theology as his main epistemological field of inquiry, but he used sophiological arguments to conflict with and disapprove them⁵.

Both of these speculations misjudge the real intention of Florovsky's thought that was a synergetic synthesis between personal freedom and community, which he found it to be accomplished in the teaching of the church fathers⁶. Florovsky

⁴ See P. GAVRILYUK, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), pp. 2-4. However, S. Tanev has already proved that the major difference between Florovsky and Bulgakov was concentrated in the way which both of them understood patristic theology and specifically the teaching of saint G. Palamas about the distinction between essence and energies in God. As for the former was the peak of patristic theology, for the later was a personal and underdeveloped sophianic teaching. See S. TANEV, "ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑ vs ΣΟΦΙΑ: The contribution of Fr. Georges Florovsky to the rediscovery of the Orthodox teaching on the distinction between the Divine essence and energies", *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 2:1 (2011), pp. 15-71. For the well-known distinction between Russian and neopatristic school see A. SCHMEMANN, "Russian Theology: 1920-1972. An Introductory Survey", *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 16, 1972, (172-194), p. 178.

⁵ *Idem*, pp. 145-150, where he argues that the "intuition of creaturehood", as one of the fundamental dimensions in Florovsky's (neopatristic) theology was adopted by P. Florensky and then it was used as a way of conflict with Bulgakov's sophiology.

⁶ Cf. A. NICHOLS, *Theology in the Russian Diaspora: Church, Fathers, Eucharist in Nikolaev Afanas'ev (1893-1966)*, (New York: Cambridge University Press 1989), p. 154: "Eschewing determinism, fatalism and

himself was much more a follower of A. Khomyakov and I. Kireyevsky and their Slavophile concept of sobornost, which was more profound in the work of F. Dostoevsky⁷.

The aim of my article is to clarify that the idea of neopatristic synthesis has an ecumenical task, which Florovsky took to fulfill what he had already found unfinished in the literary work of Dostoevsky. The great Russian litterateur was aware that in order Europe to rise again from her cultural dead-end was necessary a synthesis between new persons in Christ and community⁸. He described this phenomenon in his novels, but he did not have the epistemological apparatus to systematize his thought in a philosophical frame.

Florovsky grabbed the opportunity as a task in sequence to make clear that this unaccomplished synthesis could be fulfilled only on patristic teaching, which was and still is the only secure way for an applied ecumenicity in the field of theological thinking. Thus according to him, eastern orthodox theology is still the carrier of a real ecumenicity as delivers the patristic ecumenical teaching, which was common to western theology in the past and still can integrate contemporary western thinking in that great ecumenical tradition of church fathers.

predestinarianism in all their forms, he found the 'secular' affirmation of radical volition - free will — confirmed in the doctrine of human sunergeia, cooperation, with grace through ascetic effort, as offered by the Greek patristic tradition”.

⁷ See S.S. KHORUZHII, “Transformations of the Slavophile Idea in the Twentieth Century”, *Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1995, (7-25).

⁸ For the concept of synthesis in Dostoevsky's work see E. TOURNEIZEN, *Dostoevsky*, trans. M. Pirar, (Athens: Domos, 2016), pp. 22-25.

2 The Unaccomplished Synthesis of F. Dostoevsky

Through the multiple articles of Florovsky, we can easily detect a keen interest in the literary work of Dostoevsky, to find in him the original concept of ecclesiastic ecumenicity. In 1922 Florovsky wrote *Dostoevsky and Europe* with the purpose to highlight Dostoevsky's perspective for the revival of European culture through the timeless values of orthodox faith.

According to Florovsky, the Russian writer had already understood that Europe was a carrier of ecumenical culture due to her great heritage which combined elements from classical antiquity to Renaissance⁹. However, in Dostoevsky's days, Europe had started to reveal in herself an underlying problem, concerning the ontological distance that existed between her great cultural past and the contemporary discount of Western values.

The paradox of Europe¹⁰, as Florovsky characteristically identified this presentation of cultural malfunction in Dostoevskian thought, lies in the fact that had already existed a discount from the ecumenical ontology of classical European culture to the manifestation of the external mode of latin-german culture. This was a Europeanism which alternated the cultural phenomenon into a folklore state of culture¹¹. Alongside, the religious element which played a unique role in the thought of Dostoevsky was combined with this cultural

⁹ See G. FLOROVSKY, "Dostoevsky and Europe", *Theology and Literature, CW* (The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, R. S. Haugh (ed.), 14 vols., vols. I-V, Belmont, Massachusetts: Nordland Publishing Company, 1972 - 79, vols. VI-XIV, Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987-89), v. XI, p. 69.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Idem*, p. 72.

malfunction and had been presented at his strong critic on Catholicism. The Russian litterateur was even more than sure that papal infallibility which had been used to recreate the idea of *Pax Romana* was responsible for this European decadence¹². In this way, Dostoevsky spotted every kind of “-ism” and showed his annoyance even for socialism, which was developed in his days in Russia and asserted that it was “‘*the legacy of romeo-Catholicism’ in his secular form*”¹³ as one more expression of violated community.

The solution for that dead-end of Western decadence would come merely from Orthodox Russia, for she was the only country who could affiliate the ecumenical values of Europe to transform her material spirit in holy-spiritual¹⁴.

Florovsky perceived that the Dostoevskian proposition had not the character of a secular utopia like the one that V. Soloviev

¹² *Idem*, p. 74.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Idem*, p. 77. Cf. F. DOSTOEVSKY – K. KAVELIN, “Pushkin”, *Ethnos and Ecumenicity: Dimensions of a Dialogue*, trans. G. Likiardopoulos, Ideas, (Athens: Erasmos, 1995), pp. 37-38: “Yes, the destiny of Russians is definitely pan-European and global. For someone to be original and perfect Russian it means maybe (and this you have to remember) to be brother of all the people, ecumenical man if you wish. [...] A true Russian cares for Europe and the fate of the great european race as he cares for Russia itself, for the fate of his country. [...] Oh, the people of Europe don’t have any idea how much we love them. And lately, in the years to come – I believe this – we, not we exactly, but tomorrow’s Russian until the last, will understand that to be someone a real Russian means to try to bring together all the european conflicts, to offer the solution of european anxiety with the form of panhuman russian soul which combines everything, to enclose in it with brotherly love all our brothers and finally, maybe, to offer the higher reason of great global harmony, of brotherhood all of the nations into the Evangelical law of Christ!” [my translation].

had already proposed¹⁵, although the two men were fond of each other views about the concept of Godmanhood¹⁶.

The vision of Dostoevsky was holy-spiritual and had Christological dimension because he was looking forward not in a secular establishment of God's kingdom but to its existential internalization¹⁷. Therefore, Orthodoxy for the Russian writer preserved the ideal humanity created in the image of God which was the most valuable idea for the humankind¹⁸. This

¹⁵ For a negative interpretation of Soloviev's utopian ecumenicity see the chapter "The Seductive Path of Vladimir Solov'ev" from G. FLOROVSKY, *Ways of Russian Theology: Part Two, CW v. VI*, pp. 243-251.

¹⁶ See G. FLOROVSKY, *Dostoevsky and Europe*, p. 79, where Florovsky refers to Soloviev's opinion about Dostoevsky related with the concept of global harmony that the Russian Church would bring to the world from the tight way of pain and sacrifice. About the relation between the two men, Florovsky quoted that (p. 81, fn. 5): "The authority of the testimony of Soloviev, who was close to Dostoevsky during the last years of his life, in the very period when the quoted words were written, is enhanced by our knowledge that he himself was inclined toward the "earthly kingdom" — both in earlier times (the end of the 70s) when he went with Dostoevsky to the Optina Monastery, and especially when he wrote the words quoted above (1883). That was a little before the appearance in Rus of his "Great Dispute," with its sharply delineated Catholic-theocratic tendencies". As to the opinion that Dostoevsky has already been familiar with the concept of Godmanhood of Soloviev, this is concluded from the fact that the Russian writer had attended the Lecture for Godmanhood of the Russian philosopher and related with him personally at the end of his life. See V. SOLOVIEV, *The idea of Ecumenicity in the work of Dostoevsky*, trans. – prof., D. B. Triantafyllidis, (Thessaloniki: P. Pournaras, 1989), pp. 20-23.

¹⁷ *Idem*, p. 73,

¹⁸ *Idem*, p. 78: "And that 'idea' includes within itself an independent and complex cultural-social ideal, an ideal of the great, universal, all-national, all-fraternal union in Christ's name, about 'the all-national and universal church, realized on earth, to the extent that the earth may contain it'. Orthodoxy is namely 'human progress and human civilization', the way it is understood by the Russian people, who trace

incarnated ecumenicity was, in fact, the cultural proposition that would be adopted by Florovsky against the nationalist project of Eurasianism¹⁹ in his days. This was, in fact, an ecclesiastical Ecumenicity based in the *ascesis* of the gnostic will and the promotion of divine spirit which aimed to the liberation of man from his self-destructive egotism²⁰.

In the two year period 1930-31, Florovsky published three texts about the thought of the Russian writer which revealed his tension to promote the Dostoevskian theory in the religious field. In his first article, *The Dead Ends of Romanticism*, Florovsky proclaimed that the Russian litterateur fulfilled Alexander Herzen's proposition against the excess of the chiliastic optimism which was carefully hidden into the stream of romanticism. That excess operated as the first motive in Dostoevsky's thought and combined it with the problem of freedom.

More specifically this was a basic dimension provided by the Russian writer the idea that human personality could only be developed into growing conditions of liberty. However, this kind of freedom should be under existential rules. Otherwise,

everything to Christ and who personify their future in Christ and in Christ's truth because they cannot imagine themselves without Christ".

¹⁹ For the history of Florovsky's involvement with eurasianism see K. J. MjøR, *Reformulating Russia. The Cultural and Intellectual Historiography of Russian First-Wave Émigré Writers*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. 156-165.

²⁰ *Idem*, p. 79: "Only in Orthodoxy is the individual completely liberated, precisely because in it is proclaimed not his inherently destructive self-assertion, but rather his self-denial, his trial, even to the point of sacrificing his life. And indeed, only he who loses his soul will find it, not he who preserves it. 'Voluntary, completely conscious and uncoerced self-sacrifice for the good of all', says Dostoevsky, 'is a sign of the highest self-mastery, of the highest freedom of will'".

human passions are revealed and oppress other's freedom²¹. So, softening the human passions was the general issue in Dostoevsky's novels, with the story of the Great Inquisitor to be his classical paradigm where he localized the romeo-Catholic system as the oppressor of freedom²².

Therefore, Dostoevsky's proposition could be analyzed in two correlated matters "*the fate of man as the fate of history*"²³, and the synthetic solution was "*to see God and to find oneself in God – to reach one's fellow-creature and the world through God*"²⁴. This synergetic synthesis of human freedom with world-history, was the solution that Dostoevsky was looking forward to the tragedy of human civilization. Moreover, that would be a reality only when a man could solve his existential problem of freedom.

The recognition of the existence of evil in human heart on Dostoevsky's novels, where his heroes fight with their personal passions, shows his promising synthesis between liberated men from passions and human society. "*Only in the good can man find himself. (...) And for Dostoevsky, speech does not originate in the abstract principle of the good, but in the personal God and above all in Christ*"²⁵.

²¹ See G. FLOROVSKY, "The Dead Ends of Romanticism", *Philosophy: Philosophical Problems and Movements*, CW v. XII, p. 59.

²² *Idem*, pp. 59-60.

²³ *Idem*, p. 61.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Idem*, p. 63. Cf. R. WILLAMS, *Dostoevsky. Language, Faith and Fiction*, (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 183: "As Florovsky says, Dostoevsky never loses focus on the Word made flesh, and if we look at the notebooks for Devils, we find in the notes and drafts for Stavrogin's conversation with Tikhon the contrast drawn between trying to "make a leap," changing the world by some dramatic gesture or policy, and the process that will "regenerate the image of man in oneself." The

As Florovsky wrote in his second article *The Evolution of the Dostoevskian Concept of Human Freedom* in 1931, Dostoevsky's synthesis could only be achieved within the church. Freedom is accomplished through love and brotherhood, which are the fundamental elements of the catholicity (sobornost) in Christ's body (church). Into church, human personality ceases to be unrealistic because it is grounded in the solid space of tradition, as the timeless expression of catholicity and draws from there the ontological identity of ontological embodiment in Christ²⁶. Besides, it is not strange that according to Florovsky "*Dostoevsky dreamed about 'Russian socialism,' but he envisioned the 'Russian monk'*"²⁷, showing from his point of view how much the Russian writer had invested in the value and magnificence of ascetic tradition as the only solution for healthy and harmonic society. So it is not strange that at the same period when Florovsky published his patrology volumes from his St. Sergius lectures in Paris, he prejudged that the only solution for the ecumenical problem was the timeless values of monasticism

notion that renewal can be brought about by anything other than the labor of self-restoration is illusory".

²⁶ See G. FLOROVSKY, "The Evolution of the Dostoevskian Concept of Human Freedom", *Theology and Literature*, CW v. XI, p. 85: "'Soillessness' worries him on a deeper level. Before him stood the frightening specter of the spiritual renegade — the fatal image of one who is a wanderer more than a pilgrim. Here again is the typical theme of romantic metaphysics alarmed by the collapse of organic ties, by alienation from and break with the self-willed personality with his environment, with tradition, with God. And the 'cult of the soil' is precisely a return to primordial wholeness, to the ideal and task of a whole life. For Dostoevsky, as for many others, it was a project for a still unrecognized sobornost. Division is present in all forms of life, especially in human existence".

²⁷ *Idem*, p. 86.

as an application of Eastern Orthodox spirituality in the ecumenical dialogue²⁸.

However, Dostoevsky's legacy has not been well-known because he fulfilled some philosophical synthesis or system but as he transmitted his metaphysical experience²⁹. Thus, it was Florovsky's task to apply for his intellectual status to systematize Dostoevsky's experience. In other words, he proclaimed that the transformation of Dostoevsky's literal work into a theological system was his personal bet to approve his epistemology.

*"Dostoevsky does not present a synthesis. He did not know how to develop his experience notionally, how to combine it into ideas. As a whole, his creativity is only sublime mythology, and thus there is still the task [emphasis on the word task at this citation and to the next ones, is ours] of speculative analysis. There is still metaphysical ore to be smelted and forged here. This is only the beginning — but it is the start of a new way, the way of Christian metaphysics, personality, and history"*³⁰.

²⁸ See G. FLOROVSKY, *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers, CW v. X*, pp. 104-105: "Herein lies a sorely troublesome controversy in the history of Christianity, a controversy that still is not addressed adequately in the present Ecumenical Movement. It is a problem that involves the very essence of Christianity, of a Christian vision of God, the world and redemption, a problem that exploded before the very eyes of Martin Luther who at first was not overly certain about the rejection of monasticism was anti-Biblical. Herein lies a great controversy, a dispute which still divides Christianity and carries with it two completely different visions of the very nature of spiritual life".

²⁹ See G. FLOROVSKY, *The Evolution of the Dostoevskian Concept of Human Freedom*, p. 86.

³⁰ See G. FLOROVSKY, *The Dead Ends of Romanticism*, p. 64; "The Brothers Karamazov: An Evaluation of Komarovich's Work" *Theology and Literature, CW v. XI*, σ. 93: "The creative path of Dostoevsky was

At this point, we have to detect that the concept of task for which Florovsky did so much work has an exceptional meaning and shows how he was putting himself in the field of theology and also the landmark which differed him from S. Bulgakov. It is not only an aspect of his disagreement with the sophiological teaching that Gavriilyuk maintains as the major conflict of the two men. The word *task* is found in most of Florovsky's articles and constantly shows his will to be in consequence with the Orthodox phronema of holy-patristic tradition in his days. On the contrary, Bulgakov as one of Soloviev's successors understood his personal task as adjusting dogma in the contemporary word, but to be expressed with the language of western philosophy and liberated from the static language of patristic theology. Certainly, sophiology was only a dimension of this view³¹. Therefore, the interpretation of *Christian Hellenism*, as

not direct, it meandered. And all the flourishes and zigzags he creatively incorporated into his synthesis as its dialectical moments and motifs. Dostoevsky was strongly disturbed by the temptation of chiliasm; he was not always able to vanquish it. Nor was he able to vanquish it in his last novel. But he did brightly illuminate the path of the outcome. The mysterious vision of Alesha over the grave of the staretz goes beyond the edge of history. The 'Galilean Cana' is the end of history illuminating historical toil with serraphic light. This is not a synthesis, but rather the theme of synthesis: not chiliasm, but transformation and resurrection. The works of Dostoevsky are raw metaphysical ore; they both await and demand speculative processing. Perhaps the time for this is already upon us".

³¹ See G. FLOROVSKY, "Western Influences in Russian Theology", *Aspects of Church History, CW*, v. IV, p. 177: "From Solov'ev this tradition, taken up by his spiritual followers and successors [definitely Bulgakov was one of those], passed into the contemporary religio-philosophical tradition. To such an understanding of theological tasks one should

the patristic synthesis between the experience of revealed Logos with classical philosophy and its application to the present as neopatristic synthesis, was the task which Florovsky undertook to accomplish, so as to formulate the unaccomplished synthesis of Dostoevsky between man and history.

3 Neopatristic Synthesis

On September 1948 when Florovsky settled in America, he began to use the term of neopatristic synthesis in his articles³². His first reference was when he took up his duties as a dean on

oppose another: the task of theology lies not so much in translating the Tradition of faith into contemporary language, into the terms of the most recent philosophy, but lies rather in discovering in the ancient patristic tradition the perennial principles of Christian philosophy; this task lies not in controlling dogma by means of contemporary philosophy but rather in re-shaping philosophy on the experience of faith itself so that the experience of faith would become the source and measure of philosophical views. The weakest side of Solov'ev and his school was precisely this misuse of the speculative process which can enchain, and often even deform, Tradition and the experience of faith. The influence of German philosophy, in any case, organically penetrated Russian theological consciousness”.

³² See G. FLOROVSKY, “The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology”, *Anglican Theological Review*, Chicago, v. 31, n. 2, 1949, (65-71). “On the History of Ecclesiology”, *Ecumenism II: A Historical Approach*, CW v. XIV, (9-17). “The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church by Vladimir Lossky”, *The Journal of Religion*, v. 32, n. 3, 1958, (207-208). “Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church”, *Aspects of Church History*, CW v. IV, (11-30). A. BLANE, “A Sketch of Life of Georges Florovsky”, *Georges Florovsky. Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman*, Andrew Blane (ed.), Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993 p. 154.

4th of November 1948 at St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary. He elucidated in a first level the task of neopatristic synthesis and secondly he put the red lines between his school (neopatristic) and the Russian (religiophilosophical)³³.

Specifically, since he had already admitted the return of Russian intelligentsia in church, yet he disapproved of the dangerous and dead-ending venture of her representatives. In other words, he turned down the religiophilosophical proposition which was a reinterpretation of patristic tradition with new philosophical terms from German Idealism and an *unhealthy mysticism*³⁴.

Thus, the legacy of Russian school was concentrated mostly in the preservation of patristic faith and the free spirit of her representatives³⁵. However, for Florovsky what coming first was the orthodox task which was greater than any other intellectual legacy.

"The task is perhaps more inspiring than the legacy. And, the task of a contemporary Orthodox theologian is intricate and enormous. He has much to learn still before he can speak with authority. And above all he has to realize that he has to

³³ For the characterization of this term by Florovsky see one of his first articles written in 1923, G. FLOROVSKY, "In the World of Quests and Wanderings. The Passion of False Prophecy and Pseudo-Revelations", *A Revolution of the Spirit: Crisis of Value in Russia, 1890-1924*, (eds.) B. G. Rosenthal & M. Bohachevsky-Chomiak, New York: Fordham University Press, 1990, p. 238,

³⁴ See G. FLOROVSKY, *The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology*, p. 69: "Unfortunately, this reinterpretation was unnecessarily linked with the adoption of German idealistic philosophy, of Hegel, Schelling, and Baader, and very much of unhealthy mysticism has crept into the schemes constructed by Vladimir Soloviev, the late Father Sergius Bulgakov, Father Paul Florensky, and perhaps most of all the late Nicolas Berdiaev".

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

talk to an ecumenical audience. He cannot retire into a narrow shell of some local tradition —simply because of his Orthodox, i.e. the Patristic, tradition is not a local one, but an ecumenical one. And he has to use all his skill to phrase this ecumenical message of the Fathers in such a way as to secure an ecumenical, a truly universal appeal. This obviously cannot be achieved by any servile repetition of the Patristic letter, as it cannot be achieved by a Biblical fundamentalism either. But servility is alien both to the Bible and to the Fathers. They were themselves bold and courageous and adventurous seekers of the Divine truth. To walk truly in their steps means to break the new ways, only in the same field as was theirs. No renewal is possible without a return to the sources. However, it must be a return to the sources, to the Well of living water, and not simply a retirement into a library or museum of venerable and respectable, but outlived relics. (...) The true theology can spring only out of a deep liturgical experience. It must become once more, as it has been in the age of the Fathers, a witness of the Church, worshiping and preaching, and cease to be merely a school-exercise of curiosity and speculation. This liturgical approach to Theology has always been the distinctive mark of the Orthodox Church. (...) We are perhaps on the eve of a new synthesis in theology—of a neopatristic synthesis, I would suggest. Theological tradition must be reintegrated, not simply summed up or accumulated. This seems to be one of the immediate objectives of the Church in our age. It appears to be the secure start for the healing of Christian disruption. An ecumenical cooperation in theology is already a fact; Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars are already working together in many directions. The Orthodox have to join in”³⁶.

³⁶ *Idem*, pp. 69-70.

From this extensive quotation we can regard three essential points that formulate the principles of neopatristic synthesis and also Florovsky's task: a) return not to the letter but to the patristic spirit of *Christian Hellenism*³⁷ which is the interpretation key of neopatristic synthesis, b) Orthodox theology has an organic relation to liturgical experience, as a testament to church's life and c) the connection between holy-patristic theology and ecumenicity of orthodox tradition, as a testimony for the participation of Orthodox Church in ecumenical dialogue, and also a proposed solution for the ecumenical problem (this was Florovsky's ecumenical task)!

Almost ten years later, Florovsky defended neopatristic synthesis with an announcement on the Congress of Faith and Order in Athens, *Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church*. It is fascinating how he interpreted the introductory expression of Chalcedonian Oros "*Following the Holy Fathers...*", which meant a reference not to some vacant

³⁷ For the concept of returning to patristic spirit as the major *task* for contemporary orthodox theology see G. FLOROVSKY, "Christian Hellenism" *The Orthodox Observer*, no. 442, 1957, p. 10: "We quote the Fathers, with assurance and conviction, but do we really live by their message? Precisely because, in our own days, the Orthodox Church is facing new issues, new problems, in a changing and changed world, and has to respond to the new challenge of the contemporary situation in complete loyalty to her tradition, it is our bounded duty to recover the creative spirit of Christian Hellenism, and to be as alive to the claims of our own epoch, as the masters of old were alive to the challenge of their age. In brief, one has to learn to be at once 'ancient' and 'modern'. The task of our time in the Orthodox world is to rebuild the Christian-Hellenic culture, not to the relics and memories of the past, but out of the perennial spirit of our Church, in which the values of culture were truly 'christened'. Let us be more "Hellenic" in order that we may be truly Christian".

tradition but the holy-spiritual testimony of specific persons³⁸. Florovsky made clear his position identifying ecclesiastical phronema with the concept of tradition, as continuity from apostolic to patristic period.

Therefore, mentioning patristic teaching is not an anachronism, but a testimony of true faith and perennial category of Christian tradition³⁹. Thus, Florovsky maintained that patristic theology was not an intellectual and philosophical theology which tried to find truth in an Aristotelian way, but on the contrary, it was existential and revelatory of holy-spiritual truth which was accomplished in the Body of Christ⁴⁰.

He also emphasized that the *following the fathers* was, in reality, an acquisition of their mind-phronema, *ad mentem patrum*. The collaboration of rational thinking and ecclesiastical life, faith, and knowledge, is the growing frame of orthodox theology and patristic phronema, thus whichever kind of reference to patristic theology could not be independent of church father's mind⁴¹. Therefore, since the age of the fathers continues in the devotional life of the Church and Christians apply the principles

³⁸ See G. FLOROVSKY, *Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, p. 16.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ *Idem*, p. 17; "Theological Tensions among Christians", *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach*, CW v. XIII, p. 12: "For both theology and doctrine are not philosophy. It is not a speculation on religious topics or problems but does not exclude the theological use of reasons. But it begins, earnestly and emphatically, with revelation — not with an innate 'revelation' of the truth in the human mind, but with a concrete Revelation in history, with a true encounter. It is a personal datum — not because it is a private business of human personalities but because it is a self-disclosure and challenge of a Divine Person of the Personal God".

⁴¹ *Idem*, p. 18: "'To follow the Fathers' does not mean simply to quote their sentences. It means to acquire their mind, their phronema. The Orthodox Church claims to have preserved this mind [phronema] and to have theologized ad mentem Patrum".

of patristic life and tradition in their daily lives, theologians too have to discover the patristic thought, as disclosed in the tradition of the church⁴². In other words, theologians must follow the patristic example at the level of theological research and study. Thus, Florovsky insisted on the relation of charismatic patristic theology with fathers' epistemological knowledge, as we see it happens in Cappadocian fathers, which was also necessary for contemporary theologians⁴³.

⁴² *Idem*, p. 21: "In this sense, it can be contended, 'the age of the Fathers' still continues alive in the 'Worshiping Church'. Should it not continue also in the schools, in the field of theological research and instruction? Should we not recover 'the mind of the Fathers' also in our theological thinking and confession? 'Recover', indeed, not as an archaic pose and habit, and not just as a venerable relic, but as an existential attitude, as a spiritual orientation. Actually, we are already living in an age of revival and restoration. Yet it is not enough to keep a 'Byzantine Liturgy', to restore a 'Byzantine style' in Iconography and Church architecture, to practice Byzantine modes of prayer and self-discipline. One has to go back to the very roots of this traditional 'piety' which has been always cherished as a holy inheritance. One has to recover the patristic mind. Otherwise one will be still in danger of being internally split—between the 'traditional' pattern of 'piety' and the untraditional pattern of mind. As 'worshippers', the Orthodox have always stayed in the 'tradition of the Fathers'. They must stand in the same tradition also as 'theologians'. In no other way can the integrity of Orthodox existence be retained and secured".

⁴³ See G. FLOROVSKY, "The Vessels of Clay", *SVTQ*, v. 3, n. 3-4, Sp-Sum 1955, (2-4), p. 4: "We praise the Three Hierarchs, who were, above all, the ecumenical teachers, the teachers of right faith, but we are strangely indifferent to their perennial contribution to the life of the Church: this was their teaching, their theology, their interpretation of the Christian truth 'in the words of reason'. And do we not need, first of all, an illumination of our reason by the 'Light of Reason' in the present days of intellectual confusion? Without a sober guidance, without the red thread of sound doctrine, our feelings would but err and our hearts would be blinded".

So, the Russian theologian preserved that neopatristic synthesis as a return to the fathers could be creative only to the meter where modern theologians are in a position to hypostasize themselves in patristic holy-spirituality as a charismatic way of faith and knowledge of the church. Under these presuppositions, he succeeded to maintain that neopatristic synthesis is necessary for contemporary Orthodox theology because Orthodox tradition was always patristic and the ecumenical problem which is related to separated Christianity could be solved only into the patristic context⁴⁴. Florovsky fulfilled the concept of neopatristic synthesis by establishing as its main principle the Christological and soteriological criterion. *“The synthesis must begin with the central vision of the Christian faith: Christ Jesus, as God and Redeemer, Humiliated and Glorified, the Victim and the Victor on the Cross”*⁴⁵.

At this point, we disagree with Baker who stressed that Florovsky’s emphasis on Christological criterion is in some way a continuity of the second right synthesis by Soloviev as it was appeared on his last documents, while his first synthesis was theocratic and was aiming to a utopian ecumenicity.

⁴⁴ See G. FLOROVSKY, *Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, p. 22: “This brings us to the concept of a Neopatristic synthesis, as the task and aim of Orthodox theology today. The Legacy of the Fathers is a challenge for our generation, in the Orthodox Church and outside of it. Its recreative power has been increasingly recognized and acknowledged in these recent decades, in various corners of divided Christendom. The growing appeal of patristic tradition is one of the most distinctive marks of our time. For the Orthodox this appeal is of special urgency and importance, because the total tradition of Orthodoxy has always been patristic. One has to reassess both the problems and the answers of the Fathers. In this study the vitality of patristic thought, and its perennial timeliness, will come to the fore”.

⁴⁵ *Idem*, p. 23.

Specifically, Florovsky in 1955 wrote an interesting article with the title *Reason and Faith in the Philosophy of Solov'ev* where it is evident that he was not Soloviev's follower but he also criticized him for a negative way for lack of ontological commitment with Christ which is the most valuable measure for a successive synthesis⁴⁶. While on his last reference to this article he distanced himself absolutely from whichever kind of relation he had with the Russian philosopher at the beginning of his academic career⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ See G. FLOROVSKY, "Reason and Faith in the Philosophy of Solov'ev", *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought*, (ed.) E.J. Simmons, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955, p. 295: "It is true, Solov'ev emphasizes here personal incarnation, but still the stress is rather on the (eternal) Idea, which, as he points out himself, is essentially the same in Philo or Plotinus, in Origen or Gregory of Nazianzus. As much as Solov'ev did say about Christ in his various writings, he never was in the center of his speculations. Now, in his last 'Story' he radically changes the approach. And in this new perspective the whole problem of 'faith' and 'reason' had to assume a radically new content. But Solov'ev did not live long enough even to start this revision. In a sense, his 'Story' was his 'Retractationes'. The 'Story' ends in a double synthesis, a false peace of the antichrist and a true 'reunion of churches', and the latter is based on a common confession of Jesus Christ Who came in the flesh (1 John 4.2-3). The test is here historical, and not philosophical. And what is required now is not just a renunciation of one's self, but a positive commitment to the Living Person".

⁴⁷ *Idem*, p. 297, fn. 39: "Some recent writers paid me underserved honor by quoting my very old bibliographical article, buried in a provincial periodical, to allege my authority for the full conformity of Solov'ev with 'the genuinr spirit of Eastern Orthodoxy'; see K. Muchul'skii, Vladimir Solov'ev. Zhisn' i uchenie (2nd ed., Paris, 1951), p.119 and Peter P. Zouboff, Godmanhood as the Main Idea of the Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov (Poughkeepsie, 1944), p. 43. The latter author adds, in a footnote, that this estimate of mine 'has been disputed by at least one contemporary Church authority'. He could have added that it had been strongly repudiated by me, as one could have learned, e.g. from

4 Holy-Patristic Ecumenicity

A thoughtful consideration of ecumenicity in Florovsky's work includes the existence of a problem, the ecumenical problem. This is related with the ascertainment that even the church is one in her nature, to her ontological existence, thus in her experimental aspect, she is divided into her parts⁴⁸. Thus, the ecumenical problem is a paradox –*ecumenical paradox*– because the church was and continues to be one in her historical dimension even the existence of this division⁴⁹. Under these presuppositions, Florovsky anticipated his role in the ecumenical movement and specifically in the 1st Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Amsterdam in 1948, as a missionary, because he considered himself as an ambassador of the one catholic-orthodox church who was not afraid to come in the ecumenical dialogue⁵⁰. His ecumenical task was to show

my later (and also bibliographical) article, 'Molodost' Vladimira Solov'eva', in Put, no. 9 (January 1928). How could it escape the attention of readers that the article the quoted had been written when the writer was still in his teens and therefore should not be imputed to him thirty-five years later? I use this opportunity for a formal 'retraction' of my fully incompetent 'estimate' of my undergraduate youth".

⁴⁸ See G. FLOROVSKY, "The Doctrine of the Church and the Ecumenical Problem", *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. II, n. 2, 1950 (152-161), p. 153.

⁴⁹ See G. FLOROVSKY, "The Problem of Ecumenical Encounter", *Rediscovering Eastern Christendom: Essays in memory of Dom Bede Winslow*, (eds.) E.J.B. Fry & A.H. Armstrong, (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1963), 63-76, p. 65.

⁵⁰ See G. FLOROVSKY, "The Orthodox Contribution to the Ecumenical Movement", *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach*, CW v. III, pp. 160-161: "I regard Orthodox participation in the Ecumenical Movement in the same way as missionary action. The Orthodox Church is specifically called to play a part in ecumenical exchanges of ideas, precisely because it is aware of its own role as guardian of apostolic faith and of Tradition in their full integral shape, and it is in this sense the only

that the Orthodox Church was not a local one which represented only the East. On the contrary, he insisted that Orthodox ecumenism should go through patristic tradition as the certain criterion for the reunion of churches⁵¹. So, he called

true Church; since it knows that it holds the treasure of divine grace through the continuity of the ministry and apostolic succession; and finally because in this way it can claim a special place among divided Christianity. Orthodoxy is the universal truth, the truth for the whole world, for all the ages and all nations. These are the reasons the Orthodox Church is called and obligated to illustrate the truth of Christ always and everywhere, before the whole world". This article was published after the 1st Assembly of WCC in 1949 under the title "Une Vue sur l'Assemblée d'Amsterdam", *Irenikon*, v. 22, n. 1 (5-25), but it is included in Collected Works of G. Florovsky with different title.

⁵¹ *Idem*, p. 161: "If I define the task and nature of Orthodox participation in the Ecumenical Movement as missionary, I do not understand the term as meaning direct propaganda or proselytizing [...] Such a position brings us also to the 'common ground,' in other words to 'the undivided Church'. The Orthodox theologian can and must represent the contemporary 'East' less than ecumenical antiquity itself. That is why it will never take sides with those who only necessarily represent the present or the recent past, or even something older but already tainted by provincialism due to the breaking up of unique Tradition. Early history is obviously important, mostly due to its integral, synthetic character rather than its longevity. Orthodoxy expresses the patristic moment within the economy of Ecumenism. In any case, it is only there that Orthodox Ecumenism finds its meaning and justification. The reference to contemporary currents of, 'oriental' (or, rather, Russian) theology can only ever have a subordinated, limited and not always positive meaning". In 1954, when Florovsky participated in the 2nd WCC Assembly at Evanston he adopted the term *ecumenicity* in his theological vocabulary, showing with this way that he preferred it more than the word *ecumenism*. At his address he insisted again that true ecumenicity could be applied only if the member churches admitted their dogmatic differences, which was the main cause for the separation of churches, as the true ecumenical criterion. See G. FLOROVSKY, "The Challenge of Disunity", *St Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, v. 3 n. 1-2, Fall - Winter 1954 - 1955, (31-36), p. 35: "The tension, which had been described at Amsterdam as 'our

the member churches of WCC for an ontological relationship with Christ, as the Head of the Church, for the union to be accomplished under dogmatic presuppositions⁵².

In *Ecumenical Aims and Doubts* the main speech which Florovsky delivered in plenary session on an opening day in Amsterdam, we can detect four important points which constitute his ecumenical proposition: a) “[t]here is no common mind in the Christian world. The first ecumenical task is namely that of creating it”⁵³, b) he maximized the dogmatic differences between churches as the main cause of ecumenical problem⁵⁴, c) he applied his neopatristic synthesis in ecumenical dialogue and he proclaimed that “the only way towards ecumenical synthesis is the way of combined return and renewal, rebirth and repentance (...) True synthesis presumes a discrimination”⁵⁵ and finally d) he maintained that the reunion of churches is a divine gift and it would be accomplished on the one Body of Christ (Catholic Church)⁵⁶. With these four dimensions in his mind,

deepest difference’, belongs to the very heart of the Ecumenical problem. It is this tension that gives the true ecumenicity to the Ecumenical quest”.

⁵² *Idem*, p. 162.

⁵³ G. FLOROVSKY, “Ecumenical Aims and Doubts: An Address at the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, 1948”, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach*, CW v. III, p. 22.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*: “The ecumenical situation is utterly antinomical and rather ambiguous, and the ecumenical problem is tragic. For Christians, tragedy means no less than sin. There is therefore no “irenical” solution. Tragedy culminates only in catastrophe or crisis. The human tragedy has already culminated in the catastrophe of the Cross. The human response to this Divine crisis of history must be repentance and faith. Peace and glory come only by the Cross”.

⁵⁵ *Idem*, p. 25.

⁵⁶ *Idem*, p. 26: “The ultimate goal –the true restoration of Christian unity in faith and charity- is indeed beyond human planning and human reach, and it is perhaps even on the other side of historical horizons.

Florovsky tried to apply the idea of neopatristic synthesis in ecumenical dialogue aiming to recreate the patristic mind as the only solution for an applied ecumenicity.

Therefore, in 1950 Florovsky wrote a great article under the title *The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement*, and insisted that “[t]he unity of the Christian mind was lost long before Communion was broken. The schism was first consummated in minds before it was enacted in practice in the realm of rule and administration”⁵⁷. Specifically, he maintained that on the timeless history of united Christianity somehow it appeared a break between Hellenic and Latin thought, which had a common reference the Greek language previously⁵⁸. The result was that each church considered the other as schismatic⁵⁹.

However, Florovsky identified the Eastern Orthodox Church with one Catholic and ecumenical church, because she did not stay in the strong frame of a local tradition, but she expressed and continued to do it the common legacy of one Catholic church⁶⁰. *“In one sense, the Eastern Church is a survival of*

The ultimate unity can come only from above, as a free gift of Almighty God”.

⁵⁷ G. FLOROVSKY, “The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement”, *Theology Today* 7, n. 1, 1950 (68-79), p. 69.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ *Idem*, p. 71.

⁶⁰ *Idem*, p. 72: “The witness of the Eastern Church is precisely a witness to the common background of ecumenical Christianity because she stands not so much for a local tradition of her own but for the common heritage of the Church universal. Her voice is not merely a voice of the Christian East but a voice of Christian antiquity. The Eastern witness points not only to the East but to an Oikoumene, in which East and West belong together in the peace of God and in the fellowship of the primitive tradition”.

ancient Christianity as it has been shaped in the age of the Ecumenical Councils and of the Holy Fathers. The Eastern Church stands exactly for the Patristic tradition"⁶¹. While in western church occurred an ontological loss from common patristic tradition with the form of scholasticism which emphasized only in Augustinian theology.

Therefore a perception prevailed in western theology which took for granted that patristic tradition was only a historical reminiscence⁶². *"We have to realize that, as a matter of fact, Christian Hellenism was never a peculiarly Eastern phenomenon. Hellenism is the common basis and background of all Christian civilization. It is simply incorporated into our Christian existence, whether we like it or not"*⁶³.

Indeed, the background of neopatristic synthesis was at its core an ecumenical proposition which would include all the answers for western and eastern philosophical questions that could be given only through *Christian Hellenism*, the patristic spirit, and thought. Namely, this creative return to the fathers does not mean an abandonment of western challenges and demands for orthodox theology. On the contrary, Orthodox theology is challenged to give answers to western (non-orthodox) questions derived from the depth of Orthodox tradition as the

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² *Ibidem*: "But in the West, in the Middle Ages, this Patristic tradition was reduced or impoverished (for a considerable period of time "Patristic" meant in the West simply "Augustinian," and everything else was ignored or forgotten), and again it has been obscured and overburdened with a later scholastic superstructure. Thus in the West it became a sort of an historical reminiscence, just a piece of the past that had passed away and must be rediscovered by an effort of memory".

⁶³ *Idem*, p. 74.

holy-spiritual testimony of truth⁶⁴. Eventually, we consider that this is the only way to solve the “*European anguish*” as Dostoevsky used to proclaim in his writings and Florovsky took the challenge to propose a theological system with his neopatristic synthesis⁶⁵. “*This will constitute for Orthodox thought the best possible antidote against the hidden or unknown poisons which affect it. Orthodoxy is called upon to answer the*

⁶⁴ See G. FLOROVSKY, “Ways of Russian Theology”, *Aspects of Church History, CW* v. IV, pp. 199-200: “It is not sufficient to repeat the ready-made answers of the West; we must rather analyze them and personally experience them, penetrate and appropriate to ourselves all the problematics and the drama of Western religious thought, follow and interpret the most difficult and winding course travelled since the Schism. One cannot possibly enter into a life as it is being created, except through the channel of its problematics, and one must feel and perceive it precisely in its problematic aspect as a quest and as an unrelenting search. Orthodox theology shall not be able to establish its independence from western influences unless it reverts to the Patristic sources and foundations. This does not mean forsaking our time, withdrawing from history, deserting the battlefield. We must not only retain the experience of the Fathers, but moreover develop it while discovering it, and use it in order to create a living work. Likewise, independence with regard to the heterodox West must not degenerate into alienation. Breaking away from the West does not bring about any true liberation. Orthodox thought has to feel the Western difficulties or temptations and bear with them; it may not usurp the right to bypass or brazenly to ignore them.” This article is the concluding chapter of Florovsky’s *magnus opus* monography *Ways of Russian Theology* which was published in French in 1949 and is related chronologically with our research. Here we quote the English translation.

⁶⁵ *Idem*, p. 200: “We must, through creative thinking, resume and transmute all this experience of the West, its pangs and its doubts; we must take upon ourselves, as Dostoevsky used to say, ‘the European anguish’, accumulated through centuries of creative history. It is only through such sympathy, such active compassion, that the divided Christian world may possibly find the way to union, welcome the separated brethren and witness their return to unity”.

questions of the heterodox from the utmost depth of its continuous Catholic experience and to offer to Western heterodoxy less a refutation than a testimony, even the truth of Orthodoxy"⁶⁶.

For that reason, the concept of holy-patristic ecumenicity as the common way of theological thought and life which has characterized Christianity for more than a thousand years should also contribute again for the realization of a true ecumenicity, because it is still alive in eastern tradition and could be transmitted in western too. The succession of this integration of western church along with Eastern in the common patristic tradition was Florovsky's ecumenical task, during his commitment in ecumenical movement under the banner of neopatristic synthesis.

"There is no reason to believe that these differences or varieties are ultimately irreconcilable and cannot or should not be integrated or rather re-integrated into the fullness of the Catholic mind. Possibly this reintegration has not yet been conscientiously attempted. I am pleading now that such a task should be urgently undertaken. We have to examine the existing tensions and divergences with a prospective synthesis in view. I mean exactly what I say: a synthesis and integration, and not just a toleration of the existing varieties or particular views. No ultimate synthesis is possible in history but still there is a measure of integration, for every age. Our fault is precisely that we are at the time, behind our own time. We have to recognize the

⁶⁶ *Ibidem.*

*common ground that existed a long time ago. This seems to be the most imposing ecumenical task*⁶⁷.

Holy-patristic ecumenicity would again be a helpful way for the reunion of churches only when the two churches participate in the joint way of patristic thinking (mind) or, in other words when they will act *patristically*⁶⁸. So this genuine ecumenicity that Florovsky spoke could only be realized only through the neopatristic synthesis, not as a clear correlation of local ecclesiological traditions, but as an embodiment in patristic tradition of the timeless holy-spiritual experience and theological way of thinking⁶⁹.

Conclusion

In one of his last articles *The Problem of Ecumenical Encounter* related to the ecumenical problem which was written in 1963, Florovsky maintained that both Soloviev and Bulgakov indeed had taken part in the ecumenical movement. However, they did not succeed to apply their propositions due to lack of a genuine holy-patristic ecumenicity.

As we saw, this ecumenicity was identified with the enduring historical presence of holy-spiritual tradition which was represented in the theological works and the way of living of the Church Fathers. This was the only secure way for

⁶⁷ G. FLOROVSKY, *The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement*, p. 71.

⁶⁸ *Idem*, p. 77: "In order to interpret the mind of the ancient Church, i.e., the mind of the Fathers, we have to be Patristically-minded ourselves".

⁶⁹ *Idem*, pp. 78-79.

integration in ecumenical movement under the concept of neopatristic synthesis. So, whatever resemblance between Florovsky's synthesis with Soloviev's and Bulgakov's propositions is out of the question.

According to Florovsky, Soloviev himself never managed to apply a successive ecumenical plan for the solution of the ecumenical problem because *"his own ecclesiology was lacking in depth, and his dubious doctrine of Sophia only confused and obscured the actual issue"*⁷⁰.

Moreover, even if in his last years he understood his problem and tried to focus on the reunion of churches in a more *"eschatological expectation beyond the limits of history"*⁷¹, however, he did not manage to achieve anything. *"He did not help the West to grasp the deepest ethos of Christian East, and his zealous followers in Russia did even more harm in this respect. Nor did he help the Russians to appreciate the treasures of the Western tradition – in worship and spirituality, in Christian philosophy, and in other fields, of which he probably was not fully aware himself"*⁷².

From the other hand, Bulgakov only managed to make some ambiguous noise with *intercommunion*, between the Russian and the Anglican church in the frame of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius in the '30s⁷³.

⁷⁰ G. FLOROVSKY, *The Problem of Ecumenical Encounter*, p. 70.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ Idem, p. 75. For the history of intercommunion in the Fellowship See N. ZERNOV, "Some Explanations of Fr. Bulgakov's Scheme for Intercommunion (Drawn by Nicolas Zernov and approved by Fr. Bulgakov)," *Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives*, Oxford, UK, 1933, p. 1, http://www.sobornost.org/Archives_Bulgakov-Intercommunion.pdf.

However, “doctrinal agreement’ is not for him an indispensable prerequisite of sacramental communion”⁷⁴. “His proposal, however, met with strong opposition in the Fellowship itself. Father Bulgakov himself quoted Vladimir Solovyov. In as sense, his scheme is an extension of Solovyov’s conception. Only there is in it much more of wishful thinking than in the daring Utopias of Solovyov, and much more naivete and impatience. Bulgakov’s ecclesiological conception is vague: it is vitiated by a kind of historical docetism”⁷⁵.

Even if Florovsky himself never gave an exact determination of his neopatristic synthesis, we consider that this was happened because as a theologian tried to express his theory in the academic world with an ecclesiastical and missionary attitude. It is remarkable what Florovsky thought for himself when he was asked his opinion about the church fathers in one of his last participations in a theological congress. “A participant noted that the age of the church fathers had ended and was no longer relevant to the modern world. To that, Florovsky replied, ‘The Fathers are not dead. I am still alive!’”⁷⁶. We consider that neopatristic synthesis was an ecumenical task that Florovsky took upon to face the problems of his age and give answers to the ecumenical problem not from his sophisticated way, but as a member of the Orthodox Church – as a Church Father! So his proposition was inaugurated from the ecumenical vision of his favorite writer Dostoevsky and eventually took its form by his attachment to patristic ecumenical theology.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁵ *Idem*, pp. 75-76.

⁷⁶ B. NASSIF, “Georges Florovsky”, in: M. Bauman and M. I. Klauber (eds.), *Historians of the Christian Tradition*, Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holgman Publishers, 1995, (449-68), p. 461.