

Florovsky's "The Boundaries of the Church" in Dialogue with the Reformed Tradition: Toward a Catholic and Charismatic Ecumenical Ecclesiology

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The purpose of this essay is threefold. First, I seek to trace a brief history of the concept of catholicity within the Reformed tradition¹ and offer this historical context as an explanation for its resistance to traditional conceptions of the Church.² Secondly I will show how Georges Florovsky's work "The Boundaries of the Church," offers a better point of reference for Orthodox dialogue with Churches of the Reformed Tradition than other Orthodox ecclesiologies, such as those based solely on St. Cyprian's model, and the ecclesiology of N. Afanassieff. Last, I will use John Calvin's ideas on the church in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* to show that certain contemporary Reformed ecclesiologies do not take into consideration the early Calvinist emphasis on catholicity.

Using the early Christological controversies of Monophysitism and Nestorianism and applying them to ecclesiology, I will illustrate how both the traditionalist Orthodox and evangelical Reformed views of the Church are weak, make extreme claims on the nature of the Church, and must come closer to the center for dialogue. There is hope if doctrinal agreement could be made in two areas—(a) the existence of the Church, at least to some degree, outside the formal walls of any given denominational, canonical structure in a "charismatic" sense, and (b) the intrinsic unity of the Church as a catholic reality. Both these statements must be affirmed for the sides to agree, though agreement must not come at the expense of doctrinal suicide for either tradition.

The Catholicity of the Church in the Reformed Tradition: Resistance or Acceptance?

Before I continue, it is important to distinguish between the current Orthodox and Reformed understanding of "the Church." For Florovsky, though he concedes the Fathers of the Church have been reluctant to "define" the Church in a proper sense, it may be said that the Church contains within it a *historical perspective*, "...which would embrace the whole of the historical experience of the Church in its pilgrimage through the ages."³ In addition, "The

¹ The term *Reformed Tradition*, for the purpose of this essay, refers to the churches associated with the theology of John Calvin. Specifically, this essay focuses on churches unified under the creedal system (those professing the early creeds of the ecumenical councils in addition to the French, Scots, Second Helvetic Confessions, and the Westminster Catechism), thus it excludes the Zwinglian traditions. The majority of these churches utilize a Presbyterian or Synodal polity with the exception of some Congregationalist strands. Interestingly, the Reformed Church of Hungary, the Reformed Church of Romania, and the Polish Reformed Church have all maintained the office of bishop, faithful to a specific interpretation of Calvin.

² By the term *catholicity* I mean an understanding of the Church which takes its entire history seriously and longs to nurture and maintain its intrinsic unity among contemporary ecclesiastical communities. This literally means that every action of a local and particular church "concerns the whole." Though the nature of apostolicity is different among Christian traditions, a catholic view of the Church takes into account the living traditions that have unified it over the years. Protestants typically associate catholicity with the "pure seed" which they seek to restore from the churches as a whole. Aspects of this essay will both uphold and challenge this conception.

³ Georges Florovsky, "The Catholicity of the Church", in *The Church of God*, ed. E. Mascall (London: S.P.C.K, 1934), 58, *emphasis mine*.

Church is the unity of charismatic life. The source of this unity is hidden in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and in the mystery of Pentecost...,” which is continued by means of Apostolic Succession.⁴ As we shall see later, it is this charismatic quality with which Florovsky endows the Church, balancing the canonical/hierarchical fabric of the Church *as an institution* that is an appealing point for Protestants. The Reformed understanding of the Church, and indeed its contention with certain concepts of history and Apostolic Succession, lie in its historical insistence that “...all the people's right in electing a bishop had been taken away. Votes, assent, subscriptions, and all their like had vanished; the whole power was transferred *to the canons alone*.”⁵ This is a reference to the usurping of power by the papacy, allowing the Reformed Church to render the validity of Roman hierarchy questionable, if not corrupt.

The Reformed Church thus views itself as picking up where true apostolicity left off, at the point of conjuncture, prior to the usurpation of Roman power and corruption. As Florovsky states concerning succession, “the objective side is the uninterrupted sacramental succession, the continuity of the hierarchy...the subjective side is loyalty to Apostolic tradition; a life spent according to this tradition, as in a living realm of truth...this demand entails the denial of individual separatism; it insists on catholicity.”⁶ The Reformed Tradition views itself as the byproduct of when loyalty to apostolic succession meant disloyalty to the canonical institution. This is precisely the way the Reformed Church sees its own mission, as upholding the subjective loyalty to the apostolic tradition in the “realm of truth.” The original point was not individuality or even separatism, but a restoration of the one, catholic Church to its divine roots, keeping the holy parts of its history, and emphatically rejecting the doctrinally erroneous elements, which it stated were not present during the time of the apostles and are an abrogation of true apostolicity.⁷ In this sense, both the Orthodox and Reformed churches believe they are bearers of a pure and original ecclesial reality, untainted by deviations—this is precisely why the Orthodox claim the Western church split from *it*.⁸ In some ways, Florovsky's re-evaluation of the boundaries of the Church gives credence to the Reformed concept that, though the Church has an apostolic quality, authority, and propensity for the right administration of the sacraments, the *esse* of the Church cannot be ascribed to the canonical institution alone, particularly when said institution is viewed as corrupt beyond repair.

At least at one point in their history, when the churches of the Reformed Tradition spoke of schism, they thought of the schismatic Roman Catholic Church, and dogmatically speaking, even of the Orthodox! I think that such narrow views of the Church do little to help in contemporary ecumenical dialogue, for they assume the validity of their canonical structure *alone*, meaning that unity, or even agreement, may only occur through conversion to the *superior ecclesia*—Roman, Orthodox, or Reformed.⁹ What is equally worthless is when, as Florovsky

⁴ Ibid, 65.

⁵ Jean Calvin and Ford Lewis Battles, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, The Library of Congress Classics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 1085, *emphasis mine*.

⁶ Georges Florovsky, “The Catholicity of the Church”, in *The Church of God*, ed. E. Mascall (London: S.P.C.K, 1934), 45.

⁷ See Florovsky's mention of the “branch theory of the Church” in Georges Florovsky, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Belmont, MA: Notable and Academic Books, 1989), 34.

⁸ Ioan Sauco, “The Church Beyond Our Boundaries/ The Ecumenical Vocation of Orthodoxy,” *The Ecumenical Review* (April 2004): 2.

⁹ Florovsky holds to a narrow conception of the Church, yet he is able to illustrate more explicitly the Orthodox understanding that the Holy Spirit does indeed move and work in other ecclesial communities, for it is the true Church working within them. For Florovsky's insistence on the Orthodox Church as the only *true* Church, see

points out in his critique of the World Council of Church's "quasi-creedal *basis*," the parameters for dialogue center on a false sense of a utopian whole and a united Christian World, with differences "...restricted to the field of 'order' or 'polity,' to the realm of historic manifestation."¹⁰ Under these conditions, vague confessions of common belief in Christ attempt to gloss over massive dogmatic differences, and worse yet, they confuse the issues and sidestep the question which is at the center of the debate: are these other churches "the Church," in part or in whole—are they catholic?

The answer to this question has been posited in a variety of ways, with the greatest degree of contribution, in terms of ecumenical ecclesiology, by the Orthodox.¹¹ I would suggest that it is time for the Protestant churches in ecumenical dialogue to learn the benefits of viewing division through the lens of "catholicity." This involves not insisting on the unrealistic notion that Catholic and Orthodox churches, connected by 2000 years of Tradition, undergo some sort of "purification" whereby the 16th century standards of Reformed theology are applied, and more so, loosening the expectation that these ancient traditions of the Great Church be placed in the same category, or considered as "denominations."¹² It would likewise be helpful if the Orthodox Church sought generic means, based on their own tradition, to consider the ways in which churches of the Reformed Tradition are indeed members of the catholic communion. It is here that Florovsky's conception of "The Boundaries of the Church" is applicable to the dialogue.

One Church: Charismatic *and* Catholic

Georges Florovsky was able to see in the ecumenical dialogue of the 1970's what is just coming to fruition now between the Reformed and Orthodox communions, and indeed he was able to be "...open and sympathetic to Protestant views and needs without, however, sacrificing Orthodox principles..."¹³ As late as the year 2000 "Common Statement on the Membership and Incorporation into the Body of Christ," the commission claimed that the Reformed hold to an understanding of apostolic succession as *successio fidei*, and that

...they fear the intrusion of human tradition and the temptation to invest an independent priesthood with its own powers, which could then mediate between the people and Christ...for fear that the Lordship of Christ might be eclipsed...each tradition believes that it maintains an unbroken Apostolic succession: the Orthodox through the episcopate; the Reformed through the proclamation of the Apostolic Gospel."¹⁴

It is precisely this divergence in apostolic succession that may be informed by Florovsky's *charismatic* conception of the boundaries of the Church. For the Orthodox, right faith and the valid celebration of the sacraments in line with apostolic succession (attached to the

Georges Florovsky, "The True Church," in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Belmont, MA: Notable and Academic Books, 1989), 134.

¹⁰ Georges Florovsky, "The Quest for Christian Unity and the Orthodox Church," in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Belmont, MA: Notable and Academic Books, 1989), 136.

¹¹ For a further explication of Orthodox contributions to this question, see Nicholas A. Jesson, "Orthodox Contributions to Ecumenical Ecclesiology" (PhD seminar paper, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, Ontario., 2001), 2.

¹² Georges Florovsky, "Ecumenism and the Reformation," in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, *Ecumenism II: A Historical Approach* (Belmont, MA: Notable & Academic Books, 1989), 38.

¹³ John S. Romanides, "Fr. Georges Florovsky: The Theologian in the Service of the Church in Ecumenical Dialogue" (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1980), 1.

¹⁴ L. Vischer, ed., *Agreed Statements from the Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue* (Geneva: WARC, 1998), 3.

important presence, whether literal or symbolic, of the bishop), defines the demarcation lines of the Church. Florovsky critiques St. Cyprian's "...silent supposition that *the canonical and charismatic limits of the Church invariably coincide*. And it is this unproven identification that has not been confirmed by the communal consciousness."¹⁵ Thus, the central question is whether the Church may exist outside a valid apostolic succession, as the concept of succession is maintained in the "heretical sect" or "schismatic entity." It is no wonder why traditionalist Orthodox have been hesitant to recognize the baptism of Protestant churches—there exists a different concept of apostolic succession, which for them is a requirement for the validity and efficacy of sacraments and Church.¹⁶ Florovsky points out that Roman theology "...admits and acknowledges that schismatics have a valid hierarchy and that in a sense, even "apostolic succession" is retained, so that under certain conditions the sacraments can be and actually are accomplished...."¹⁷ Florovsky is able to adopt a similar conception of the charismatic limits of the Church by appealing to Augustine, whom he states considered the sacraments of schismatics valid, and indicative of "...the continuance of their links with the Church...in the sacraments of sectarians *the Church is active*."¹⁸ For Florovsky, the objective side of sacramental validity is accomplished by grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, thus creating unity, but he alludes to Augustine's idea that it is the *lack of love* and the unity of peace in schismatic churches that causes the absence of *efficacy*.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Florovsky insists that "...the love of God overlaps and surmounts the

failure of love in man. In the sects themselves and even among heretics *the Church continues to perform her saving and sanctifying work*."²⁰

Regarding Florovsky's conclusion, it is important to state that there has been much controversy over what he meant. Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna maintains that the later Florovsky "...did not recognize the *validity* of non-Orthodox sacraments...[and]...felt that the ecumenical movement had deviated from its original purposes and that he was perhaps wrong to have been one of its most famous proponents."²¹ This said, the Archbishop's statement concerning

¹⁵ Georges Florovsky, "The Boundaries of the Church," in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Belmont, MA: Notable and Academic Books, 1989), 37.

¹⁶ See "Apostolic Succession," in Nicholas Lossky, Jose Miguez Bonino, John Pobee, Tom Stransky, Geoffrey Wainwright, Pauline Webb, ed., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 48. The primary difference between the Orthodox and Reformed understanding of apostolic succession involves whether succession is only a spiritual "handing down," whereby emphasis is placed on God's call, discerned by the assembly, which puts one in line with apostolic authority (Reformed), or the spiritual dimension attached to a specific, literal, genealogical lineage (Orthodox). The elements of tradition and call apply to both, yet emphasis for the Reformed is on the contemporary, congregational call of the ordained presbyter.

¹⁷ Georges Florovsky, "The Boundaries of the Church," in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Belmont, MA: Notable and Academic Books, 1989), 41. The "conditions" by which the sacrament of baptism is accomplished via churches that are not Roman is simply that of the Trinitarian formula, and water.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Florovsky states "The sacraments of schismatics are valid, that is, they genuinely are sacraments. But they are not efficacious (*non-efficacia*) because of the schism or division itself. For in sects and divisions love withers and without love salvation is impossible" Interacting with this Augustinian concept, Florovsky insists that this does not mean that the sacraments of schismatic communities are "...of no avail," and later qualifies this concept utilizing the sovereign love of God ("The Boundaries of the Church" in *Collected Works*, v. 13, 42.)

²⁰ Georges Florovsky, "The Boundaries of the Church," *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Belmont, MA: Notable and Academic Books, 1989), 43.

²¹ Archbishop Chrysostom of Etna, "Protopresbyter Georges Florovsky," *Orthodox Tradition* XI, no. 2 (1994): 28-29, *emphasis mine*.

Florovsky's understanding of non-Orthodox sacraments as *invalid* cannot be corroborated by much additional data, whereas Florovsky's frustration with the way his work was exploited by the predominately Protestant ecumenical movement is evident even in his early scholarship. I would agree that Florovsky held tight to the Orthodox Church's identity as the only true church. Where I disagree with Archbishop Chrysostomos is in his conclusion that Florovsky's justifiable problems with the ecumenical movement act to negate the force with which he challenged the assumptions of St. Cyprian's strict and narrow understanding of the Church, and utilized—indeed reclaimed for the East—Augustine's valuable insights on the subject.²² The early Florovsky, in his interaction with the ecumenical movement, sought a corrective to what now dominates certain strands of hyper-traditionalist Orthodoxy, namely the overemphasis of identification between the Church and Christ himself. Whereas evangelical strands in the Reformed Tradition tend to emphasize the distinction between Christ and the Church and often are guilty of *ecclesiological Nestorianism*, the traditionalist strands of Orthodoxy are at times guilty of *ecclesiological Monophysitism*.²³ The Orthodox Church claims that the divine and human natures of Christ are mysteriously united in the Church.²⁴ Most Protestants would agree, but I argue that, like Monophysitism and unlike the Chalcedonian Christology, the traditionalist Orthodox place such a heavy emphasis on the *divine nature* of the Church that they forget the human nature which outlines its limitations. The Council of Chalcedon upheld that there was indeed a union of the divine and the human in Christ, but also maintained that it occurred "...without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person."²⁵ Do the traditionalist Orthodox leave enough room for such a distinction and peculiarity of natures between itself as Church and Christ as God?

Florovsky was at pains to maintain that the Orthodox Church is indeed one with Christ and exhibits great authority due to this connection, and yet that the Church is not the distributor of grace in the *same exact manner* as Christ. Certainly, to advocate such a concept of the Church as the mystical body of Christ would be tantamount to idolatry because there would be *no* distinction between the Church and Christ himself.

Florovsky's critique of the *economic* approach to ecumenical ecclesiology illustrates how the view exists on wobbly historical ground and as John Erickson states, "...does not faithfully express and explain the traditional practice of the Orthodox Church with regard to Christians outside its visible communion."²⁶ Most importantly for the purposes of this essay, Florovsky

²² See Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996).

²³ I believe these early Christological heresies serve as similes (allowing the things compared to remain distinct despite their obvious similarities) for ecclesiology. Monophysitism is like the traditionalist Orthodox emphasis on identifying the Church with Christ in that it clumps the distinct natures of Christ (human and divine) into one nature, thoroughly dissolving the distinction into unity. By comparison the Church is in fact distinct from Christ. Likewise, Nestorianism is like the evangelical Reformed emphasis on division between Christ (as wholly other) and the Church in that it negates the fact that there are two natures (human and divine), but *one Divine Person*. By comparison, the Church is in fact unified with Christ. Each ecclesiological view has its strength, but the weaknesses lie in the lack of *balance*.

²⁴ Mark Saucy, "Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox Together: Is the Church the Extension of the Incarnation?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June 2000): 1.

²⁵ "The Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon," (Labbe and Cossant, Tom. IV. col. 562).

²⁶ John H. Erickson, "Reception into the Orthodox Church: Contemporary Practice," *The Ecumenical Review* 54, no. 1 (2002): 68. In this article, Erickson calls for an official rejection of the re-baptism of already baptized Orthodox converts, and a rescinding of the Patriarch of Constantinople's 1755 decree on heretic baptism (68).

questions the Church's ability to dispense grace and make all-encompassing statements such as the Cyprianic formula "outside the Church there is no salvation,"²⁷ if such statements are taken to mean that the Church cannot work, by the Holy Spirit, in communities outside its visible, canonical bounds.²⁸ The assumptions that Florovsky challenges are stated quite plainly by contemporary Orthodox theologians. Patrick Barnes, in his description of the principle of economy states openly:

The basic principle underlying its use is that the Church has been endowed by God with authority to manage the affairs of her household. She is therefore in a full sense the steward (*oikonomos*) and sovereign administrator of the sacraments; and it falls within the scope of her stewardship and economy *to make valid*—as she thinks fit—sacraments administered by non-Orthodox, *although such sacraments are no sacraments if considered in themselves and apart from the Orthodox Church*. Because a person's Baptism is accepted as valid—or rather *made valid* by economy—when he becomes Orthodox, it does not therefore follow that his Baptism was valid before he became Orthodox.²⁹

It is ironic that the traditionalist Orthodox, those who advocate a Cyprianic view of the Church, would consider the affairs of the non-Orthodox as within the Orthodox Church's *household*. Certainly, if such non-Orthodox communities are within the Orthodox *household*, they are Churches in the proper sense of the word. Additionally, it is the "to make valid" portion of this description with which Florovsky contends. Certainly the Church has the authority to manage internal affairs, administrate the sacraments, and extend leniency or withhold it from those outside canonical boundaries if such people wish to become Orthodox. But to control the flow of grace to the point whereby sacraments performed outside are *validated upon entrance into the canonical Church* puts the Orthodox Church on par authoritatively with the One who validates such sacraments *in the Orthodox Tradition—Christ by the power of Holy Spirit!* The assumption in the statement above is that non-Orthodox sacraments are indeed *invalid* because the Church cannot exist apart from the Orthodox Church in a canonical sense. Florovsky's palpable and telling statement on the principle of economy sums up well what he thought:

The "economic" explanation raises...difficulties in regard to its theological premises. One can scarcely ascribe to the Church *the power and the right*, as it were, to convert the has-not-been into the has-been, "to change the meaningless into the valid," as Professor Diovnioitis expresses it (*Church Quarterly Review* No. 231, p.97), "in order of economy."³⁰

It is in this way that Florovsky maintains that the canonical Orthodox Church is the true Church, but does not take this to imply that the Holy Spirit cannot work outside the boundaries or consent of this canonical structure.

²⁷ St. Cyprian, *Ep.* 73.21:PL 3,1169; *De unit.*:PL 4,509-536.

²⁸ Florovsky states explicitly that the Orthodox Church's customary practice of receiving non-Orthodox *not by baptism* reflects the presumption that sacraments of non-Orthodox are valid, and that "...if sacraments are performed, it can only be by virtue of the Holy Spirit." This statement is significant because it illustrates the movement of the Holy Spirit outside the canonical limits of the Church, yet invoking within a non-Orthodox community, at least in part, that which belongs only to a valid Church: baptism. See Georges Florovsky, "The Boundaries of the Church, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Belmont, MA: Notable and Academic Books, 1989), 37.

²⁹ Patrick Barnes, *The Non-Orthodox: The Orthodox Teaching on Christians Outside the Church* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Orthodox, 1999), 32. First and third *emphasis mine*.

³⁰ Georges Florovsky, "The Boundaries of the Church, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Belmont, MA: Notable and Academic Books, 1989), 40, *emphasis mine*.

The principle of economy according to many Orthodox writers is found in Canon Law and is applicable to all statements regarding the management of the “house,” which is the Orthodox Church. According to Edward Moore, scenarios “...detrimental to the mental and spiritual well-being of the person [is]... what the strict, wooden, and unthinking application of Canon Law to present situations often produces.”³¹ The application of the principle of economy, while often portrayed as a means for the Orthodox Church to extend grace to those outside its borders, actually functions to exercise and retain powers which are not, to begin with, within the Church’s possession. Florovsky knew that these ecclesiological issues, particularly that of the jurisdiction of the canonical Church and the view of the principle of economy which gave the Orthodox Church full authority *to validate the invalid* sacraments, has deep soteriological significance. Florovsky claims that

...if we confine ourselves to the canonical or institutional limits, we may force ourselves into a very dubious position. Are we entitled to suggest that all those who, in their earthly career, were outside the strict canonical borders of the Church, are thereby excluded from salvation? Indeed, very few theologians would dare to go so far.³²

Certainly there are more than a few contemporary Orthodox theologians who are making that claim by their very logic, *vis-à-vis* their interpretation of the principle of economy.

Florovsky’s insistence on the Orthodox Church as the true Church, tempered by his keen analysis of charismatic movement outside the canonical Church, make his work attractive to the Reformed ecumenist who views doctrine, and not empty forms of irenicism, as *the* building block for dialogue. Unlike Afanassieff, for Florovsky there is an openness to the idea that the *Una Sancta* is able to work and function in the faith of other ecclesial communities, though those communities live in a kind of darkness and more importantly, outside a fruitful understanding of peace and catholicity. Afanassieff explicitly states that those who have become detached from the true Church “...while retaining certain ‘vestiges’ of the Church...truthfully, could not be called “churches” in the proper sense of the word.”³³ If we take seriously Florovsky’s statement, “where the sacraments are accomplished, there is the Church,” then we must define the Church in these charismatic terms, in addition to the canonical. Florovsky’s adoption of Augustinian principles concerning sacramental validity, according to Tamara Grdzeldze, is also consistent with a Church Father who is more widely accepted in the Orthodox tradition: St. Basil the Great. St. Basil “...affirms that the grace of the Holy Spirit operates in those who have broken away from the church,” referring specifically to the sacramental validity.³⁴ Certain Orthodox theologians, utilizing aspects of *oikonomia*, make a distinction between the *external* grace found outside the Orthodox Church’s canonical boundaries, and the *internal* grace found within. John Erickson points out that members of this group

...have been attracted by its [economic theology’s] Cyprianic exaltation of the Church as the exclusive vehicle of salvation. For them, outside the canonical limits of the Orthodox

³¹ Edward Moore, "Economy and Canon Law," *Theandros: An Online Journal of Orthodox Christian Theology and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2003): 1-2.

³² Georges Florovsky, "St. Cyprian and St. Augustine on Schism," in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, *Ecumenism II: A Historical Approach* (Belmont, MA: Notable & Academic Books, 1989), 50.

³³ Nicolas Afanassieff, "Una Sancta," in *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in Our Time: Readings from the Eastern Church*, ed. Michael Plekon (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2003), 24.

³⁴ Tamara Grdzeldze, "Using the Principle of Oikonomia in Ecumenical Discussions: Reflections on 'The Limits of the Church' by Georges Florovsky," *The Ecumenical Review* 56, no. 2 (April 2004): 241.

Church there is simply undifferentiated darkness, in which rites like baptism and ordination have no more significance than non-baptism and non-ordination.³⁵

It is precisely this imbalance and abuse of the economic theory of the Church and sacraments that Florovsky's early work deviated from and challenged.

Why is Florovsky's understanding of the Church compelling in ecumenical dialogue with the *Reformed Tradition*? First, I argue that the Reformed churches, at least the great majority of them, *adhere* to the concept of *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. In Calvin's *Institutes 4.1.1*, we see the statement, "Away from the Church one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation." Again, in the *Westminster Confession 25.2*, "The visible Church . . . is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." Where then is the difference? It is precisely in that the Reformed churches view "the Church" as all who have been elected by God's grace, through faith, initiated through baptism by water in the Trinitarian formula—these criteria *alone* define the boundaries of the Church.

The contribution of Florovsky is that there now is a foundation for dialogue, in that the Orthodox may view the sacraments of those communities which have broken away from "the Great Church," as valid on the basis of charismatic grounds—baptism is the work of the Holy Spirit, occurring objectively because of God, and subjectively because of faith, however weak or blindly unaware of the seriousness of schism that faithful recipient is. The pneumatological emphasis of Florovsky's ideas resonates with the Reformed mind because focus is placed on the one whom they feel truly officiates over the sacrament: Christ himself, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is precisely why it would be considered an abomination, from the Reformed understanding, for a Reformed convert to Orthodoxy to be forced to be rebaptized—not because it questions the validity of the "sacrament" itself, but because it questions the promises and seal of the God *who officiates over the sacrament*.³⁶

Secondly, because the Reformed churches are hesitant to give credence to what they view as an overemphasis on the *institutional* nature of the Church, Florovsky's approach, and indeed the entire Orthodox conception of pneumatology, opens doors for agreement. Upon baptism in the Reformed churches, each faithful member, whether adult or infant, is ordained into the priesthood of Christ, and becomes a member of the People of God according to the new covenant accomplished by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Florovsky's language gives enough "openness" whereby the two traditions may communicate as to the significance of the ecclesial community in this process, which in both traditions, is *central*. But the community is both more than institution, and more than charism—it is the very unity of the Church throughout the ages, both *in history* and *transcending history*. It is Florovsky's understanding of the boundaries of the church that, in my view, has led to the two churches being able to claim a common understanding that baptism is a sacrament of grace, and "...that this grace confers forgiveness of sins and rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit, which is necessary for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven."³⁷ The breakthrough in this statement is that both churches understand "the Kingdom of Heaven" to mean both an eschatological reality, and the earthly, canonical Church—it is God's graceful election that makes membership possible. Furthermore,

³⁵ John H. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1991), 117.

³⁶ See Walter Kasper, "Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of Baptism," *The Ecumenical Review* 52, no. 4 (2000): 4.

³⁷ "Membership and Incorporation into the Body of Christ," in *Agreed Statements*, 1.

this statement acknowledges that baptism by water and the Spirit *accomplishes* something. Though the grace conferred upon baptism is only the beginning of initiation into a new life in Christ, followed by an even fuller understanding of community in the Eucharist, and greater sanctification and service, the acknowledgment by the two churches brings hope.

Lastly, lest we make the mistake of being hasty with what is agreed upon, and unfair to the proper interpretation of Florovsky, the Church is both one in reality, and truly catholic. It is deeply imbedded in history, and the Holy Spirit has sustained that history, and thus the division of the Church of Christ is gravely serious. Consistent with Florovsky's theology is the statement that "...both traditions recognize that the Church towers above any merely historical, human institution,"³⁸ but also that "...the apostolic foundation and uninterrupted sacred history of the Church"³⁹ form the institutional, canonical Church, and this Church is *real*. This balance, marked by the Orthodox, and thus Florovsky's conception of the Trinity is the third point of convergence for the Reformed churches, yet this time it is a challenge. The challenge is to balance the charismatic nature of the Church, whereby the Spirit is not leashed to human volition, with the canonical nature of the Church, open to the vast history and lineage that stems from its ancient inception. Florovsky's description of the Church as both canonical/institutional, tied to the Christological elements of apostolicity and succession, and the pneumatological value seen in the Church, with God working even among division, is truly Trinitarian. This balance creates enough space for dialogue with a tradition whose identity has been marked by the prophetic urge to purify God's earthly sanctuary from the corruptions of the 16th century, but not so much space as to forfeit the Orthodox insistence on catholicity.

Calvin's Understanding of the Church: His Emphasis on Unity and Catholicity

Earlier I mentioned how Florovsky's work helped expose some potentially Monophysitic tendencies among the traditionalist Orthodox who negate the distinction between Christ as incarnated Son of God and the canonical Church, or concentrate on the divine aspects of the Church at the expense of the human. In the interest of fairness, it is important to mention how John Calvin sought to safeguard the Reformed Church against the ecclesiological Nestorianism that has plagued certain strands of evangelical Protestantism since the modern era.⁴⁰ Calvin emphasized the unity of the Church and based this unity on its attachment to Christ. He sought to "...express this indivisible connection which all members of Christ have with one another."⁴¹

Calvin quotes St. Cyprian (as is common) and points out

...how he [Cyprian] continually calls us back to the Head himself. Accordingly, Cyprian declares that heresies and schisms arise because men return not to the Source of truth, seek not the Head, keep not the teaching of the Heavenly Master.⁴²

Calvin viewed his beliefs and actions as neither schismatic nor heretical. Quite the opposite, he viewed his actions as necessary for maintaining the unity and holiness of the one true

³⁸ "Summary of Discussions on the Identity and Unity of the Church," in *Agreed Statements*, 1.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

⁴⁰ Because of the evangelical insistence on drawing a stark division between the Church and Christ, the issue of the unity and authority of the Church has been one of contention for the Orthodox-Reformed ecumenical dialogue.

⁴¹ Calvin, Jean and Ford Lewis Battles. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, The Library of Congress Classics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, 1047.

⁴² *Ibid*.

Church.⁴³ In this sense, Calvin did not view the Church–Christ connection and Paul’s description of the Church as the Body of Christ as mere metaphor, like the majority of evangelical Reformed do today. Such an acknowledgment speaks volumes in terms of what Calvinists *should* believe concerning the Chalcedonian balance that was mentioned earlier. If Florovsky helps the Orthodox see the importance of the distinctly human and limited (though not fallible) aspect of the Church, certainly Calvin helps the Reformed see the importance of the Church’s divinity, holiness and authority. The temptation for the Orthodox is to see all of God’s movement within the *visible*, canonical boundaries of the Church, insisting that the Holy Spirit cannot work outside these bounds without the mediation of the institution. The temptation for the Reformed is to limit the power of the institutional, canonical Church by describing the Holy Spirit’s movement as a mystery of which we may know little, since such a mystery implies Christ working directly, through the Spirit⁴⁴, within the *invisible* Church. The traditionalist Orthodox tendency is to disregard the existence of the Church outside of itself, while the evangelical Reformed tendency is to regard the existence of the Church practically everywhere. Calvin’s work, like Florovsky’s, finds a balance.

Additionally, Calvin stresses the importance of the visible, canonical Church by referring to it with the title of “mother.” He states, “how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast....”⁴⁵ Thus, beyond viewing the Church as one, united, and catholic throughout time and space, he also viewed it as being endowed with the authority of Christ, so that

...no one is permitted to spurn its authority, flout its warnings, resist its counsels, or make light of its chastisements—much less to desert it and break its unity...separation from the church is the denial of God and Christ.⁴⁶

Applying such principles to the evangelical strand of the Reformed Tradition, we see a conception of the Church that looks strikingly similar to the Orthodox view. Calvin’s words temper the inclination among modern Protestants to disregard the real boundaries that exist between the world and the canonical Church. Also, Calvin’s ideas, and indeed his proclivity for utilizing the early Church Fathers and various historical Church documents in his writings stress the importance and necessity of maintain the catholicity of the Church as it stands across time and space. Such ideas debunk the misconception among some Protestants, particularly those involved in ecumenical dialogue, who believe that churches as individual entities, devoid of any connectionality, could be considered Churches in the true and proper sense.

In summary, in the first part of this paper I traced the historical and contextual differences between the Reformed and Orthodox conception of “the Church,” raising questions of hierarchy

⁴³ Calvin's view on the Church was quite sympathetic to the East. He states in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "They [the Roman Church] make the Greeks schismatics; with what right?...What? Would not they who fall away from Christ [the Roman Church] deserve to lose it much more?" (*Institutes Vol.2*, 1043). This said, Calvin claimed that churches within the Roman Catholic Church could be true Churches to the extent that they are in communion with the Head of the Church, Christ, and to the extent that they exhibit "...those marks who effectiveness neither the devil's wiles nor human depravity can destroy," speaking of unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity, right preaching of the Gospel, and right administration of the sacraments (*Institutes Vol.2*, 1053).

⁴⁴ The Reformed Churches view the procession of the Holy Spirit as through the Father and the Son, consistent with most other Western Christian Churches.

⁴⁵ Calvin, Jean and Ford Lewis Battles. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, The Library of Congress Classics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, 1016.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 1024.

and particularity. In the second part I found three areas of interest in Florovsky's "The Boundaries of the Church," and illustrated how these charismatic and catholic elements have and continue to open venues for dialogue between the Orthodox and Reformed traditions. Specifically, I examined the concepts of charismatic and canonical boundaries, utilized the Council of Chalcedon and applied it to imbalances in certain strands of the Orthodox and Reformed Church in regards to their definition of the Church in relation to the incarnated Christ. In addition, I used Florovsky's scholarship to illustrate how he predicted and spoke against such imbalances. Last, I examined John Calvin's *Institutes* and showed how his stress on unity and catholicity defies the individualism and ecclesiastical Nestorianism prevalent in the evangelical communities of the Reformed Tradition today. If both the Orthodox and the Reformed are able to agree on the importance of acknowledging boundaries on the one hand, and God's ability to work outside the canonical Church on the other, great strides could be made in ecumenical dialogue.