



Noah Michael Jefferson

Catholicity in Modern Orthodox Theology

Abstract

An integral but little explored aspect of modern Orthodox theology is the theology of catholicity as the Orthodox Church's fullness of truth, developed by the Slavophiles, Russian religious philosophers and neopatristic theologians through theological reflection on the relationships between God and the Church in the divine economy, ecclesial and personal catholicity, and an holistic theological paradigm. The theologians studied in this article are Ivan Kireevsky, Aleksei Khomiakov, Pavel Florensky, Sergius Bulgakov, Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, Dumitru Staniloae and St Justin Popovich. The article will trace the history of their contributions to the theology of catholicity in a general summary, and the particularities of their theology will be assessed in a synthesis to address the



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main questions and themes of catholicity, namely the ontological fullness of the Church's truth through participation in the divine economy, the fullness of truth as accessible and able to be manifested personally and ecclesiastically, and the catholicity of the Orthodox theological paradigm. It will be argued that a truly catholic ecclesiology and theology must be founded upon a Trinitarian approach to catholicity, synthesizing the Christological and Pneumatological approaches, and that Orthodox theology must have as its goal the expression of the catholic truth, from within the medium of this catholicity, expressed through and in a theological paradigm rooted in this catholicity.

Keywords

Catholicity, Ecclesiology, Neopatristic, Trinitarian, Dogmatic Theology

1 Catholicity, Sobornost and the Church as Pillar and Ground of the Truth

1.1 Sobornost of the Slavophiles

Theological reflection on the Orthodox Church's catholicity began with the Slavophiles. Ladouceur explains the principal theme of the Slavophiles was the Church, and against the westernizers they "invoked the uniqueness of the old Russian culture, which led them directly to the Orthodox Tradition, representing the continuity and fullness of the original Church of Christ."¹ The two greatest Slavophiles were Ivan Kireevsky and Aleksei Khomiakov who, despite being laymen,² would spark the

¹ Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology: Behold, I Make All Things New* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), p. 44.

² *Ibidem*, p. 43.

Church's reflection on ecclesiology based on sobornost and integral knowledge.

Ivan Kireevsky's principle contribution to Orthodox theology was his idea of integral knowledge, though he never called it by that name, according to which true knowledge is only possible once man rightly orders the natural faculties in the heart and attains consciousness of God, the divine enlightening the natural faculties which allow reason to properly understand the world.³ In isolation rationality deceives, and ultimately reason is never able to discover truth which is inexpressible,⁴ but in personal wholeness reason is given its proper place. Furthermore, this wholeness is not individualist but social as "everything essential in the human soul can be developed only socially... personal convictions must enter into a real... encounter with... something essential."⁵ This society was the Orthodox Church as Lanz explains for Kireevsky truth is "ready given to him... in the text of Tradition," this tradition being the common faith of the whole Church pan-historically which has access to the fullness of the eternal truth.⁶ The Church is the realm of integral knowledge, which orders its own "faculties" by a unity of consciousness, prayer and belief of all Orthodox Christians of every age.⁷

Aleksei Khomiakov elaborated on Kireevsky's thought and himself focused on the subject of the Church, developing the concept which would come to be called sobornost. Sobornost entails that the Church images "the unity of God," specifically the Triune God,

³ Aleksei Khomiakov, Ivan Kireevsky, "General Introduction" in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, trans. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), p. 21.

⁴ Henry Lanz, "The Philosophy of Ivan Kireevsky" *The Slavonic Review Vol. 4, No. 12*. (University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1926), p. 603.

⁵ Ivan Kireevsky, "On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy," p. 264.

⁶ Henry Lanz, "The Philosophy of Ivan Kireevsky," pp. 600-601.

⁷ Ivan Kireevsky, "On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy," p. 264.

and thus is a real unity in multiplicity.⁸ This unity in multiplicity is preserved in free personal communion of love, an internal rather than external unity,⁹ and thus Khomiakov states “the Church is the revelation of the Holy Spirit to the mutual love of Christians... the Church’s divine mission is not only to save souls... but also to keep the truth of the revealed mysteries... complete through all the generations.”¹⁰ This “truth” is the presence of God in the Church, whereas doctrines about God become dogmatic by the reception of the whole Church society,¹¹ as it is only in the Church’s bond of love who is Christ that the fullness of inexpressible truth, “refused neither to ignoramuses nor to servants,” is manifested lawfully.¹² Truth and love are therefore the essence of the Church, whose society is based upon as well as constitutes this reality in its communion of love which preserves freedom. Dogmatic heresies are therefore, first and foremost, schisms from love and therefore also a loss of truth, leading to rationalism and the absence of human wholeness.

I have chosen to summarize the thought of Ivan Kireevsky as well as Aleksei Khomiakov to highlight the fact that, in contrast to modern Eucharistic ecclesologies which focus on hierarchy and can verge on episcopomonism,¹³ for the Slavophiles catholicity or sobornost was primarily a matter of unity in truth, inseparable from love together constituting faith/faithfulness. This becomes especially evident in Khomiakov’s articulation of the

⁸ Aleksei Khomiakov, “The Church is One,” p. 31.

⁹ Joost Van Rossum, “A. S. Khomiakov & Orthodox Ecclesiology” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 35:1 (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991), pp. 69-70.

¹⁰ Aleksei Khomiakov, “The Church is One,” p. 31.

¹¹ Kallistos Ware, “Sobornost and Eucharistic Ecclesiology: Aleksei Khomiakov and his Successors” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* / 11(2-3) (2011), p. 221.

¹² Aleksei Khomiakov, “Some Remarks by an Orthodox Christian Concerning the Western Communion,” pp. 121, 133.

¹³ Kallistos Ware, “Sobornost and Eucharistic Ecclesiology,” p. 232.

meaning of catholicity as qualitative rather than quantitative, and based on right faith:

[St Athanasius] said... 'Your names are due to human chance; ours come from the very essence of Christianity'... How does the Church understand Catholicity... The word they chose was *sobornyi*. Sobor implies the idea of an assembly... existing virtually without a gathering. It is a unity in plurality... The Catholic Church is the Church *that is according to all, or according to the unity of all*.¹⁴

As N. O. Lossky explains, catholicity or sobornost "is the free unity of the members of the Church in their common understanding of truth and finding salvation together—a unity based upon their unanimous love for Christ and Divine righteousness."¹⁵ God, the Holy Spirit, is the Church's truth and life, and in the freely loving communion of the Church preserved by grace the manifestations of this truth and life are given in tradition, which are lived and understood in fullness within the Church.¹⁶ While this understanding of catholicity is very broad, encompassing all tradition, it is best encapsulated as fullness of truth in essence, potency, and in actuality though in a qualified sense. In essence it is the full presence of God/Truth in the Church, in potency it is the continual ability of the individual as well as the ecclesia to express this truth,¹⁷ in actuality it is the ability of the Church's members to experience the fullness of truth through its tradition, though the reality of the truth transcends formulations.¹⁸ The sobornost ecclesiology of Ivan Kireevsky and Aleksei Khomiakov has the reality and problem of the Church's fullness

¹⁴ Aleksei Khomiakov, "Letter to the Editor of *L'Union Chrétienne*," pp. 137-139.

¹⁵ N. O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1952), p. 35.

¹⁶ Aleksei Khomiakov, "Letter to the Editor of *L'Union Chrétienne*," pp. 137-139.

¹⁷ Vladimir Moss, *Khomiakov on Sobornost*. (Academia.edu, 2013), p. 3.

¹⁸ Aleksei Khomiakov, "Some Remarks by an Orthodox Christian Concerning the Western Communions," pp. 128-129.

of truth at its very centre, and would influence later thought on the Church as “the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).”

1.2 Russian Religious Philosophy

Sobornost as fullness of truth was further developed by the Russian religious philosophers, Pavel Florensky and Sergius Bulgakov. Florensky strikingly critiqued Aleksei Khomiakov for his ecclesiological immanentism, and in so doing demonstrates the centrality of the problem of doctrinal and ontological truth to sobornost ecclesiology:

Khomiakov’s theory of the Church leaves the impression that the decrees of the whole Church are true because they are the decrees of the whole Church. This word whole suggests that the decrees of the Church are not a discovery of the Truth but an invention of the Truth... even if the latter is taken in its Sobornost.¹⁹

This criticism seems unfair to Khomiakov, especially as Florensky’s definition of “Ecclesiality” is basically identical to Khomiakov’s sobornost, “if one must nevertheless apply concepts to the life of the Church, the most appropriate concepts would be... biological and aesthetic ones.”²⁰ However, it highlighted the need for further theological thought on the ontological nature of the Church’s fullness of Truth and its expressions in tradition.²¹ Florensky attempted to address these issues through antinomy and consubstantiality, elaborating on integral knowledge.²² It is with Florensky that we find “catholicity” expressed in terms of

¹⁹ Pavel Florensky, “Around Khomiakov,” pp. 324-325.

²⁰ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 8.

²¹ Capital “T” Truth will now be utilized in reference to God, the ontological subject of Truth by whom the Church is lead into and perceives all Truth, and lowercase “t” truth will refer to the expressions and manifestations of Truth in the many aspects of tradition, especially doctrinal.

²² Robert Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky: A Metaphysics of Love* (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), p. 63.

an elaborated epistemic worldview: the Triune Truth being the ontological precondition for truth, the mode of cognizing Truth being personal ecstatic communion, and the Truth being cognized both intuitively and discursively and expressed in antinomy as truth.²³ To further clarify, true knowledge for Florensky, explains Gustafson, is ontologically personal and participatory, a going out of the knower into the known and vice versa, and is thus inseparable from or equal to love.²⁴ This is based on the Trinity of God which overcomes the rationalist dilemmas of one vs many or subject vs object, and after which creation is patterned and in which Truth it participates.²⁵ Thus, the Church receives and dwells in the fullness of Truth given by God, and its tradition is formed in accordance with this Truth and takes on a particular character based on its divinely given ontology.²⁶ Florensky thus argues that the Church's dogmas bear a specific antinomic and infinite character, "the form of truth is capable of holding its content, the Truth, only when... it has something from the Truth,"²⁷ which allows them to be inexhaustible theologically and yet serve as doctrinal boundaries against heresies of fallen knowledge, rationalism lacking love.

Sergius Bulgakov, influenced by the Slavophiles, Vladimir Soloviev and Pavel Florensky, further developed a universalist doctrine of catholicity with the title ecumenicity,²⁸ attempting to overcome the dichotomy between the quantitative and qualitative views of catholicity through Sophiology. The Church is the divine-humanity present in the Trinity from eternity as the paradigm of creation, the soul of the world necessarily uniting the divine and created Sophia in the process of creation's deification

²³ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, pp. 20, 33-34, 37-38.

²⁴ Richard F. Gustafson, "Introduction," *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, pp. xvi-xviii.

²⁵ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, pp. 37-38.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 164-165.

²⁷ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, pp. 106-109.

²⁸ Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, p. 275.

which will culminate eschatologically “by the complete fusion of the two, when God will be all in all.”²⁹ While rooting the Church’s identity in eternity Bulgakov believed the fall led to a sundering of humanity and creation’s wholeness of being and knowledge in multi-unity,³⁰ and thus it is in the Incarnation and Pentecost that qualitative fullness is given to the Church in history. For Bulgakov the Incarnation and Pentecost are both universal events as while in the Old Testament only God’s gifts were available to humanity, in the New Testament the Son and Spirit descend in hypostatic fullness, “all humankind is the body of Christ.”³¹ The fullness of God has already filled creation yet not manifested entirely, “the power of this abiding is limited... [it] depends on the receptivity of the world and of humanity,” and thus the current age is characterized by a “duel between freedom and grace,” the eschaton is present in potential and is thus now able to be eventually actualized.³²

Catholicity is thus for Sergius Bulgakov universal in quantity, as God fills all creation by his Word and Spirit, yet it is also qualitatively preserved in the Orthodox Church’s historical conciliarity, “the Church is not only interior Conciliarity, but also a collectivity which seeks the same Spirit.”³³ Bulgakov synthesizes in his own Sophiological system the views of the Slavophiles and Florensky and also clarifies the value and meaning of the historical tradition for the Church’s fullness of Truth. The Church is infallible by nature for Bulgakov by its possession of the truth in essence and not by its expression of true statements as in Papal infallibility,³⁴

²⁹ Sergius Bulgakov, “The Problem of the Church in Modern Russian Theology” *Theology* 1931 / 07 Vol. 23; Iss. 133. (1931), pp. 11-14.

³⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 183-189.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 133-134.

³² Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), p. 281.

³³ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans. Lydia Kesich. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), p. 69.

³⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 64.

yet the Truth's manifestations must transmit and provide the context for accessing the Truth. Bulgakov thus holds to a modified form of doctrinal development, in the sense that while the dogmatic formulae are static by their revealed, historical and canonical nature, the understanding of their meaning grows and changes as the Church develops towards fully actualized Godmanhood.³⁵ The fullness of truth is not found in historical continuity of the theology of the dogmas, rather in the Church of every age its theologians theologize from the source of this Truth present in the Church mediated through its Liturgical worship and guided by the dogmatic formulae.³⁶

1.3 *The Neopatristic Theologians*

The neopatristic theologians continued developing catholicity, which term Georges Florovsky preferred to sobornost, in light of patristic theology.³⁷ The centrality of fullness of truth to the doctrine of catholicity was still paramount in their thinking, as Vladimir Lossky stated "catholicity then shows itself to us as an inalienable mark of the Church in virtue of her possession of the Truth... catholicity is a quality of Christian Truth... specifically designates Christian Truth, the mode of knowledge of this Truth proper to the Church."³⁸ Indeed there is great continuity between the neopatristic theologians and their predecessors regarding theology of catholicity but also important differences,

³⁵ Sergius Bulgakov, "Dogma and Dogmatic Theology" in *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in Our Time/Readings from the Eastern Church*, ed. Michael Plekon (Lanham, MD: A Sheed & Ward Book, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, inc., 2003), pp. 75-78.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 69, 78.

³⁷ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 225.

³⁸ Vladimir Lossky, "Concerning the Third Mark of the Church: Catholicity" in *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 172-173.

highlighted and crystalized in the controversy between Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky, the father of the neopatristic movement, over limited inter-communion.³⁹

While the neopatristic theologians addressed the subject of the Church's ontological Truth from diverse angles, Christology, Pneumatology and Trinitarian synthesis, they all in common affirmed that this ontological Truth was not dependant on human community,⁴⁰ nor did they affirm a pantheistic ecclesiology,⁴¹ which was the Sophiological danger.⁴² Vladimir Lossky's idea of a distinct pneumatological economy is never used to justify the idea of catholic fullness existing outside the canonical Church, rather he states "the operation of the Holy Spirit in the world before the Church and outside the Church is not, therefore, the same as his presence in the Church after Pentecost."⁴³ Dumitru Staniloae likewise, despite explicating an ecclesiology of cosmic scope,⁴⁴ said "we cannot speak of grace as something outside the Church,"⁴⁵ which he clarified as the Orthodox Church.⁴⁶ Catholicity for these theologians was the property of the "Orthodox" Church, the true Church, alone, and their opinions on non-Orthodox churches varied,⁴⁷ Georges Florovsky contending the Spirit worked through the sacraments of other churches to reunite

³⁹ Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, pp. 289-293.

⁴⁰ Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ: An Orthodox Interpretation of the Church*, trans. Robert M. Arida (Boston, MA: The Wheel Library, 2018). <https://www.wheeljournal.com/wheel-library/the-body-of-the-living-christ>), p. 56.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 47.

⁴² Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, p. 275.

⁴³ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), p. 157.

⁴⁴ Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, p. 172.

⁴⁵ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God Vol. 4.* (Brooklyn, NY: Holy Cross Orthodoxy Press, 2012), p. 102.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

⁴⁷ Capital "C" Church will be and has been utilized to refer to the Eastern Orthodox Church, while lower-case "c" church is used in reference to faith communities labeled Christian.

them with the Church,⁴⁸ and St Justin Popovich denying any grace outside of catholicity.⁴⁹

For the neopatristic theologians then, the Truth not only dwells in the Church passively but is expressed actively in its structure, spirituality and dogmas, “the Church knows Truth = All-Truth; The Church has Truth = All-Truth; The Church is Truth = All-Truth.”⁵⁰ Ontological Catholicity thus becomes united with the Church’s historical tradition, becoming Tradition. While the Slavophiles implied that truth was simply the decision of the whole community and Bulgakov affirmed a growth in consciousness of Truth as the Church evolved towards God-manhood,⁵¹ the neopatristic theologians held that the Church was catholic in every age, both in essence and actuality:

Tradition is a rule of continuity, a living turning point of time. It is the perpetual conscience of the Church that protects its unity and identity throughout the ages ... Conformity to the past is therefore only a consequence of fidelity... only an expression of the permanence and identity of the catholic experience across the changes of the centuries... For, indeed, tradition is nothing other than the power to instruct, *potestas magisterii*, the authority of witnessing and of proclaiming the truths of the faith. As the Church bears witness, it has no need to remember something or to lean on some sort of exterior authority. It renders witness from the fullness of its experi-

⁴⁸ Georges Florovsky, “The Limits of the Church” in *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Theological Writings*, ed. Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur (London: T&T Clark, 2019), p. 255.

⁴⁹ Justin Popovich, *Orthodox Faith & Life in Christ*, trans. Asterios Gerosterios (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2005), pp. 170-171.

⁵⁰ Justin Popovich, *Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church Volume IV, Church - Divine-Human Tradition*. https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Iustin_Popovich/sobranie-tvorenij-tom4/1_2. Accessed Aug 16 2021.

⁵¹ Sergius Bulgakov, “Dogma and Dogmatic Theology,” p. 76.

ence, living and perpetual, of the fullness of its catholic existence, because the Church is the living body of the One who is the Truth, the Way and the Life.⁵²

In these quotes Georges Florovsky appears to approach the ideas of Bulgakov, yet there are crucial differences, most notably Florovsky's insistence on historical continuity and on the Church's teaching authority, which in every age expresses the fullness of truth accurately though its formulations are not exhaustive of divine reality.⁵³ Such a view harmonizes the charismatic and historical aspects of the Church's catholicity, and is based on the understanding that Christ as the head of his Body actively guides the Church through history to express his fullness.⁵⁴ According to Radu Bordeianu, Dumitru Staniloae also offers a similar explanation stating Christ acts sacramentally from within the Church while also being its Head.⁵⁵ The Truth of the Church is the unity of the personal God with man revealed in historical truth; this therefore compels one to view the ecclesial catholicity of the Church as historically present in its spirit and doctrinal continuity, and the Church's members must strive to express this catholicity,

“this new consciousness will in no wise be an impersonal fusion... one finds oneself in a symphonic and harmonious communion... Those who have attained it are recognized by the Church as its teachers and doctors or as its fathers precisely because they... rendered witness to the catholic faith of the entire Church.”⁵⁶

This has been a general overview of the rich and diverse yet consistent Orthodox theology of ecclesial and personal catholicity. It

⁵² Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, pp. 67-68.

⁵³ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, p. 238.

⁵⁴ Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, p. 80.

⁵⁵ Radu Bordeianu, “Staniloae: Natural, Universal, and Ordained Priesthood” *Pro-Ecclesia* Vol. XIX No. 4., p. 406.

⁵⁶ Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, p. 80.

will now be expedient to move from the general to the particulars of the ontological, historical, ecclesiological and personal aspects of catholicity expounded by these theologians, particularly focusing on the approaches to and understanding of catholicity according to the neopatristic theologians.

2 The Dual Economy of the Son and Spirit

2.1 *The Body of Christ*

Georges Florovsky said “the theology of the Church is only a chapter, and an essential chapter, of Christology,” meaning not only that the nature of the Church is based on the Incarnation but also that the Incarnation is not complete without the Church.⁵⁷ The dogma of Chalcedon is the rule of ecclesiology for those who approach the subject of catholicity through a primarily Christological lens, as the Church is a theanthropic union in Christ, “it is the mystery of sobornost, the mystery of catholicity.”⁵⁸ This though does not entail any loss of human personality by being incorporated into the divine essence, “for no one glorifies human nature or the human person as much as the God-man does.”⁵⁹ Rather, as free hypostasis assuming humanity in his particular hypostasis,⁶⁰ Christ unites to himself other free persons, “this saves us from impersonalism without committing us to any humanistic personification.”⁶¹ This dyophysite ecclesiology makes possible the interpretation of Chalcedon as affirming not only

⁵⁷ Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, p. 27.

⁵⁸ Georges Florovsky, “*Sobornost: the Catholicity of the Church*,” p. 259.

⁵⁹ Justin Popovich, *Orthodox Faith & Life in Christ*, p. 73.

⁶⁰ Georges Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*. http://www.holytrinitymission.org/books/english/fathers_florovsky_3.htm. accessed 25 Jun 2021.

⁶¹ Georges Florovsky, “*The Church: Her Nature and Task*” in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* Vol. 1. (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1974), p. 67.

the uniting of ontological Truth with history, but also the freedom of Church tradition developing while remaining catholic at every historical point, as the human and divine are united without alteration.⁶²

A primarily Christological approach to catholicity does not do away with the Holy Spirit's role in the Church but defines his role as continuing the work of Christ, "through the Holy Spirit Christians are united to Christ; they are united in him and established in his body."⁶³ For Florovsky, as explained by Matthew Baker, the Holy Spirit is given to the Church in history to build up the *Totus Christus*, yet the Spirit also transcends history, belonging not to the community or magisterium but to the Son.⁶⁴ St Justin Popovich likewise treats the Holy Spirit primarily in the role of building up the Body of Christ, focusing on the patristic dictum "that everything in the Church comes from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit."⁶⁵ The economies of the Son and Spirit cannot be separated, but the Incarnate Son is given precedence by Florovsky as the starting point for theology and ecclesiology.⁶⁶ For Florovsky this economic relation is based on the intra-Trinitarian relations,⁶⁷ and thus the eternal Truth of God's inner life is known in the Church in history. This is the ground for the primarily historical approach to understanding the Church's catholicity, in which, according to Ross J. Sauvé, catholicity is determined by a continuity of history and historical interpretation with unity of spirit.⁶⁸

⁶² Robert M. Arida, *The Body of the Living Christ*, p. 16.

⁶³ Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, p. 36.

⁶⁴ Matthew Baker, "The Eternal 'Spirit of the Son': Barth, Florovsky and Torrance on the Filioque" *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Vol 12, Issue 4., pp. 390-391.

⁶⁵ George N Petrovich, "Eucharistic Joy in Justin Popovich's Dogmatics." PhD thesis. (Rome: academia.edu, 2015), p. 94.

⁶⁶ Matthew Baker, "The Eternal 'Spirit of the Son'," p. 390.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 392-395.

⁶⁸ Ross J. Sauvé, "Georges V. Florovsky and Vladimir N. Lossky: An Exploration, Comparison and Demonstration of Their Unique Approaches to the

2.2 *The Faces of the Spirit*

Vladimir Lossky famously stated, “it is then that this divine person (...) will manifest himself (...) for the multitude of the Saints will be his image.”⁶⁹ For Lossky the Holy Spirit both continues Christ’s Incarnation through the Church’s hierarchy and has his own economy by which he communicates grace to human persons, multiplying while Christ unites.⁷⁰ This view is based on Lossky’s belief that Christ is the principle of unity in the Church and thus “if there is no other divine work than the work of the Son, this body can be but a totalitarian Church... human persons are... absorbed by this person.”⁷¹ While Lossky’s understanding of a distinct Pneumatological economy is controversial, critiqued by Dumitru Staniloae for not recognizing the diversity of the structures formed by the Son and the unifying work of the Spirit, the substance of his thought is that the Holy Spirit communicates divine grace to human persons,⁷² preserving their identity while elevating them to truly catholic personal existence, “another personal recapitulation of the whole united humanity.”⁷³ Lossky’s understanding is in debt to Pavel Florensky who emphasizes the hiddenness of the Spirit in the Church’s tradition,⁷⁴ and believes it is the pneumatophores, the *starets*, who manifest the Spirit and

Neopatristic Synthesis.” PhD thesis, Durham University. (Durham: Durham E-Theses Online, 2010), p. 136.

⁶⁹ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 173.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 167-168.

⁷¹ Anthony Feneuil, “Becoming God or Becoming Yourself: Vladimir Lossky on Deification and Personal Identity” *Theosis / Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West*. (Peeters, 2018), p. 57.

⁷² Dumitru Staniloae, “The Holy Spirit and the Sobornicity of the Church” in *Theology and the Church*. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), pp. 67-68.

⁷³ Anthony Feneuil, “Becoming God or Becoming Yourself,” pp. 57-58.

⁷⁴ Eugene F Rogers Jr, “The Mystery of the Spirit in Three Traditions: Calvin, Rahner, Florensky or, You keep Wondering where the Spirit Went” *Modern Theology* 19:2. (2003), p. 255.

of whom the Spirit builds the Church.⁷⁵ Thus, the Church's Pneumatological multiplicity must have equal footing with Christological unity, "if the true foundation of the catholicity of the Church is to be found."⁷⁶

For Vladimir Lossky, as Sauv  explains, ontological Truth is the Church's Christological essence, but its actualization is given to persons by the Holy Spirit, who is the "unique mode of receiving" and understanding tradition.⁷⁷ Historical continuity is not devalued by Lossky but what is most important for the Church's catholicity of Truth is its unity of spirit, manifested by the persons of the Saints who witness to the Church's fullness in every age, St Seraphim of Sarov being Lossky's prime example.⁷⁸ This view lends itself to a theological attitude rooted less in history and more in spiritual principles, for Pavel Florensky antinomic contemplation,⁷⁹ for Lossky apophatism,⁸⁰ which are necessary to receive and express the Truth. The Spirit is therefore the source of the Church's actualized personal catholicity, and persons must strive to express his Truth though their expressions cannot exhaust it as "knowledge of the Holy Spirit would give perfect spirituality, perfect deification to all Creation (...). Then history would end; the fullness of time would be achieved; in the whole world Time would be no longer."⁸¹

⁷⁵ Glen Attard Ocar, "The Holy Spirit as Protagonist in the Spiritual Life: An Appraisal of the Pneumatology of Pavel A. Florenskij (1882-1937)" *The Comforter*. (Rivista Enciklopedika ta' Spiritwalit , 2013), pp. 136-140.

⁷⁶ Vladimir Lossky, "Concerning the Third Mark of the Church: Catholicity," p. 177.

⁷⁷ Ross J. Sauv , "Georges V. Florovsky and Vladimir N. Lossky," pp. 97-98.

⁷⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 216.

⁷⁹ Charlo Camilleri, "Pavel Aleksandrovi  Florenskij's Method of Discerning Spiritual Truth" *Acta theol.* vol.33. scielo.org.za, 2013.

⁸⁰ Ross J. Sauv , "Georges V. Florovsky and Vladimir N. Lossky," p. 147.

⁸¹ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, p. 82.

2.3 Eternal Manifestation

Dumitru Staniloae writes, “the indissoluble union between Christ and the Holy Spirit who truly constitutes the Church (...) has its profound roots in that indissoluble union which according to Orthodox teaching exists between them within the sphere of their inner Trinitarian relations.”⁸² It is the Trinitarian life in which Staniloae grounds his ecclesiology,⁸³ bringing the Christocentric and Pneumatocentric modes of thought regarding catholicity into a synthesis informed by St Gregory Palamas’ development of the Trinitarian dogmas.⁸⁴

Viorel Coman explains that Staniloae, relying on the distinctions between causal and non-causal hypostatic relationships in the Trinity, shows that the divine Persons are always hypostatically distinct yet inseparable and interpenetrated by one another, and this eternal relationship between the Son and Spirit is manifested in the Church, thus every aspect of the Church is Christological and Pneumatological.⁸⁵ Christ just as much founds the Church’s multiplicity as its unity, as He is distinct from the Church as its Head governing from Heaven,⁸⁶ and the Spirit likewise is source of unity, “is himself the power of unification, the gift of unity in communion,”⁸⁷ and together they form the Church

⁸² Dumitru Staniloae, “Trinitarian Relations and the Life of The Church,” p. 15.

⁸³ Calinic Berger, “Does the Eucharist Make the Church? An Ecclesiological Comparison of Stăniloae and Zizioulas” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 51:1. (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007), p. 26.

⁸⁴ Dumitru Staniloae, “Trinitarian Relations and The Life of The Church,” pp. 15-16.

⁸⁵ Viorel Coman, “Unity and Diversity in the Church: Vladimir Lossky’s Reflection on the Role of Christ and the Spirit in the Church, and Its Critical Reception in Dumitru Staniloae’s Theology” *Catholicity under Pressure: The Ambiguous Relationship Between Diversity and Unity*. (2016), pp. 318-319.

⁸⁶ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God Vol. 4*, pp. 17-21.

⁸⁷ Dumitru Staniloae, “*The Holy Spirit and the Sobornicity of The Church*,” p. 66.

which is true sobornost, a real unity in multiplicity.⁸⁸ This is an improvement on the explanations of Vladimir Lossky as Staniloae addresses Lossky's dialectical economy of the Son as principle of natural unity over against the Spirit as principle of personal distinction with an articulation of the economy grounded in the inter-Trinitarian relations.⁸⁹

For Staniloae the unity of the Trinity is more than unity of essence, it is the Trinitarian communion of love in which the Spirit, himself a personal principle, eternally manifests the energetic love of the Father to the Son and the joy of the Son to the Father, "the Holy Spirit is what unites the father and the Son, not as essence but precisely as Person, leaving Father and Son at the same time as free Persons."⁹⁰ In the Church then human persons are united to this energetic communion of love in fullness, through the Son being granted the Spirit and through the Spirit sharing in filial sonship.⁹¹

This Trinitarian mode allows Dumitru Staniloae to approach the doctrine of the Church's catholic Truth in a way that synthesizes the Christocentric and Pneumatocentric approaches. Firstly, Staniloae's triadology necessitates the affirmation that "cataphatic and apophatic knowledge are always interwoven," as God is not irrational but the Supreme Reason.⁹² This overcomes the dichotomy between antirationalist tendencies in the Pneumatological mode,⁹³ and historicism bordering on philosophical nominalism in the Christological mode.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Ibidem, pp. 56-57.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, pp. 68-69.

⁹⁰ Dumitru Staniloae, "The Holy Trinity: Structure of Supreme Love," p. 102.

⁹¹ Ibidem, 106.

⁹² Calinic Berger, "Florovsky's 'Mind of the Fathers' and the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Dumitru Staniloae" *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 69: 1-4. (2017), p. 34.

⁹³ Ross J. Sauvé, "Georges V. Florovsky and Vladimir N. Lossky," p. 86.

⁹⁴ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, pp. 91-92.

Secondly, it refines the understanding of how the Church possesses catholic Truth, catholicity being virtually identical with Orthodoxy.⁹⁵ For Staniloae it is Christ who possesses fullness of Truth and the Church is infallible not only in its ontological connection to Christ,⁹⁶ but also in its continual subservience to Christ who is, as Calinic Berger explains, its guide and teacher distinct from itself.⁹⁷ This is a clear articulation of how the Church is Christ's Body yet not subsumed into his identity based on the Palamite doctrine of the divine energies, Christ and the Church remaining distinct in energetic communion,⁹⁸ and strengthens the theological understanding of the Church's historic yet charismatic catholic tradition.⁹⁹

Thus, the Trinitarian mode synthesizes the Christological and Pneumatological approaches, and Orthodox theology going forward must recognize a successful Trinitarian ecclesiological synthesis has been achieved and commit to theologizing from this perspective.

3 Ecclesial and Personal Catholicity

3.1 Tradition of the Fathers

While the neopatristic theologians may have differed in relating catholicity to Christology or Pneumatology, they were remarkably united in their understanding of catholicity in relation to the history of the Church, the defining of the Church's fullness of Truth in council (sobor). Through ecumenical councils the Church universally defines dogma, eternal truths in historic formulae which have "limitless capacity to adapt to the infinitely

⁹⁵ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God Vol. 4*, p. 82.

⁹⁶ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God Vol. 1*. (Brooklyn, NY: Holy Cross Orthodoxy Press, 2012), p. 64.

⁹⁷ Calinic Berger, "Does the Eucharist Make the Church?," pp. 41-42.

⁹⁸ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God Vol. 4*, pp. 59-60.

⁹⁹ Calinic Berger, "Does the Eucharist Make the Church?," p. 42.

variable situations of human life,"¹⁰⁰ making dogmatic clarification and development in language possible while also affirming that the eternal dogmatic Truth is not subject to "lack of fullness of Revelation, nor the necessity of adding to it anything whatever."¹⁰¹ However, ecumenical councils were understood not as constituting catholicity but manifesting it, "the universal Church's synodality is manifested in the ecumenical Council," because there is no higher order than the episcopacy.¹⁰² "It is only in the episcopate that the Church has its catholic witness" because in the bishop the local Church is united with all others by their bishops in apostolic succession not only of ordination but in apostolic tradition, which the bishops witness to in their definitions.¹⁰³ Georges Florovsky is adamant that the episcopal magisterium is one of witness to the truth not creative of it, thus not only must the bishop in his own person partake and witness to the Church's lived experience but must follow "those individuals who (...) are granted the gift of expressing this catholic consciousness."¹⁰⁴ There is a reciprocal relationship between the episcopal magisterium and Orthodox persons existing within the Church's catholic fullness. The charismatic order of the hierarchy is to witness definitively to the catholic truth as handed down from catholic persons, and this witness prepares persons in the Church to attain catholicity and thus manifest the truth to which the Church in council will witness, "the hierarchy not only

¹⁰⁰ Dumitru Staniloae, "The Theological Foundations of Hierarchy and Synodality" *Orthodox Synaxis*, 1970.

<https://orthodoxsynaxis.org/2020/02/03/dumitru-staniloae-the-theological-foundations-of-hierarchy-and-synodality/>.

¹⁰¹ Vladimir Lossky, "Tradition and Traditions," p. 151.

¹⁰² Dumitru Staniloae, "The Theological Foundations of Hierarchy and Synodality."

¹⁰³ Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, pp. 80-81.

¹⁰⁴ Georges Florovsky, "Breaks and Links," p. 166.

teaches the faithful, but also learns from them.”¹⁰⁵ This interpersonal communion is what Florovsky explains as the Church’s creative productivity in opposition to “pretentious assertions of prophetic freedom” such as believing freedom equates to opposition to religious norms.¹⁰⁶

The Church is thus catholic in its possession of and potential manifestation of the truth at every level, from the episcopacy to the laity, and this understanding of the neopatristic theologians was formed according to and explains doctrinally the reality of the Church’s dogmatic tradition through history. As Georges Florovsky poignantly noted throughout his works, the ecumenical councils of the Church proclaim persons authoritative, “it was the faith of St. Cyril and of St. Celestine that was established (...) it was the faith of St. Cyril and of St. Leo that was recognized.”¹⁰⁷ The doctrine of catholicity thus forces us to view the history of the Church in its councils and dogmas and in the persons of its fathers as expressing fullness of truth, as authoritative. This does not do away with historical nuance and a critical attitude because history contains breaks and links, but our approach to these dilemmas must come from our own “theologizing within the medium of sobornost.”¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Lossky explains that the Church in council, whether ecumenical or local, can say just what was said in the first ever council “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (Acts 15:28)” because of its catholicity and, as catholicity is the goal and medium from within which our theology must be done, individual theologians in the Church must strive to be able to say with St Basil “whosoever is not with me is not with the Truth.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Dumitru Staniloae, “The Theological Foundations of Hierarchy and Synodality.”

¹⁰⁶ Georges Florovsky, “Breaks and Links,” p. 167.

¹⁰⁷ Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁸ Georges Florovsky, “Breaks and Links,” p. 167.

¹⁰⁹ Vladimir Lossky, “Concerning the Third Mark of the Church: Catholicity,” p. 180.

3.2 Catholicity and the Transformed Mind

How is this catholicity to be attained by persons? For Georges Florovsky catholicity is attained through an ecclesial catholic transformation brought about by participation in the Church's worshipping life, ascetic effort, and self-renunciation in humility to the guidance of the fathers.¹¹⁰ Far from being mere slogans, Florovsky's epistemology of catholic transformation is firstly based on the belief that in the life of the Church, and especially in its Liturgy,¹¹¹ the believer experiences in a way akin to "vision-like apprehension"¹¹² the truth of the divine communion in his very being united with all believers of every age. Secondly, this experience and ontological reality is actualized in personal communion, not negating individuality but in humility submitting to the personal witness of the Church and so becoming capable in one's own person of embodying and expressing the truth believed by all.¹¹³ In short it is to live in tradition and "tradition is the Church itself in its catholic existence."¹¹⁴ The late Matthew Baker explains that for Florovsky this was put into practice by studying the fathers' historical witness from proclamation to polemic to doctrinal definition, focusing on the foundational questions of their theology to assimilate their theological spirit to express Orthodoxy in every age.¹¹⁵ The "perennial principles of Christian philosophy"¹¹⁶ are thus attained by persons in a communion which is both historical and transcends history, and

¹¹⁰ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, p. 228.

¹¹¹ Georges Florovsky, "The Worshipping Church," p. 344.

¹¹² Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, p. 228.

¹¹³ Georges Florovsky, "Breaks and Links," pp. 166-167.

¹¹⁴ Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, p. 68.

¹¹⁵ Matthew Baker, "«Theology Reasons' – in History: Neo-Patristic Synthesis and the Renewal of Theological Rationality»" *Θεολογία*, 81: 4. (2010), pp. 101-102.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 99-102.

catholicity is demonstrated to be necessarily conscious and active by the Church's very historic character.

The historic aspect cannot be divorced from personal spiritual catholicity even according to Vladimir Lossky who states regarding catholicity "herein is the invincible force of the fathers."¹¹⁷ Lossky undoubtedly shares Florovsky's belief in the authoritative and catholic fullness of the Church in its fathers and councils of all ages, and while differing in his focus and emphases his views are complementary to Florovsky's. In his famous article "Tradition and Traditions,"¹¹⁸ Lossky distinguishes between tradition as the oral and written traditions¹¹⁹ and Tradition as the principle or mode of knowledge by which the eternal truth is received and participated in the Holy Spirit.¹²⁰ "Tradition" is linked to personal catholicity as Lossky states "Tradition is... the condition of the Church having an infallible consciousness, but it is not a mechanism which will infallibly make known the Truth outside and above the consciousness of individuals."¹²¹ In every age "the Church gives to its members the faculty of knowing the Truth in a fullness that the world cannot contain"¹²² and this principle of knowledge is its mysticism, "the means of our union with God (...) Christian dogma unfolds itself about this mystical centre."¹²³ The witness of the father's and dogma is thus indispensable as the "intelligible instrument," "external limit" and "narrow door" which lead to the transcendent Truth, and it is from within this

¹¹⁷ Vladimir Lossky, "Concerning the Third Mark of the Church: Catholicity," p. 180.

¹¹⁸ In this article we have followed Lossky's convention, designating by capital "T" Tradition as the mode of knowledge of the Church in communion with God, and by lower-case "t" tradition we refer to the Church's historical tradition including its oral and written aspects. "Tradition and Traditions," p. 151.

¹¹⁹ Vladimir Lossky, "Tradition and Traditions," pp. 143, 147-148, 165.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, pp. 153-154.

¹²¹ Ibidem, p. 155.

¹²² Ibidem, 161.

¹²³ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 10.

Tradition of Truth that the dogmas are understood catholically and new expressions of the Truth (though in continuity of spirit with tradition) are possible.¹²⁴

Lossky is clear that catholicity cannot be equated with holiness but catholicity is necessary for becoming a saint because “a catholic is one who surpasses the individual (...) who mysteriously identifies himself with the whole and constitutes himself a witness of the Truth in the name of the Church.”¹²⁵ Lossky as a theologian thus focuses on the mystical experience needed for and discovered in the depths of the Church’s life which brings about catholic transformation, and according to him these depths are the Holy Spirit himself and the Tradition by which catholicity is attained is the apophatic way.¹²⁶

3.3 *Theanthropic Truth and Creation*

Catholicity must also have a metaphysical or cosmic significance as the fullness of the truth of all things. The Sophiologists began from this cosmic perspective but the monistic tendencies of their systems tended towards determinism on the paradigmatic level,¹²⁷ thus for Vladimir Soloviev the Church became the natural progression of the cosmos realizing its fullness much as “the appearance (...) of the second Adam, was not any more incomprehensible than the appearance (...) of the first Adam.”¹²⁸ Ross Sauv e’s description of utopian determinism captures the unfortunate result well, “the subject of utopian progress cannot be any

¹²⁴ Vladimir Lossky, “Tradition and Traditions,” p. 162.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 180.

¹²⁶ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 238-239.

¹²⁷ Brandon Gallaher, “Antinomism, Trinity and the Challenge of Solov’evan Pantheism in the Theology of Sergij Bulgakov” *Studies in East European Thought* Vol. 64, No. 3/4 (Springer, 2012), pp. 215-218.

¹²⁸ Vladimir Soloviev, *Lectures on Godmanhood*. (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948), p. 194.

one individual event or act, but only the ‘universal organism’ exists as subject progressing to its end.”¹²⁹ The neopatristic theologians, avoiding such monistic tendencies, argued that the subjects of the Church’s development and indeed the development of all creation are free persons in communion with the supreme personal reality of the Trinity, “for contact with supreme person or with the supreme truth cannot take place without a free opening towards him.”¹³⁰

The universe is indeed intelligible and is kept in being according to the divine reasons but these prototypes or divine reasons are not merged with but are rather the pattern after which free persons distinct from God by nature are created, and thus in human persons “the task of creation is not limited to development or to realizing its natural talents” but is found to be deification in personal communion.¹³¹ The universe is made as the intelligible ground for personal communion between God and man and is indeed to be recapitulated in man,¹³² thus all of its truths and forms of knowledge are to be found in fullness in the Church. Catholicity thus entails that in the Church all knowledge finds foundation in the Truth as it is united to God. As all truth and meaning is ultimately found in the personal God¹³³ then it must be understood that all human reasoning to arrive at truth must be grounded in the personally revealed God as well, as Dumitru Staniloae explains that it was only by divine revelation that knowledge of God was preserved prior to the Incarnation.¹³⁴ In the Church this grounding of all truth is possible as partial revelation is fulfilled:

The Church no longer experiences the pressure of revelation as a series of acts through which essential new contents are

¹²⁹ Ross J. Sauvé, “Georges V. Florovsky and Vladimir N. Lossky,” p. 114.

¹³⁰ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God Vol. 1*, p. 62.

¹³¹ Georges Florovsky, “Creation and Createdness,” p. 60.

¹³² Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God Vol. 1*, pp. 10-11.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

communicated to her. Rather, she experiences the pressure of revelation as a continuous act through which the same Christ is ceaselessly present in her midst with all his treasures of grace and truth. This consciousness is a sensitivity maintained in the Church by the Holy Spirit.¹³⁵

Firstly then the Church's catholicity ontologically encompasses in itself the fullness of all ontological truth, created and uncreated, for it is in light of the supernatural that the created is known in fullness, "when this knowledge 'is joined with faith, becoming one with her (...). This knowledge is then fulfilled by faith and receives the power to 'rise to the heights;' to perceive him who is beyond all perception."¹³⁶

Secondly, the Church's tradition in which natural knowledge is united with supernatural in the light of divine revelation and the communion of the Church becomes the worldview and paradigm from within which all reason must take place and look to as its presuppositional foundation, "supernatural revelation has thus given clarity and certainty to natural faith."¹³⁷

Understanding this it is possible to describe the Church in light of its dogmas and doctrines as a system, and as Staniloae explains this is no system based upon mere abstract ideas but is

"the living unity of Christ, the person in whom there is united, and who himself unites, divinity and creation... as system, universally comprehensive [But]... through freedom, the system is continually and actually open to what is new."¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Ibidem, p. 64.

¹³⁶ Justin Popovich, *Orthodox Faith & Life in Christ*, p. 143.

¹³⁷ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God Vol. 1*, p. 19.

¹³⁸ Ibidem, p. 66.

4 The Necessity of Catholicity to the Nature of the Church

4.1 One, Holy and Apostolic

In light of all that has been said, it is evident that the theology of catholicity is integral to the Orthodox theology of the Church, and indeed catholicity is the primary attribute of the Church listed in the Nicene Creed, underpinning oneness, holiness and apostolicity. The Church is one according to St Justin Popovich because “the partition, the division, of the Church is ontologically and essentially impossible.”¹³⁹ Even Georges Florovsky, who believed vestiges of ecclesiality existed among the separated faith communities, identified Orthodoxy as the only true Church, alone the *Una Sancta*.¹⁴⁰ This is because the Church’s unity is qualitative, is catholic, ontologically by the indwelling of the Trinity in the Body of Christ and personally, in the living preservation of sacramental and doctrinal unity by the episcopate and laity in love. If vestiges of ecclesiality exist outside the One Church it is not an ontological division but the Church working in them in expectation of returning them to the oneness which exists only in catholic fullness and living unity.¹⁴¹ The Church is one because there is one catholic Body, “one unique theanthropic organism in all worlds.”¹⁴²

The Church is Holy also because it is catholic. These ecclesial attributes must not be confused as this would lead to Montanism; however holiness is not achievable outside catholicity.¹⁴³ The Church is holy because “holiness is an attribute of God” and as the Body of Christ the Church is filled with all holiness.¹⁴⁴ This

¹³⁹ Justin Popovich, *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, trans. Benjamin Emmanuel Stanley. (Birmingham, AL: Lazarica Press, 2000), p. 48.

¹⁴⁰ Georges Florovsky, “Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement,” p. 285.

¹⁴¹ Georges Florovsky, “The Limits of the Church,” pp. 254-255.

¹⁴² Justin Popovich, *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, p. 47.

¹⁴³ Vladimir Lossky, “Concerning the Third Mark of the Church: Catholicity,” p. 176.

¹⁴⁴ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God Vol. 4*, p. 69.

holiness is primarily divine living, energy not essence, and is participated in through personal relationship with the Holy Trinity.¹⁴⁵

The Church is therefore called holy in both an ontological sense, as the environment of sanctification bearing all sacraments, and in a personal sense as the living interpersonal communion of deification, “everything in it is holy (...) all that it has.”¹⁴⁶ Vladimir Lossky states it is impossible to imagine the Church without holiness “the source and the end of her existence,” and it is likewise impossible to imagine her as holy without catholicity, without unity in plurality, without truth which would result in “an unconscious holiness, a lightless path towards sanctification, in the darkness of not knowing what grace is.”¹⁴⁷

Apostolicity likewise exists in and is a manifestation of catholic existence. Lossky states that the apostolic charism of the hierarchy is an objective state, the unchanging structure of the Church.¹⁴⁸ We have discussed how this structure of the hierarchy in apostolic succession is related to Catholicity, and now it is apropos to state that the Church is apostolic not only by ordained succession but by its founding upon the apostles and continued preservation of their same faith. “We appeal to the apostles, and not just an abstract ‘apostolicity’”¹⁴⁹ because it is the apostles who in history were given the fullness of Truth, the apostolic deposit, and were “the first god-men through grace.”¹⁵⁰ The Church is apostolic not by slavishly adhering to the expressions of the apostles alone, but by a living fidelity to their message and theanthropic spirit, preserved in the catholic communion by which

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 72.

¹⁴⁶ Justin Popovich, *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁷ Vladimir Lossky, “Concerning the Third Mark of the Church: Catholicity,” pp. 171-172.

¹⁴⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 187.

¹⁴⁹ Georges Florovsky, “Saint Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers,” p. 223.

¹⁵⁰ Justin Popovich, *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, p. 51.

the apostles are “here on earth, linked with the whole theanthropic eternity of Christ.”¹⁵¹ The Church is apostolic because the apostles themselves are not distant but ever present, themselves and in the holy fathers.¹⁵²

4.2 Orthodoxy from Catholicity

There is another attribute of the Church deriving from the four attributes of the Nicene Creed, Orthodoxy, in Russian *Pravoslavie*, meaning correct belief and right worship. These two aspects of “Orthodoxy” cannot be separated from one another as according to Sergius Bulgakov “the *lex orandi* in the largest sense is the *lex credendi* (...) the altar and the theologian’s cell (...) must be conjoined.”¹⁵³ For Georges Florovsky it is in the worship of the Church and pre-eminently in the eucharist that the Church is realized catholically, not only in the fullness of the Church under the bishop in sobornost with all bishops, but in the prayer of all Orthodox living and dead, “the Eucharistic mentioning of the living and the departed means the confirming of each individuality in the united and catholic body of the Church.”¹⁵⁴

In the anamnesis of worship the historical is not left behind but is made actually present, the horizontal retains its nature while becoming the vertical, and in the communion of prayer the Church is united in one body while retaining personal distinction.¹⁵⁵ This is possible because the Church worships in the fullness of the Spirit, an ontological fullness experienced in personal communion, and also because of its fullness of truth. The Church’s worship follows the command of Christ, “they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24).”

¹⁵¹ Ibidem.

¹⁵² Ibidem, p. 52.

¹⁵³ Sergius Bulgakov, “Dogma and Dogmatic Theology,” pp. 68-69.

¹⁵⁴ Dobromir Dimitrov, “The Eucharist as the realization of the catholicity of the Church according to Protospesbyter Georges Florovsky” *Sourozh, A Journal of Orthodox Life and Thought* (111). (2016), p. 104.

¹⁵⁵ Georges Florovsky, “The Worshipping Church,” pp. 340-344.

The fullness of truth is manifest in worship in a mode different from that of dogmas and theologizing. It is manifest “in images and symbols, in religious poetry and religious art,”¹⁵⁶ indeed in the prayers and actions of the worshippers, but the content of this truth is the same as that manifest in theology and dogma, “the two (...) coincide in so far as they express, each by its proper means, the same revealed reality.”¹⁵⁷

The ontological reality must be expressed truthfully in the reason and praxis that derives from it, thus Florovsky explains in history matters of asceticism could only be resolved in dogmatic synthesis and matters of dogma in ascetic synthesis.¹⁵⁸ To say that the Church is Orthodox thus requires a dual affirmation, that in it is preserved true worship and true doctrine, not in abstract nor merely in potential but in life, for the Church lives in worship. The liturgical and ascetic traditions of the Church are not merely dogmatic facts which theology must look to in explicating their content, rather these exist always in the catholic tradition which at every point in history does explicate their content truthfully. For the Church Orthodoxy can only be living and full, never static nor partial.

4.3 Catholicity as Trinitarian Unity in Multiplicity

If we were to sum up the doctrine of catholicity, it would be that the Church is united in the image of the Trinity through union with the Trinity. Rather than a false dialectic between Christol-

¹⁵⁶ Georges Florovsky, “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation” *The Christian East Journal* Vol. XIII No. 2 1932. https://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/holy_spirit_revelation_florovsky.htm.

¹⁵⁷ Vladimir Lossky, “Tradition and Traditions,” p. 167.

¹⁵⁸ Georges Florovsky, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky Vol. 10* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1974), http://www.holytrinitymission.org/books/english/fathers_florovsky_4.htm.

ogy and Pneumatology we must hold that ecclesiology is a chapter of Triadology, as was believed by Dumitru Stăniloae,¹⁵⁹ uniting Son and Spirit, history and spirituality, hierarchy and charism, unity and multiplicity.

In the Trinity the Spirit's eternal procession is stamped with the character of the Son, in proceeding from the Father he manifests the love of the Father to rest in the Son and is energetically manifested by the Son as love to the Father, thus the diversity of unique persons is preserved in a unity in which no divine person can be separated from the fullness of the other.¹⁶⁰ Thus in the divine economy and in the life of the Church the Triune persons all together grant their divine energetic grace, though in different modes reflecting the eternal relations of from the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit, "the Son and Spirit not only reveal one another, each of them from his own position, but they also reveal the Father."¹⁶¹ It is because of the fullness of the divine life, not restricted as monad or dyad,¹⁶² nor overflowing into polytheism,¹⁶³ that the Church is itself catholic and exists in sobornost.

This life of the Trinity is fullness of Truth, and Pavel Florensky put it well in stating "outside the Three, there is not one, there is no Subject of the Truth."¹⁶⁴ By incorporation into the Trinitarian life the Church is raised up, its historical existence is permeated with the divine fullness of Truth at every point, as in the Incarnation Christ divinizes history, pneumatizes it and opens it to the

¹⁵⁹ Viorel Coman, "Dumitru Stăniloae on the Filioque: The Trinitarian Relationship between the Son and the Spirit and Its Relevance for the Ecclesiological Synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 49:4. (2014), pp. 570-571.

¹⁶⁰ Viorel Coman, "Dumitru Stăniloae on the Filioque," pp. 569-570.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 574.

¹⁶² Vladimir Lossky, "The Procession of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Doctrine," pp. 83-85.

¹⁶³ Dumitru Stăniloae, "Trinitarian Relations and The Life of The Church," p. 23.

¹⁶⁴ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, p. 38.

suprahistorical.¹⁶⁵ The Church thus participates in the Trinity and is its created image, “it is a unity in multiplicity, a living and differentiated unity (...) the created image of the majestic and holy Trinity.”¹⁶⁶ In this pneumatisation the historical becomes united with the vertical without losing its nature and the ineffable presence of God is available at every point through the Spirit, not becoming a retreat into agnosticism, but through the Spirit the Logos is experienced who grants knowledge beyond knowledge to know “what is beyond everything perceptible and intelligible.”¹⁶⁷ The Church enters into the life by which the Father knows the Son in the Spirit; ecclesiology becomes “a chapter of the doctrine of the Father” in the words of Viorel Coman.¹⁶⁸ As a community of persons human and divine, this Trinitarian catholicity is something continually lived and worked for, and many do not accomplish this or fall away, but as in the Trinity there is no interval between Father, Son and Spirit so in the Church there is no point at which this fullness of truth is not manifest and preserved. This is the vision of catholicity in Orthodox theology.

5 Key Questions for the Future

In the previous chapters we have discussed the history of the theology of catholicity in modern Orthodox theology, have elucidated the different modes of thought regarding catholicity, and in doing so have provided our own theological synthesis and definition of catholicity in the neopatristic paradigm. We have de-

¹⁶⁵ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God Vol. 3* (Brooklyn: Holy Cross Orthodoxy Press, 2012), p. 133.

¹⁶⁶ Georges Florovsky, *The Body of the Living Christ*, p. 62.

¹⁶⁷ Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Orthodox Theological Seminary Press, 2003), chap. 27, location 4296.

¹⁶⁸ Viorel Coman, “Dumitru Stăniloae on the Filioque,” p. 575.

defined catholicity as the unity in multiplicity of the Church in fullness of truth, in essence, potency and actuality of persons, imaging in history and being grounded in the communion of the Holy Trinity. The Church's catholicity is thus the absolute paradigm within which and from which fullness of truth is accessed and manifest, the criterion by which all knowledge and belief is judged and given true meaning within Tradition.

Catholicity is thus not only given but striven for, and in this theological striving there have been disagreements and discrepancies which must become key questions motivating Orthodox theological thought moving forward. Of utmost importance is the question of commitment to a synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology in a Trinitarian catholicity. This synthesis has been accomplished in the theology of Dumitru Staniloae and is evidenced in the work of theologians such as the late Boris Bobrinskoy who in his work *The Mystery of the Church* explains catholicity precisely in Palamite Trinitarian terms.¹⁶⁹ However, this synthesis has not been widely received and there is deficiency in the popular ecclesiology of Met John Zizioulas both in regards to Triadology proper and its ecclesiological consequences, such as a false dialectic between history and eschatology, and pitting asceticism and even faith over against sacramentalism.¹⁷⁰ The Trinitarian synthesis must be applied in all areas of the life of the Church and especially in the area of theology, specifically the ability and necessity for theology to speak catholically or dogmatically.

We have discussed how a Trinitarian catholicity is necessary for an understanding of tradition as fullness of truth in essence and actuality simultaneously at all historical points. It is this understanding of catholicity which is the precondition of all dogma and catholic expressions and preservation of the faith, and it is in this

¹⁶⁹ Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Church: A Course in Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012), pp. 124-125.

¹⁷⁰ Calinic Berger, "Does the Eucharist Make the Church?," pp. 49-51.

catholic medium that “those who believe exist continually between the life of history and the supra-historical life.”¹⁷¹

Georges Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky differed on this point only in emphases, Florovsky responding to theologies of Russian and Western religious philosophers privileging the abstract and metaphysical over the historical and particular,¹⁷² Lossky responding to those using the grey areas of history to attack the unity of sacred tradition.¹⁷³ A Trinitarian catholicity contains both of these perspectives and means theology must never become unbalanced towards the historical, categorized by Lossky as “seeking to establish by the methods of secular science a new canon of tradition,”¹⁷⁴ nor towards the spiritual alone, but both must be held together inseparably.

But to accomplish the above requires that we be, to quote Georges Florovsky, “theologizing within the medium of sobornost.”¹⁷⁵ In short, in all our theologizing, historical or dogmatic, we must begin from within the paradigm of the Church’s catholic Tradition. We must begin from the fullness of truth and move outward; to begin from that which is extrinsic or partial is to compromise catholicity for “only a ‘catholic action’ is permissible in the Holy Catholic Church.”¹⁷⁶ This does not imply a retreat from the world nor an acceptance of the world as equal, its trends axiomatically viewed in a favourable light to be addressed agreeably; rather from within the Church the fullness of truth is available to address every age, to find the true or false in every

¹⁷¹ Dumitru Staniloae, “Revelation Through Acts, Words and Images,” p. 128.

¹⁷² Georges Florovsky, “‘Theological Will’,” pp. 243-244.

¹⁷³ Vladimir Lossky, “The Procession of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Doctrine,” pp. 72-73.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

¹⁷⁵ Georges Florovsky, “Breaks and Links,” p. 167.

¹⁷⁶ Georges Florovsky, “Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement,” p. 288.

context, and we do so in communion with the catholic community of all ages.¹⁷⁷

In the fullest meaning of the words of the Synodikon of Orthodoxy, proclaimed in sobornost by all the Church annually, the goal of our theology must be to say “this is the Faith of the apostles, this is the Faith of the fathers, this is the Faith of the Orthodox, this Faith hath established the whole world,”¹⁷⁸ or in the words of the father of neopatristic theology, “the fathers are not dead. I am still alive!”¹⁷⁹

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¹⁷⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *Dogmatic Theology: Creation, God's image in Man, & the Redeeming Work of the Trinity* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017), pp. 150-152.

¹⁷⁸ Alan Brown, “The Synodikon of Orthodoxy (1583)” *Максимологија*, Accessed June 2, 2021. <https://maksimologija.org/the-synodikon-of-orthodoxy-1583/>.

¹⁷⁹ Georges Florovsky, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, p. 232.

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