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Original Paper

The Neopatristic Synthesis and Eschatology: Georges Florovsky and John Zizioulas in Dialogue

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Abstract
This essay explores the eschatological dimensions of the theological thought of Georges Florovsky and John Zizioulas by emphasizing them within the context of the neopatristic synthesis. It begins by defining Florovsky's concept of the neopatristic synthesis and highlights it as a spirit of doing theology, rather than a strict methodology. Following, the essay examines the eschatological implications of Florovsky's thought and concludes that they remain incomplete. Responding to this, the essay demonstrates how Zizioulas builds on Florovsky's eschatological thought by integrating eschatology with ontology and communion. Therefore, offering a more precise understanding and developed understanding of the eschatological implications, and thus, advancing the vision of Florovsky's neopatristic synthesis.

Keywords: Georges Florovsky, John Zizioulas, neopatristic synthesis, eschatology, modern Orthodox theology

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Introduction

In a short text uncovered by his biographer Andrew Blane, Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) briefly sketches out his "theological will," for the future generations of readers and students of his thought. Florovsky reflects on the theological idea that his thought has become most associated with: the "neopatristic synthesis." Foundationally grounded in the example of patristic theology which Florovsky holds as that which "taught" him "Christian Freedom," the neopatristic synthesis is fundamentally "a creative reassessment of those insights which were granted to the Holy Men of old." It is that which is "patristic," and "faithful to the spirit and vision of the Fathers, *ad mentem Patrum* [according to the mind of the Fathers]. Yet, it must be also neopatristic, since it is to be addressed to the new age, with its own problems and queries."[1]

With such reflection, Florovsky lays the ground for the reorientation of an Orthodox theology that is rooted in creative engagement with the Fathers. However, he notes that his contribution to this project of the neopatristic synthesis has been limited. He writes that "much has been left undone. I have written less than I ought to have written or probably than I could have written. And now probably it is too late."[2] The evidence of such an admission is contained within the text: Florovsky did hope to be 'Given time' to fully write down his "theological will" and "to convey" his "deep concern to the coming generations," but no such theological will was completed, outside of this text.[3]

Despite Florovsky's self-admittance that he did not write enough to fully develop or establish his ideas—and in particular, the call for a neopatristic synthesis—his profound influence on the shape of Orthodox thought in the 20th century, through his writings, lectures, academic posts, and ecumenical activities has led many to regard

[1] Georges Florovsky, "Theological Will" in *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Theological Writings*, eds. Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 242.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 243.

him as one of the most important figures in modern Orthodox thought. Thus, while Florovsky never did complete a "theological will," his influence upon the shape of Orthodox theology is undeniable.[4] The figure in which this influence is perhaps most visible and most comprehensively known is that of Met. John Zizioulas (1931–2023).[5] Zizioulas, who worked under Florovsky during his doctoral studies, is undoubtedly the most important Greek theologian of the 20th century. In many respects, Zizioulas shows himself as an inheritor of Florovsky's neopatristic synthesis. That is, as a theologian whose frame of thought is "faithful to the spirit and vision of the fathers" and addressed to "a new age." The primary contention of this essay, especially regarding Florovsky, is that Zizioulas engages in and fulfills a neopatristic synthesis within the sphere of eschatology.

There is an eschatological undercurrent throughout Florovsky's writings, and in many cases, the eschatological realities of the Christian faith are appealed to in order to promote a particular point. Zizioulas, likewise, is a deeply eschatological thinker. There is no consideration of Zizioulas, in his thought, that does not carry an eschatological characteristic. Zizioulas is a more developed eschatological thinker based on his comprehensive relation of eschatology to ontology. This essay is thus not a criticism of Zizioulas but a display of how, through eschatology, Zizioulas shows himself to be doing work that is truly neopatristic as Florovsky envisioned it—as oriented towards the thought of the patristic era, and fostering the spirit of creativity in such engagement.

This essay begins by defining the neopatristic synthesis as understood by Florovsky. It argues that, for Florovsky, the neopatristic synthesis is not a rigid methodology, but is rather a posture or spirit of

[4] For an example of Florovsky's influence, see *The Living Christ: The Theological Legacy of Georges Florovsky*, eds. John Chryssavagis and Brandon Gallaher (London: T&T Clark, 2021), which features a diverse range of theologians, monastics, and hierarchs, reflecting on the thought and legacy of Florovsky. See especially, in the volume, Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, "The Diachronic Significance of Fr. Georges Florovsky's Theological Contribution," 37–50.

[5] Other notable figures in whom Florovsky's influence can be seen include Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958), Alexander Schmemann (1921–1983), John Meyendorff (1926–1992), and John Romanides (1927–2001).

engagement. After establishing this foundation, the essay explores the eschatological implications of Florovsky's thought. Ultimately, concluding that these implications remain unfulfilled. This allows for an examination of how Zizioulas, in recognizing the limitations of Florovsky's approach, further develops eschatology in relation to ontology, and therefore, offers a more precise vision of the eschatological implications of the Orthodox tradition.

Understanding the Neopatristic Synthesis

One of the great misconceptions surrounding the neopatristic synthesis present in both endorsers and critics is that it exists as a unified methodology. That is, that it is envisioned as a methodological structure for theology that is neatly defined, categorized, and understood. This, it is to be said, is a fundamental misunderstanding of the neopatristic synthesis. Such an understanding is not present in the writings of the neopatristic synthesis' architect, Georges Florovsky. Because this essay argues that Zizioulas is an inheritor of the neopatristic synthesis and that this inheritance is known in the development of Zizioulas' eschatology, it must be defined. More specifically, in order to invoke it with a sense of usefulness, the neopatristic synthesis must be defined with special attention to how it is not—strictly speaking—a methodology, but rather a frame for doing theology in modernity.

It must first be stated that Florovsky's use of the term "neopatristic synthesis" is reflective. Thus, what is meant is that it is not, as it were, something that is invoked with any uniformity or consistency in his corpus. Moreover, it does not play an active role in shaping his writings and arguments. His use of the term is scant throughout his corpus. Its first real appearance was in Florovsky's 1948 commencement address at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary entitled, "The Legacy and Task of Orthodox Theology."[6] In the address, Florovsky speaks of a "reintegrated" Eastern theological tradition, wherein the theology of "The East must meet and face the challenge of the West,

[6] Georges Florovsky, "The Legacy and Task of Orthodox Theology," in *Patristic Witness*, 185–191.

and the West perhaps has to pay more attention to the legacy of the East."[7] The neopatristic synthesis is, for Florovsky, a broad effort of overcoming the "Westernizing" of Orthodox theology by reclaiming the spirit of the patristic tradition, i.e., "to walk truly in [the] steps [of the Fathers] means to break new ways. … No renewal is possible without a return to the sources."[8]

As evidenced by the above quotations, Florovsky's call for a neopatristic synthesis—or a patristic renewal for Orthodoxy's theological witness in modernity—is fundamentally not methodologically stringent. What is being pointed towards is more simply a retrieval of the spirit or "mind" of the Fathers. For instance, Florovsky argues that "'To follow' the Fathers does not mean just 'to quote' them. 'To follow' the Fathers means to acquire their 'mind,' their *phronema*."[9] For Florovsky, to follow the Fathers in the way of renewal is to acquire their "mind." Thus, it is to not just sit with "isolated sayings and phrases" of the Fathers, but to integrate them into one's own thought, as they "are truly alive." This is a recovery as "an existential attitude" and "as a spiritual orientation."[10] Florovsky argues that, in such recovery, theology can be "reintegrated into the fullness of our Christian existence."[11] The closest thing we have to a self-identified theological methodology of Florovsky comes from his conclusion to *Ways of Russian Theology*, entitled "Breaks and Links."[12] Here, Florovsky speaks of the future of Orthodox theology by advocating a theology that returns to "patristic sources and foundations" while remaining attuned to the problems of "the contemporary age."[13] This theology, Florovsky argues, must be historically conscious and ecclesially referential, that is, at the service of the Church and its catholicity. This is the contribution of the Fathers in Florovsky's mind. "Orthodox theology," he writes, "is called upon to

[7] Ibid., 191.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Georges Florovsky, "St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers," in *Patristic Witness*, 224–225.
[10] Ibid., 227.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Georges Florovsky, "Breaks and Links," in *Patristic Witness*, 159–183.
[13] Florovsky, "Breaks and Links," in *Patristic Witness*, 172.

show that the 'ecumenical question' can only be resolved in the fulfilment of the Church, within the totality of a catholic tradition."[14] What organizes these characteristics is their expression under the "Hellenistic style" of the Fathers.[15] That is, Christian Hellenism to which we will turn to shortly in our examination. However, in sum, these characteristics, as observed by Paul Ladouceur, do not give a strict definition to the neopatristic synthesis and its methodological aims. Thus, the neopatristic synthesis remains "nebulously defined."[16]

It has recently been argued that however laudable Florovsky's call for the recovery or reintegration of the patristic spirit in Orthodox theology may be, it is not always on display in his own writings.[17] Moreover, although Florovsky is a historian, he falls into the temptation of decontextualizing the Fathers in many of his writings to prove a particular point in historical reconstruction. This is perhaps most evident in Florovsky's proclaimed "Christian Hellenism," which Zizioulas endorses.[18] Florovsky's Hellenism is built upon an understanding of Christian Revelation to the Gentiles in a providential relationship to the language of the Greek world. For Florovsky, "Hellenism is a standing category of the Christian existence."[19] Florovsky severely undercuts the diverse theological witness of the patristic tradition by collapsing legitimate differences in the theological approach to Hellenism simply because the Scriptures and dogmatic proclamations of the Church from which these theologians were working are grounded in Hellenistic ideas. To quote Marcus Plested,

[14] Ibid., 174.

[15] Ibid., 168.

[16] Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology: 'Behold, I Make All Things New,'* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 112–114.

[17] See Alexander Hurtsellers, "The Church as an Incarnational Mystery: Biography and Christology in the Ecclesiology of Georges Florovsky," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 67.3–4 (2023): 167–197.

[18] "Just as the Christianization of Hellenism would not have been achieved without the adoption of Greek philosophical concepts of the time on the part of the Church Fathers, so too the transmission of the patristic teaching from one age to another can only occur through the concepts and dilemmas of the time and culture where the patristic message is transmitted." Zizioulas, "The Diachronic Significance of Fr. Georges Florovsky's Theological Contribution," in *Living Christ*, 41.

[19] Georges Florovsky, "Creation and Createdness," in *Patristic Witness*, 51.

> The failure to adequately acknowledge the distinctive shape and characteristics of the Latin Christian tradition is compounded by the insistence on Hellenism as the defining feature of properly patristic theology. This insistence absolutizes one possible philosophical framework and would seem to preclude full integration into the envisioned synthesis of non-Hellenic expressions of patristic Christianity, such as the earlier Syriac tradition.[20]

Therefore, it becomes uncertain as to what veers too far away from Hellenism and ceases to be a properly grounded Christian theology. One could argue that, by engaging the Idealist philosophical tradition through the dogmatic tradition of the Orthodox Church, figures like Pavel Florensky and Sergius Bulgakov are being Hellenistic, insofar as their works are an idealism under the cross wherein they creatively engage a dominant philosophy through dogmatic affirmations. It is therefore difficult to engage the validity of the call for Hellenism because it is obscured by its own vagueness and limitations. It is an absolutization of "one possible philosophical framework." It thus does not consider the variety of non-Hellenic expressions of the patristic epoch. As noted by Sergey Horujy, "The very concept of "Christian Hellenism," in a manner typical of Florovsky, is nowhere rigorously defined and elaborated, remaining an umbrella formula of vaguely delineated content. In the course of time, the somewhat overblown quality of Florovsky's praises of Hellenism and their partial disputability are becoming more plainly visible."[21]

Moreover, this reconstruction of the neopatristic synthesis, encapsulated here through Florovsky's appeal to Hellenism, offers a paradigm for Orthodoxy theology that forcibly defines itself in opposition to the West. While Florovsky is not as anti-Western as some of the more notable figures he influenced such as Vladimir Lossky and more strikingly John Romanides, Florovsky's theological example, in its claimed reclamation of the Fathers against an acute Westernization, nevertheless leads his understanding of neopatristic syn-

[20] Marcus Plested, "The Emergence of the Neopatristic Synthesis: Content, Challenges, and Limits," in *Living Christ*, 231.

[21] Sergey Horujy, "The Concept of Neopatristic Synthesis at a New Stage," *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 57:1 (2019): 22.

thesis to be spoken of vis-a-vis a Western counterpart. In short, Florovsky paints with too broad a brush a uniformity of the patristic tradition, which paradoxically hinders the call for the neopatristic synthesis, while simultaneously defining it.

Although there are shortcomings in Florovsky's use of history and in his polemics, he nevertheless identifies a way forward in the doing of theology that is able to address the problems of modernity ever aware of the richness of the Orthodox tradition. This richness is best witnessed in the creative engagement of the Fathers with the theological problems of their own day. Florovsky, in calling for this theological renewal, argues that "what is wanted… is not to translate the old dogmatic formulas into a modern language, but, on the contrary, to return creatively to the "ancient" experience, to re-live in the depth of our being, and to incorporate our thought in the continuous fabric of ecclesial fullness."[22]

Florovsky's hope is to present to Orthodoxy's dialogue partners in modernity a theology that offers a coherent understanding of the Orthodox tradition. However, he collapses the diversity of this tradition in an attempt to speak of its facets with great uniformity: In spite of his call to "ancient" experience, his call prioritizes a particular narrative of continuity amidst the patristic corpus that favors the Greek Fathers, at the exclusion of the diversity of the Latin West, and Syriac and Coptic traditions.[23] As observed by John Meyendorff in the preface to the 1983 reprint of the Russian edition of *The Ways of Russian Theology*, "An Orthodox theologian certainly has the right to ask himself if Florovsky does not consider the tradition of the Fathers too narrowly."[24] It is my contention that Florovsky does define the traditions of the Fathers too narrowly. Moreover, when I say this is definitive of the neopatristic synthesis, I am arguing that the neopatristic synthesis does not exist as a concrete methodology.

[22] Georges Florovsky, "The Ways of Russian Theology" in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky Georges Florovsky,* vol. 5, Richard S. Haugh and Paul Kachur (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1976), 197.

[23] See Plested, "The Emergence," in *Living Christ*. See also John Behr, "Synthesis to Symphony", in *Living Christ*, 279–288.

[24] John Meyendorff, "Preface" to Georges Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1983), 4.

This is evidenced by the noted shortsightedness in relation to the term. One cannot truly synthesize the Fathers, if aspects of the Fathers are ignored to present continuities where they are not. Thus, the neopatristic synthesis must be considered as providing a scaffold or structure for understanding the Fathers. It does not necessarily include the whole of the patristic corpus, but prioritizes a spirit of understanding the doing of theology that is deeply attuned to the past, present, and future life of the Church, or in Florovsky's language, the "fabric of ecclesial fullness." Therefore, the neopatristic synthesis is a scaffold or structure that was never filled out by Florovsky.

There are certainly works in Florovsky's corpus that exhibit the call of the neopatristic synthesis. Most notably, his essay, "Creation and Createdness", which surveys a variety of voices within the patristic tradition and within its commentary as they relate to the question of creation and its ontological separation from God. Nevertheless, his efforts to bridge the patristic mind with that of modern engagement do not cohere with a particular system. Thus, in this case, the neopatristic synthesis is left undone.

This has been recently observed by Kallistos Ware who sees in Florovsky's neopatristic synthesis "oversimplification and vagueness."[25] Ware states that "it has to be admitted that [Florovsky] himself f*ailed to provide a clear and concise inventory of specific doctrines that comprise this synthesis.*"[26] However, Ware notes that "despite these shortcomings, Forovsky may be applauded for providing an inspiring ideal for theological enquiry, a visionary charter for doctrinal exploration that is challenging in its possibilities and deeply Orthodox in its principles."[27] It is my argument, as stated in the introduction, that Florovsky's neopatristic synthesis left itself open to his aims in his theological will. That is, for those to come afterwards and fill in said scaffolding. This, as the rest of this paper will argue, is best evidenced in the thought of Met. John Zizioulas and this fulfillment is perhaps

[25] Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia, "Three Witnesses: Bulgakov, Florovsky, Lossky," in *Living Christ*, 59.

[26] Ibid. Italics added.

[27] Ware, "Three Witnesses," in *Living Christ*, 60.

known best through the eschatological considerations of Zizioulas and Florovsky.

Eschatology and Florovsky: An Incomplete Relationship

To demonstrate the eschatological development of Zizioulas from Florovsky's thought, we must recognize the eschatological theme shared between both, which is an admittedly broad point of consideration. However, there is between the two thinkers an appeal to eschatology that helps to structure their thought on ecclesial participation and anticipation of the *parousia*. It is through this that I would like to highlight their eschatological reflections more generally and show the more complete nature of Zizioulas' thought, as related to ontology and communion.

Florovsky's sense of the eschatological expectations of the Church must be traced back to the very grounding of the Church. That is, in Christ and thus in the mystery of the Godman. It is in this grounding that Florovsky's eschatological appeal is understood. Florovsky recognizes that the grounding of the Church is a mystery, but a mystery known in the Church's historical nature in Christ. In other words, by being established in history, the Church is, so argues Florovsky, able to wed together, as Christ did and does, the historical and the eschatological. The Church is the "Body of the Incarnate Lord." There is an incarnational emphasis to the Church. To quote further on this point,

> This is the chief reason why we should prefer a Christological orientation in the theology of the Church rather than a pneumatological. For, on the other hand, the Church, as a whole, has her personal center only in Christ, she is not an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, nor is she merely a Spirit-bearing community, *but precisely the Body of Christ, the Incarnate Lord.*[28]

It is not just that the Church is the Body of Christ, but that the Church is the "Incarnate" Body of Christ. Florovsky places emphasis on the understanding of the Church Incarnationally to highlight his

[28] Georges Florovsky, "Revelation and Interpretation," in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 26. Italics added.

commitment to the Church in history. Namely, the Church moves from the God who entered into human existence and has been decisively made known in Christ. In the Church, "Christians are incorporated into Christ and Christ abides in them—this intimate union constitutes the mystery of the Church. The Church is, as it were, the place and the mode of the redeeming presence of the Risen Lord in the redeemed world. The Body of Christ is Christ Himself."[29] The Church, as the Body of Christ, is where "the Incarnation is being completed."[30]

The Church's identity, therefore, comes from the Incarnation. Christology announces the "mystery of the Church."[31] Here, one sees that Florovsky understands the Church to be "theanthropic," wherein the "mystery of incarnation, the mystery of the "two natures," indissolubly united, [is] continually accomplished."[32] Because the Church is the Body of Christ, it, in Florovsky's estimation, embodies Christ. In other words, Christ is known in the Church. To most fully know Christ, one must belong to Christ's Body. In the Church, therefore, the individual is brought to participate in the life of God in Christ, for the Church, as Christ's Body, is in Christ. With this, Florovsky comfortably can assert that "Christianity is the Church."[33]

It should also be remembered that Florovsky's notion of the Church as Christ's Body is indicative of his commitment to the visibility of the historical Church. Florovsky understands the Orthodox Church as "*the Church* and the *only* true Church."[34] For Florovsky, the Orthodox Church is the "true Church." In this case, the Orthodox Church is the Church of Christ. It is important to note that Florovsky understands the Orthodox Church as belonging to Christ not just in a mystical or mysterious sense, but as a matter of

[29] Georges Florovsky, "The Church: Her Nature and Task," in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 65.

[30] Ibid., 64.

[31] Georges Florovsky, "The Body of the Living Christ," in *Patristic Witness*, 277.

[32] Georges Florovsky, "The Catholicity of the Church," in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 38.

[33] Florovsky, "The Church: Her Nature and Task," in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 70.

[34] Georges Florovsky, "Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement," in *Patristic Witness,* 283.

history, or rather, in a historical sense. History, of course, does not fully comprehend this mystery, but attests to it and here is precisely where the eschatological appeal of the Church takes its key. Florovsky uses the historical reality of the incarnate God in Christ, which fundamentally points to and is the reality of the Church. The Incarnation, wherein God entered into history and established the Church, shows the Church as historically situated. In this, "The Church has her own authority in history. … An authority to teach and to keep faithfully the word of truth."[35] The historical authority of the Church spoken of here finds its grounding in the Incarnation, i.e., in Christ.

Likewise, the historical grounding of revelation that the Church possesses with regard to the Incarnation is also understood in an eschatological light. This is because Florovsky believes that the Jesus of history is the Jesus of the Creed. In the Church, these two are wed together and understood without any discontinuity. That is to say, God decisively entered history in the Incarnation. The mystery of the Incarnation, as it is historical, is also eschatological. To be more specific, the depth of the Incarnation and the ministry of redemption in Christ, understood creedally by Florovsky, recognizes in its scope the *parousia*, or the Second Coming, wherein Christ will return in judgment, as a mysterious truth of Christ's Lordship. Placed within an understanding of ecclesiology, the Church is where Christ is "present with us and encounters us here on earth. … Christ is the Church."[36] Christ abides in the Church and draws the Church's members to participate in the life of the resurrection.

Thus, in Florovsky's understanding, God revealed Godself in the Incarnation in Christ and Christ established a Church. As Florovsky claims, "Christianity, is Eternal Life, having been revealed to the world and human beings in the inscrutable Incarnation of the Son of God, and having been revealed to the faithful through the holy Sacraments by the grace of the Holy Spirit."[37] Here, we can see that Florovsky imbues the Church with the divine-human characteristic. It

[35] Ibid., 286.
[36] Florovsky, "The Church," in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 65.
[37] Georges Florovsky, "The House of the Father," in *Collected Works*, vol. 13, 59.

is because of the "Incarnation of the Son of God",—that is, the entrance of God into creation—that the participation of the "faithful" in the life of God is possible. The Church, as wedded to Christ, is a Christological phenomenon that "is the transformed world, and in this development of creation in grace is included the entire meaning and genuine content of history, of existence in time. The Church is the beginning of the universal charismatic transformation of creation."[38] The Church, as Christ's, exists in time and awaits the eschatological renewal of all things.

This renewal coheres with Florovsky when he writes, "humans were made in order to open themselves freely to God's call, to overcome their isolation and to fulfill, by renouncing themselves, the dread mystery of the two natures, human and divine, for the sake of which the world was made, for it was made so that it might become the Church, the Body of Christ."[39] We must be especially attentive to the language of "become" in the concept of the Church. What this communicates is a potential of the "more" of the Church. There is, "for the sake of which the world was made," a sense in which the world "might become the Church, the Body of Christ." To borrow Florovsky's language, ecclesial participation is a renunciation of isolation that sees the Church as grounded in and oriented towards Christ. The Church, therefore, possesses an experiential recognition of its otherness.

The Church is the "leaven of history."[40] Thus, the priority given to the Church by Florovsky necessitates a commitment to the truth claims and experiences of the Church in its history, and also, in what lies ahead. That is, the eschatological promises of the Church in the *parousia*. The life of the Church speaks to an "encounter with living beings."[41] This encounter is not historically conditioned, but a reality of the eschatological participation of the Church. Instead, these living beings comprise the past, the present, and the future of the

[38] Ibid., 63.

[39] Florovsky, "Creation and Createdness," 62.

[40] Georges Florovsky, "The Predicament of the Christian Historian," in *Patristic Witness*, 217.

[41] Ibid., 203.

promises that the Church possesses. "The ultimate purpose of… historical inquiry is … in the encounter with living beings."[42]

Florovsky however recognizes that such an eschatological emphasis, like all experiential horizons, is "necessarily indirect and inferential."[43] The experience of the Church informs the "formidable bias" of the Christian narrative. Therefore, Christians must "dispense" with this bias. They must rather recognize that their "very particular interpretation" of history is predicated on the life of the Church. The Church, the Body of Christ, is that which Florovsky sees as possessing the fullness of recognition in engaging the horizon of the Church, which is eschatological.

From this, Florovsky argues that Christianity introduced a radical change to the ways in which history is thought of, in that it gives a distinct meaning to history. "The message of the New Testament," Florovsky argues, "makes sense of history. In Christ and by him."[44] Christ's entry into and actions in the world "existentially validated" time. By God's entry into history, through Christ, "history became sacred."[45] The Christian faith gives "man's historical existence … relevance and meaning."[46] The meaning of this historic transformation is upheld in the Church. In this, the Church is part of revelation. To be historically conscious, Florovsky believes that there must be a recovery of the doctrine of the Church, which as Christ's body can "restate history in its true existential dimension."[47]

History is therefore given existential meaning in the Body of Christ. That is to say that humanity, in the Church, can now recognize that history witnesses to the "mystery of salvation" and the "tragedy of sin."[48] The whole of history is properly understood, in the Church, in and through the revelation of God's activity in Jesus Christ. Any circularity that Florovsky relies upon becomes intentional. That is to say that the Church, as an interpretive community,

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 197.
[44] Ibid., 217.
[45] Florovsky, "Predicament," in *Patristic Witness*, 217.
[46] Ibid., 216.
[47] Ibid., 218.
[48] Ibid., 219.

contains within itself the interpretive key of the "Christian vision of ... life." One that is "sorely distorted by sin, yet redeemed by Divine mercy, and healed by Divine grace, and called to the inheritance of an everlasting Kingdom."[49] The realities of history become existential in the Church, because the God Who entered into history, by this entry, gives history a meaning beyond itself. That is to say that history points to an end in Christ. The Bible, which shows a "dealing of the Personal God with human person" that "culminated in the Person of Jesus Christ" still communicates this dealing and encounter in the Church.[50]

Although he displays a true awareness and consideration of eschatology, I contend that Florovsky's eschatological invocations leave much to be desired. While it is helpful that Florovsky invokes and recognizes the necessary component of eschatological tension in the life of the Church—that is, in the historical experiences and forms and in that which is to come—he does not offer much development on the specific role of eschatological fulfillment or eschatological expectation. More specifically, Florovsky invokes the eschatological realities of the Church as a necessary facet of the Church's life and experience within this life. His invocation of the "more" or of eschatological fulfillment within the life and experience of the Church is, in my estimation, purposely limited. The mystery with which Florovsky grounds the Church is foremost explained through historical means. While he recognizes that the Church must exceed its historical scope, what is predominant in such expectations is what can be known and experienced. Florovsky foils the eschatological horizon of the Church with the safeguard of the Church's visible forms. In a word, Florovsky frames his understanding of "mystery" and of the eschatological horizon of the Church by focusing on the known of the Church in history.

The limitations of Florovksy's eschatology are displayed in his essay, "Eschatology in the Patristic Age," wherein he does not provide structure for the implications of the eschatological themes the work

[49] Ibid, "Predicament", 218.
[50] Ibid., 215.

surveys. The work certainly indicates his awareness for the need of an eschatological consciousness in doing theology.[51] However, the work primarily serves as an overview of patristic eschatology, focusing on the eschatological framework of the patristic era rather than providing original insights into the examples set by the Fathers or how these can be synthesized for contemporary use. While the essay demonstrates Florovsky's recognition of eschatology as the ultimate context for theological reflection, it fails to effectively integrate a nuanced understanding of eschatology and its significance in the life of the Church.

These limitations are reflective of Florovsky's discomfort in taking a more speculative approach to the question of eschatology's relation to history as expressed ecclesially.[52] Thus indicating his own limitations and how these are expressed through the neopatristic synthesis. I contend that such limitations of Florovsky to be more ambitious in relating the relationship of the mystery of the Church to its eschatological expectation is due to his work's relationship to Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944). A large majority of Florovsky's thought can be understood as responding or reacting to Bulgakov.[53] It must be noted here that Bulgakov's work is considerably eschatological and Bulgakov's theological system of sophiology, as developed from Idealism, Vladimir Solovyov, and Pavel Florensky, was seen by Florovsky as deeply problematic. In offering undeveloped appeals to eschatology, Florovsky very well could be doing so in a

[51] The essay, it should be said, does make reference to the historical method and the contemporary historical scholarship of Christian dogma within Florovsky's milieu. For example, he criticizes, without directly naming him, the German historian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930). 318 He also mentions Hegel's philosophy of history. However, these are not the general focus of the work, as he himself admits in the essay's closing paragraph. See Florovsky, "Eschatology in the Patristic Age," in *Patristic Witness*, 318–322.

[52] There are instances in Florovsky's writings where he is more comfortable in a speculative approach. See his essay, "'*Cur deus homo?*' The Motive of the Incarnation," in *Collected Works*, vol 3, 163–170 where he speculates on the plan of the incarnation. Cf. Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 155.

[53] See Brandon Gallaher, "'Waiting for the Barbarians': Identity and Polemicism in the Neopatristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky," in *Living Christ*, 153–188.

guarded effort to shield and differentiate this thought from that of Bulgakov, who more ambitiously sought to develop thoughts regarding questions of the last things, judgment, and the relationship these have to the current predicament of humanity and the Church.

Eschatology and Zizioulas: An Inseparable Relationship

Here, Zizioulas helps complete the eschatological picture of Florovsky. In many respects, Zizioulas shares the eschatological appeals of Florovsky, but gives them a fuller sense of relationship to being and person. That is, Zizioulas fosters the same eschatological expectation of ecclesial fullness of Florovsky. However, Zizioulas develops a more systematic and comprehensive relationship of ecclesial life with eschatology. Moreover, this development is found in correcting and articulating the Christological implications of such an ecclesially experienced eschatology as Trinitarian by giving voice to the ontological implications of such thought.

As noted, Florovsky's eschatological appeal is foundationally Christocentric, or driven by a Christological priority. In the Church's grounding in Christ—Him who is God and Man—the Church exists in tension with these realities. In other words, the Church exists in history and in relation to the end of history. The Church, grounded in the incarnate Christ, is oriented towards the resurrected and glorified Christ. Thus, the Church draws the subject to Christ's resurrection and glorification. While this is not problematic, the invocation of mystery is incomplete in its Trinitarian impart. That is, this theology does not adequately account for the Trinitarianism it appeals to. Whereas Florovsky speaks of the eschatological hope of the Church through a Christological appeal, this appeal is invoked as "mystery" without adequately expressing this appeal's place in relation to the Father and Holy Spirit. What remains is an implied synthesis of Christology with pneumatology, without offering an explanation of such synthesis.

Zizioulas was aware of the incomplete nature of Florovsky's ecclesiology in relation to Christology. He writes, for example, in *Being as Communion* that Florovsky's overemphasis on the Christo-

logical characteristic of the Church "indirectly raised the problem of the synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology, without however offering any solution to it."[54] Zizioulas reaffirms the incompleteness of Florovsky's eschatological thought in his work, *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology* where he writes that Florovsky did not provide an adequate integration of eschatological implications into the realms of "systematic theology and Christian existence."[55] Zizioulas here offers a correction. Like Florovsky, Zizioulas appeals to Christology to understand eschatology in relation to history and the Church. As helpfully noted by Robert Turner, Zizioulas sees that Christ is the "key": "Christ is the truth realized in time."[56] This affirmation is in continuity with Florovsky. However, the ways in which Zizioulas unpacks this affirmation provides a more astute vision of the eschatological tension of the Church, as principally related to ontology, i.e., the understanding of being and the person and their participation in communion.

Whereas Florovsky's Christological invocation for understanding the eschatological tension of the present relies upon observation of the historical tension of the God-man, Zizioulas develops this thought into an ontological reality that emphasizes more concretely how salvation is to be understood within history and thus in Christ. Zizioulas argues that the truth of Christian existence resides in a dialectic of Christological character: "The end of history in Christ *already* becomes present here and now."[57]

Though similar to Florovsky, Zizioulas here uncovers a more precise meaning of this tension in the person and in communion by accounting for it in experience. This is not a subjective turn towards experience, but rather a recognition of what Zizioulas identifies as the ontological truth of being and of the person. He writes that "[S]alvation as truth and life is possible only in and through the person

[54] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and teh Church* (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 124.

[55] John D. Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology* (Alhambra, CA: St. Sebastian Orthodox Press, 2023), 4.

[56] Robert Turner, "Eschatology and Truth," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (London: Routlledge, 2007), 22.

[57] Ibid., 71.

who is ontologically *true*."[58] To speak of an ontological truth to personhood, Zizioulas argues that, in Christ and in the Triune God, "being and communion" must "coincide."[59] This language of communion corresponds to the ontological significance of love and personhood. That is, Zizioulas' ontology, in its eschatological orientation, is an ontology of love. Zizioulas rejects the understanding that love is simply an attribute or a property of the divine essence. He writes,

> Love is not an emanation or "property" of the substance of God ... but is constitutive of his substance, i.e. it is that which makes God what he is, the one God. Thus love ceases to be a qualifying property of being and becomes the supreme ontological predicament. Love as God's mode of existence "hypostasizes" God, constitutes his being.[60]

Love is "God's mode of existence." This ontological understanding expresses itself in Love as communion. As this pertains to the eschatological, Zizioulas recognizes that eschatology—"coming to truth" and final perfection—is constitutive of communion. To quote Scott MacDougall, Zizioulas' "eschatology ... qualifies ontology."[61] The eschaton represents the fullness of creation's communion with the Divine: "The truth and the ontology of the person belong to the future, are images of the future."[62]

Such identity of ontology and truth is with Christ. Zizioulas' identification of the eschatological experience and truth with Christ necessarily departs from individualism. As observed by Robert Turner, it is the resurrection of Christ, in particular that "gives Zizioulas' ontology its basis in eschatology. The Incarnation brings the truth of divine personhood into the world, but the victory of the resurrection realizes the eschatological truth, Christ, in time."[63] This confirms, quoting Aristotle Papanikolaou, that "The ontological no-

[58] Ibid., 107.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 46.
[61] Scott MacDougall, *More Than Communion: Imagining an Ecclesiology Ecclesiology* (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 87.
[62] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 62; Emphasis in original text.
[63] Turner, "Eschatology and Truth," in *Theology of John Zizioulas*, 21.

tion of truth as 'being forever' is now paradoxically identified with history."[64] In other words, Zizioulas' ontology in eschatology asserts that the Incarnation brings the reality of divine personhood into the world, while the resurrection actualizes the eschatological truth of Christ within time. Zizioulas frames these claims by drawing on Maximus the Confessor. He argues that "the Incarnate Christ is so identical to the ultimate will of God's love, that the meaning of created being and the purpose of history are simply the Incarnate Christ."[65]

With this, he argues—again following Maximus as his patristic influence—that the Incarnation is not historically conditioned.[66] In other words, the Incarnation is not caused by the Fall of Adam. The Incarnation is indelibly linked to the truth of Christ Himself. Zizioulas is critical of any theology that assumes the Incarnation as conditional, i.e., as conditioned entirely on a supposed perfect state that humanity deviated from.[67] Christ is Himself truth and the revelation of truth is not subject to the Fall. Thus, as truth, the dialectic of truth is in Christ Himself. "[T]ruth is located simultaneously at the heart of history, at the ground of creation, and at the end of history:

[64] Aristotle Papanikolaou, *God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 83.

[65] Ibid., 97. It should be noted that Zizioulas' appeals to Maximus' use of "eikon" to express ontology. Nikolaos Loudovikos, a student of Zizioulas, has criticized this appeal by placing the terminology of Maximus within its proper contextual ground and as a reflection of a dialogical or analogical relationship. See Nikolaos Loudovikos "*Eikon* and *mimesis*: Eucharistic Ecclesiology and the Ecclesial Ontology of Dialogical Reciprocity", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 2–3 (2011): 123–136. See also Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 162–170; Cf. Loudovikos, "Person Instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness: John Zizioulas' Final Theological Position," *The Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 4 (2011): 684–699. Noteworthy defenders of Zizioulas' approach to Maximus and more broadly his use of personalism include Aristotle Papanikolaou and Alexis Torrance. See Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Is John Zizioulas an Existentialist in Disguise? Response to Lucian Turcescu," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (2004); Alexis Torrance, "Personhood and Patristics in Orthodox Theology: Reassessing the Debate," *Heythrop Journal*, 52, no. 4 (2011).

[66] As noted by Florovsky in his essay, "*Cur deus homo?* The Motive of the Incarnation", Maximus' view lacks patristic consensus.

[67] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 171.

all this in one synthesis which allows us to say 'Christ is the truth.'"[68] In Christ, one finds the realization of God's will. Thus, one finds the meaning or "synthesis" of existence in Christ who is the truth, i.e., simultaneously characterized in creation and in eschatology.

Because Christ as truth unites the meaning of history with eschatology, existence within history and within the expectation of the eschatological take form in Christ. That is to say, "Christ shows not just being, but the persistence, the *survival of being*; through the resurrection, Christology shows that created existence can be so true that not even human freedom can suppress it."[69] There is a Christological subtext of the person in relation to freedom, now modeled in the communion of God in Christ, i.e., the Triune God. Christ shows that the fallenness of freedom can be overcome by Divine communion. Therefore, eschatology can enter into a "mode of existence."[70] The meaning of history and truth unfold in Christ and in communion. Christ, the ultimate eschatological meaning and fulfillment, comes into history, but is not limited to history. Instead, the meaning of history is in Christ.

Zizioulas urges us to understand the participatory call of the human in truth, and thus in Christ. He does not stop his claims of Christ as truth here as though they are self-explanatory, or can be thought of in isolation. Rather, he relates these claims to the concept of communion. More specifically, the communion of God as Trinity and the pneumatological expression of communion in history and in the life of the Church. "Christology," Zizioulas argues, "is ... conditioned by Pneumatology ... in fact it is *constituted* pneumatologically."[71] Drawing on the New Testament, Zizioulas shows the necessarily pneumatological character of Christ's ministry. From Christ's conception to Christ's rising, there is a pneumatological presence. The Holy Spirit is therefore the person of the Holy Trinity "who realizes in history that which we call Christ."[72] Thus, in Zizioulas'

[68] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 98.
[69] Ibid., 108.
[70] Zizioulas, *Remembering the Future*, 1.
[71] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 111.
[72] Ibid., 110–111.

mind, there is no imbalance in Christology, for the invocation of Christ necessarily speaks to the communion of the Holy Spirit and the Father. Zizioulas' "pneumatologically focused" Christology allows for an understanding of divine and human communion. The necessary interrelation between Christ and the Spirit confirms Zizioulas' relation of communion to the relationality of God. He writes that "Without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God."[73] The Holy Trinity fundamentally discloses communion. Drawing from the Cappadocian Fathers, he argues that the Trinity is not "a primordial ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather which follows it."[74] Therefore, the work of the Spirit in Christology necessarily is reflective of Divine communion.

Beyond the ontological distinctions made by Zizioulas, his reflections on the eschatological anticipation and mystery of the Church take greater form in the ways in which he sees this expressed ecclesially. That is, he intricately links eschatology to the life of the Church in worship and in liturgy, and thus in communion. While such appeals are present in Florovsky, Florovsky does not, as we have shown, deal consistently or comprehensively with such an eschatological expression. In marking communion as inseparably linked to life in God, Zizioulas necessarily reflects upon how this divine communion is manifest in the Church. He does so by emphasizing the centrality of the eucharist.

The eucharist relates to communion and what communion allows is for the individual to be the 'image of God' by being "incorporated in the original and only authentic image of the Father, which is the Son of God incarnate."[75] The eucharist is "where communion" is "realized *par excellence*."[76] Zizioulas writes, "In the celebration of the eucharist the Church experiences that which is promised for the *par-*

[73] Ibid., 17.
[74] Ibid.
[75] John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 5.
[76] Ibid., 7.

ousia, namely the eschatological unity of all in Christ."[77] The eucharist thus liberates the historical condition of the person by allowing them to participate in its eschatological fulfillment: Christ, and the communion of the Holy Trinity. In this sense we can see that the eschatological character of the eucharist allows for humanity to partake in eschatological existence. By this, what is meant is that in the life of the Church, those who partake in the eucharist partake in the very Truth, Christ, of history and of eschatology. To quote Zizioulas, "The eucharistic community constitutes a sign of the fact that the *eschaton* can only *break through* history but never be identified with it."[78] This "sign" is a transformation of all things in Christ, where the "many" become "one." That is, where there is substantial unity in Truth, i.e., Christ, and the communion of the Trinity.[79] This sign of unity is not a mere historical remembrance, but an active partaking in the Risen Christ, or Him Who is the age to come. Therefore, the eucharist is not only a symbol of what will be, but is itself an expression of what will be. In other words, in the eucharist, the Church "is what she is by becoming again and again what she will be."[80]

We can see, therefore, that the invocation of eschatology in Zizioulas is not simply an appeal to that which is to come, as a means for relating the expectation of the *parousia* to the present. More than this, the eschatological guides the very life of the Church, because the Church is fundamentally Christ's and partakes in the truth of Christ as the fulfillment of all things; drawing all to communion with Himself, the Holy Spirit, and the Father. Therefore, Zizioulas' eschatological appeals take shape through his considerations of how humanity, being, and the person relate to God in communion. The depth with which Zizioulas seeks to understand the Christological basis of the truth is an eschatological consideration for understanding the truth of all things. Unlike Florovsky who only indicates the

[77] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 144.
[78] Ibid.,161.
[79] Ibid., 145.
[80] John D. Zizioulas, "The Mystery of the Church in Orthodox Tradition," in *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, ed. Gregory Edwards (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2010), 144.

eschatological expectation of the Church, Zizioulas makes such an expectation indispensable to the very participation of life in the Church, and thus in Christ.

Neopatristic Synthesis and Fulfillment

While we have highlighted the ways in which Zizioulas offers a deeper sense of fulfillment to the eschatological implications of Florovsky's thought, I would like to draw this study to a close by reflecting on the overarching concern that both theologians engage. Specifically, as this pertains to how Zizioulas more broadly realizes the neopatristic synthesis as envisioned by Florovsky. As we have shown, the neopatristic synthesis must not be thought of as a strict methodology. Rather, in Florovsky's mind, the neopatristic synthesis embodies a spirit of retrieval. That is, a dynamic engagement with the patristic corpus that is driven by and coheres around ecclesial identity and outlook.

His use of the term "neopatristic synthesis" is scant and when it is employed, he does not use any strict criterion for what constitutes authentic neopatristic theology. The neopatristic synthesis should thus be understood as a broad and flexible orientation, or a framework within which Orthodox theology can engage modernity. The neopatristic synthesis therefore does not possess a specific set of doctrinal conclusions or methodological rules, but instead is representative of a general theological posture that resonates more as an ethos than a methodology. Thus, it is a framework for thinking in and engaging the tradition.

Florovsky himself, while revered for his historical acumen and theological creativity, left much of his writings open in their implications and conclusions. That is, his work often does not follow its own conclusions, or offer pathways for the future of Orthodox theology. No matter how astute his historical analysis and observations are, these observations function more as invitations for exploration or general observations of historical and theological phenomenon than as solutions. Zizioulas, while reverent towards Florovsky's mind and ideas, sees that Florovsky did not adequately follow his argu-

ments into conclusions. In this particular instance, Zizioulas recognizes that Florovsky did not adequately synthesize the implications of the Church in its Christological and thus eschatological orientation. Zizioulas therefore sought to complete this open endedness in Florovsky's theology and he does so in a manner that is not only patristic, but also engages modern existential concerns with a greater sense of clarity and immediacy.

Therefore, it is not that Zizioulas engages the Fathers more thoroughly than Florovsky—while of course, this point can be made in certain respects—but that his thought actively seeks to present an Orthodox theology that is invested in the patristic corpus and engaging of the concerns of modernity. In particular, as seen in this study, through an appeal to ontology, personhood, communion, and their eschatological nature in the Church. Regardless of one's personal evaluation of the efficacy of Zizioulas' theology and the interrelatedness of ontology and eschatology, there is little doubt that his work fulfills Florovsky's criterion for what constitutes a neopatristic synthesis.[81] Zizioulas' work is truly neopatristic in the way Florovsky envisioned: providing an Orthodox theological vision that remains faithful to the patristic era, while engaging the present. This creative engagement, characterized here by his deep considerations of eschatology, shows that Zizioulas' theology remains an expression of the neopatristic synthesis that Florovsky had only begun to sketch.

[81] For instance, John Behr's criticism that Zizioulas' metaphysical system is an abstraction that does not adequately consider the function and story of revelation within the tradition. John Behr, "Faithfulness and Creativity," in *Orthodoxy and the World Today: Proceedings [of the] Sixth Congress of the Higher Orthodox Schools of Theology, Sofia, 5–10 October, 2004* (Sofia, BG: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2006), 166–173. Behr's assertions, in many respects, are countered by Alexis Torrance in "Personhood and Patristics."

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