

- **Orthodox-Evangelicals: Cooperation or Confrontation?**
- **Orthodoxes—évangéliques: coopération ou opposition**
- **Orthodoxe und Evangelikale: Zusammenarbeit oder Konfrontation?**
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## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article compare et oppose l'ecclésiologie et la sotériologie orthodoxe à la théologie évangélique. D'un point de vue méthodologique, la théologie orthodoxe et la théologie évangélique fonctionnent dans des cadres tout à fait différents. Dans le premier cas, deux directions complémentaires sont proposées: la théologie cataphatique (positive) et la théologie apophatique (négative). La théologie cataphatique est orientée de haut en bas, à la fois par sa méthode et son contenu; elle va des choses premières, comme l'unité de Dieu, transite par des affirmations concernant la Trinité et l'incarnation, jusque vers une multiplicité de concepts comme la bonté, la sagesse et la puissance. D'où la possibilité d'une ascension humaine vers le divin. Cependant, la connaissance de Dieu reste toujours imparfaite. La théologie apophatique insiste sur l'incapacité de l'esprit humain à connaître Dieu. Le théologien orthodoxe V. Lossky s'appuie sur l'herméneutique scripturaire métaphorique patristique (celle de Grégoire de Nazianze), pour s'approprier l'usage scripturaire du langage et des concepts humains. La théologie évangélique, par contre, repose sur l'idée de révélation que Dieu adresse à l'intelligence humaine, non seulement en Christ, mais aussi par le moyen de la Bible. Théologiquement, le concept orthodoxe de théosis implique des distinctions entre l'essence, la personne

et les opérations divines, qui permettent d'étayer l'idée de connaissance humaine du divin. Cela contraste avec le modèle évangélique (et plus généralement occidental) de la justification. D'un point de vue sociologique, les différences importantes qui existent entre la théologie orthodoxe et la théologie évangélique sont enracinées dans des visions du monde différentes. Cette situation s'explique en partie par l'incapacité de la Réforme à s'introduire dans l'Empire turc. Finalement, l'auteur aborde les différences qui existent au sein de la théologie orthodoxe contemporaine. A l'un des extrêmes se trouve l'affirmation conservatrice *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, qui peut conduire jusqu'au nationalisme (un bon roumain est un roumain orthodoxe). Mais il existe aussi des positions plus modérées. Certaines communautés orthodoxes, par exemple, essaient de résoudre le conflit entre apophase et cataphase en étudiant davantage la Bible. C'est pourquoi il est important pour les évangéliques de comprendre les mouvements et distinctions qui existent au sein de la pensée orthodoxe, afin de pouvoir construire des ponts pour le dialogue théologique. Mais ils doivent aussi être prêts à servir le Christ dans un environnement hostile.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Artikel vergleicht und kontrastiert orthodoxe Ekklesiologie und Soteriologie mit evangelikaler Theologie. Orthodoxe



und evangelikale Theologien arbeiten methodologisch unter sehr unterschiedlichen Rahmenbedingungen. Erstere betreiben Theologie unter den ergänzenden Überschriften von kataphatischer (positiver) und apophatischer (negativer) Theologie. Kataphatische Theologie postuliert eine 'Abstufung', sowohl methodisch als auch inhaltlich, von ersten Dingen, wie der Einheit Gottes, über die Trinität und Inkarnation, bis hin zu einer Vielfalt von Konzepten wie das Gute, Weisheit und Macht. Als Konsequenz ergibt sich die Möglichkeit menschlichen Aufstiegs zum Göttlichen. Erkenntnis Gottes ist jedoch immer unvollkommen. Apophatische Theologie besteht auf der Unfähigkeit des menschlichen Verstandes, Gott zu erkennen. Der orthodoxe Theologe V. Lossky bezieht sich auf die patristische metaphorische Schriftauslegung (Gregor von Nazianz), um mit der Verwendung menschlicher Sprache und Konzepte in der Schrift zurechtzukommen. In scharfem Gegensatz dazu ist die Erkenntnis Gottes in evangelikaler Theologie vom Gedanken der Offenbarung abhängig, und zwar nicht nur in Christus, sondern auch durch die Bibel.

Theologisch ist zu sagen, daß das orthodoxe Konzept der Theosis die Unterscheidung zwischen der göttlichen

Essenz, Person und Energie enthält, um den Gedanken der menschlichen Erkenntnis des Göttlichen aufrechtzuerhalten. Im Gegensatz dazu steht das evangelikale (und allgemein westliche) Model der Rechtfertigung.

Soziologisch gesehen basieren die großen Unterschiede zwischen orthodoxer und evangelikaler Theologie auf unterschiedlichen Weltanschauungen, eine Situation, die zum Teil durch das Versagen der Reformation erklärt wird, das türkische Weltreich zu durchdringen.

Abschließend untersucht der Autor Unterschiede innerhalb zeitgenössischer orthodoxer Theologie. Ein Extrem ist der konservative Glaube an extra ecclesiam nulla salus, der sich schlimmstenfalls in eine Art Nationalismus entwickeln kann (ein guter Rumäne ist ein orthodoxer Rumäne). Allerdings gibt es auch vermittelnde Positionen. So versuchen beispielsweise einige orthodoxe Gemeinschaften, den Konflikt zwischen Apophasis und Kataphasis durch größeren Gebrauch der Bibel zu lösen. Es ist daher wichtig für Evangelikale, theologische Bewegungen und Unterschiede im gegenwärtigen orthodoxen Denken zu verstehen und Brücken theologischer Diskussion zu bauen. Alternativ müßten sie bereit sein, Christus in feindlichem Umfeld zu dienen.

The issue concerning the relation between Orthodox and Evangelicals is very complex due to the fact that neither the Orthodox nor the Evangelicals are monolithic churches that speak with one universally recognized voice. Additionally, the nature of the relationship between them is significantly different in the Orthodox Diaspora than in the Orthodox countries. Within the limits of this paper, it is impossible to explore all possible relations between all Eastern Churches and all Evangelical Churches with their distinctive theologies, missiologies and practices. The alternative, then, is an over-generalized approach which does justice to neither Orthodox nor Evangelical due to the fact that overlooks exactly the specific aspects of the Ortho-

dox-Evangelical relations in each country. Aware of the risk of such an approach, in this paper I will explore the Orthodox-Evangelical relations from a threefold perspective: a) methodological, b) theological, and c) sociological.

## A. Methodological Perspective

From the patristic period, the East and the West have adopted distinct theological paradigms. Generally speaking, while the West follows the creation-fall-redemption approach, the East follows the creation-deification model. In other words, if the West considers that the Christ-event deals primarily with the problem of sin in order to secure redemption for sinners, the East



sees the Christ-event as,

An ineffable descent of God to the ultimate limit of our fallen human condition, even unto death—a descent of God which opens to men a path of ascent, the unlimited vistas of the union of the created beings with the Divinity.<sup>1</sup>

Lossky believes that the patristic sentence: 'God made Himself man, that man might become God' sums up the essence of Christianity for the Orthodox Church.<sup>2</sup>

#### A.1 Cataphatic and Apophatic Approaches

In order to explain the difference between the Eastern and Western approaches to theology, Lossky introduces two pairs of concepts: *katabasis* and *anabasis*; and *oikonomia* and *theologia*.<sup>3</sup>

##### A.1.1 Oikonomia and Katabasis

*Oikonomia* describes God's movement man-wards, which is a movement of descent (*katabasis*). *Oikonomia* is, according to Lossky, the 'work of the will [of God], while Trinitarian being belongs to the transcendent nature of God.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, *katabasis* is not a way of knowledge, but only the means whereby 'essential goodness, natural sanctity, and royal dignity flows from the Father, through the Only-Begotten, to the Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Lossky argues that in the very immanence of His economy, which leads to the incarnation, God remains unknowable.<sup>6</sup>

##### A.1.2 Theologia and Anabasis

In order to know God, one has to follow the way of *theologia*, which is *gnosis* 'of God considered in Himself, outside of His creative and redemptive economy.' The appropriate methods for *gnosis* are contemplation and silence; contemplation because it is 'an exit to the state of a future age, a vision of what is beyond history, a projection of eschatology into the instant', and silence because it 'constitutes the language of the world which is coming.'<sup>7</sup>

Following Pseudo-Dionysius, Lossky affirms that *gnosis* is a way of spiritual ascent (*anabasis*) beyond all perceptive and rational faculties 'in order to be able to attain in perfect ignorance to union with Him who transcends all being and

all knowledge.'<sup>8</sup> The purpose of this way is not to develop a positive theological system but to attain union with God (*theosis*). This leads us in turn to the distinction between apophatic and cataphatic theologies.

## A.2 Apophatic and Cataphatic Theologies

### A.2.1 Cataphasis:

Corresponding to the two movements of God towards man (*katabasis*) and of man towards God (*anabasis*), Lossky affirms that there are two approaches to theology.<sup>9</sup> Cataphatic theology, or positive theology, leads us to some knowledge of God, albeit in an imperfect way. Thus John of Damascus asserts that,

All that we can say cataphatically concerning God does not show forth His nature but the things that relate to His nature. . . God does not belong to the class of existing things; not that He has no existence, but that He is above all existing things, nay even about existence itself. For if all forms of knowledge have to do with what exists, assuredly that which is above knowledge must certainly be also above essence; and, conversely, that which is above essence will also be above knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

Affirmative theology begins with the loftier, more congruous comparisons and then proceeds 'down' to the less appropriate ones; or, as Lossky explains, 'a descent from the superior degrees of being to the inferior.'<sup>11</sup> In the same vein, Pseudo-Dionysius contends that the imperfection of positive theology resides both in its method and content. Methodologically, 'when we made assertions we began with the first things, move down through intermediate terms until we reached the last things.'<sup>12</sup> Likewise the cognitive content has a descending character due to the link between concepts and the 'level' of theological reflection. In his book *The Mystical Theology*, Pseudo-Dionysius claims that he had analyzed this way of theologizing in other writings (some of which were either lost or are fictitious).



In the earlier books my argument travelled downward from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied with every stage of descent.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, in *The Theological Representations*, Pseudo-Dionysius argues that positive theology begins with God's oneness and proceeds down into the multiplicity of affirming the Trinity and the Incarnation.<sup>14</sup> Further, *The Divine Names* affirms the more numerous designations for God which come from mental concepts such as good, existent, life, wisdom, power, and whatever other things pertain to the conceptual names for God.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, *The Symbolic Theology* 'descends' into the still more pluralized realm of sense perception and its plethora of symbols for the deity such as:

the images we have of him, of the forms, figures, and instruments proper to him, of the places in which he lives and of the ornaments he wears. I have spoken of his anger, grief, and rage, of how he is said to be drunk and hangover, of his oaths and curses, of his sleeping and waking, and indeed of all those images we have of him, images shaped by the working of the symbolic representations of God. And I feel sure that you have noticed how these latter come much more abundantly than what went before, since *The Theological Representations* and a discussion of the names appropriate to God are inevitably briefer than what can be said in *The Symbolic Theology*.<sup>16</sup>

Further, Pseudo-Dionysius asserts that positive theology originates in the Scriptures which contain the divine truth revealed by God in his manwards movement of economic descent.

Let us therefore look as far upward as the light of the sacred scriptures will allow, and, in our reverent awe of what is divine, let us be drawn together toward the divine splendor. For, if we may trust the superlative wisdom and truth of scripture, the things of God are revealed to each mind in proportion to its capacities; and the divine

goodness is such that, out of concern for our salvation, it deals out the immeasurable and infinite in limited measure.<sup>17</sup>

However, the concepts or the words of Scripture do not describe God as he is in Himself since He is always beyond everything that exists. For Pseudo-Dionysius, in the words of Scripture 'the Transcendent is clothed in the terms of beings, the shape and form of things which have neither, and numerous symbols are employed to convey the varied attributes of what is an imageless and supra-natural simplicity.'<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Lossky argues that whilst God reveals Himself (intelligible attributes) as wisdom, love and goodness, His nature remains unknowable in its depth and therefore our concepts must be always prevented from being enclosed within their limited meaning.<sup>19</sup> In fact, Lossky, following Gregory of Nyssa, argues that 'the ladder of cataphatic theology' which discloses the divine names drawn primarily from Scripture are not intended to become rational concepts whereby our minds construct 'a positive science of the divine nature', but are rather images or ideas intended to guide us for contemplation of that which transcends all understanding.  
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#### A.2.2 Apophasis:

Lossky affirms that man's proper response to the economy in which God reveals Himself in creating the world and becoming incarnate, is to confess the transcendent nature of the Trinity in an ascent of thought according to the way of apophatic theology.

The negative way of the knowledge of God is an ascendant undertaking of the mind that progressively eliminates all positive attributes of the object it wishes to attain, in order to culminate finally in a kind of apprehension by supreme ignorance of Him who cannot be an object of knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

On the lower steps there are images drawn from the material objects least calculated to lead spirits inexperienced in contemplation into error. It is indeed more difficult, argues Lossky, to identify God with



stone or with fire than with intelligence, unity, being or goodness. What seems obvious at the beginning of the ascent, that 'God is not fire, He is not stone', becomes less and less obvious as one attains to the height of contemplation, when one has to affirm that 'God is not being, He is not good.'<sup>22</sup> At each step of ascent one has to guard oneself against the danger of making these loftier images or ideas 'an idol of God'. Once the heights have been attained, then speculation gradually gives place to contemplation, knowledge to experience, 'for in casting of the concepts which shackle the spirit, the apophatic disposition reveals boundless horizons of contemplation at each step of positive theology'.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, apophatic theology refuses any attempt to form concepts about God and to organize them in a systematic construct according to human ways of thought. On the contrary, by pointing to mystical union with God, apophatic theology is 'an existential attitude, which involves the whole, man. . . a criterion: the sure sign of an attitude of mind conformed to the truth.'<sup>24</sup>

However, if negative theology begins by denying the appropriateness of the human mind and language to knowing God, then one may inquire concerning the role of Scriptures and dogmas, since these are themselves expressed in concepts. To answer this question, Lossky borrows from Gregory of Nazianzus' metaphorical interpretation of Moses ascent on Mount Sinai and affirms that there are different levels in theology, each appropriate to differing capacities of human understanding which reach up to the mysteries of God.<sup>25</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus writes:

God commands me to enter within the cloud and hold converse with Him; if any be an Aaron let him go up with me, and let him stand nearer, being ready, if it must be so, to remain outside the cloud. But if any be a Nadab or an Abihu, or of the order of the elders, let him go up indeed, but let him stand afar off. . . But if any be of the multitude, who are unworthy of this height of contemplation, if he be altogether impure let him not approach at all, for it

would be dangerous to him; but if he be at least temporarily, let him remain below and listen to the voice alone, and the trumpet, the bare words of piety, and let him see the mount smoking and lightening. . . But if any be an evil and savage beast, and altogether incapable of taking in the matter of contemplation and theology, let him not harmfully and malignantly lurk in this den amongst the woods, to catch hold of some dogma or saying by a sudden spring. . . but let him stand yet afar off and withdraw from the moment, or he shall be stoned.<sup>26</sup>

In this multi-level theological construct the words of Scripture and of dogma serve primarily as starting and guiding points in an ever-ascending process of contemplation which has as its final goal deification. Thus, concludes Lossky, theology will never be abstract, working through concepts but contemplative: raising the mind to those realities, which pass all understanding.<sup>27</sup>

From an Evangelical perspective, the apophatic approach to theology raises serious questions regarding the nature of knowledge that is beyond words and logical categories. The encounter with God described by Pseudo-Dionysius as 'plunging into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing', or 'one is supremely united by a completely unknowing inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing'<sup>28</sup> does hardly make sense to an Evangelical. For Evangelicals all theological knowledge is based on revelation. John Stott argues: Evangelical Christians begin their thinking with a recognition of the obvious, logical reasonableness of the revelation. Since God is our Creator, infinite in his being, while we are finite creatures of time and space, it stands to reason that we cannot discover him by our own researches or resources. He is altogether beyond us. And since in addition he is the all-holy God, while we are fallen, sinful and under his judgement, there is a chasm between him and us which we from our side could never bridge. . . We could never know him unless he should take the initiative to make himself known.<sup>29</sup>



Evangelicals believe that God made himself known through general and special revelation. While general revelation was made through nature, special revelation was made through inspiration and incarnation. The climax of God's revelation was the Word made flesh, the incarnate Son. However, Evangelical believes that the only authentic Christ is the biblical Christ. Stott contends:

What Scripture has done is to capture him [Christ] in order to present him to all) people at all times in all places. The climax of God's revelation should be described as the historic, incarnate Christ and the total biblical witness to him.<sup>30</sup>

In God's special revelation event and words went together; or in other words God's revelation is both personal and propositional.

Evangelicals also believe in the double authorship of the Bible: divine and human. The Bible is equally the Word of God and the word of man. Because the kind of book the Bible is, we must approach it in two distinct yet complementary ways.

Because it is the word of God, we must read it as we would read no other book-on our knees, in a humble, reverent, prayerful and submissive frame of mind. But because the Bible is also the word of men we must read it as we would read every other book, thoughtfully and in a 'critical' frame of mind.<sup>31</sup>

In their approach to theology, Evangelicals submit to the authority of Scripture which stands above tradition, experience and human reason.

From the survey of the apophatic and cataphatic approaches to theology it can be observed that they operate with different methods and categories. Thus, the apophatic approach focuses on a direct encounter with God beyond historical realities and consequently uses categories such as essence, energies, mystical union and theosis. Alternatively, the Evangelicals speak about knowing God in his self-revelation in Christ to whom Scriptures bears witness. Consequently, categories such as revelation, inspiration, illumination, inter-

pretation and obedience receive a prominent place.

In conclusion, the answer to the question of co-operation or confrontation between Orthodox and Evangelicals must bear in mind the fact that we speak about two distinct worlds. Distinctive theological methods lead to distinct theologies. This becomes clearer when we look at the Orthodox and Evangelicals theological perspectives.

## B. Theological Perspective

From an Orthodox viewpoint the Western Churches, both Catholic and Protestant, have a similar theological frame of reference. Khomiakov asserts:

All Protestants are Crypto-Papists. . . To use the concise language of algebra, all the West knows but one datum *a*; whether it be preceded by the positive sign +, as with the Romanists, or with the negative sign -, as with the Protestants, the *a* remains the same.<sup>32</sup>

Ernst Benz considers that the West developed its theology along the lines of a legal relationship between God and mankind out of which came the doctrine of justification. This legal approach was further extended to ecclesiology, and in the Catholic tradition, also to the doctrine of the ministry, to the role of dogmatic definitions and of canon law.

### *B.1 Orthodox Approach: Theosis.*

For the Orthodox, theology is only a means towards an end, that is union with God, or *theosis*. Consequently, the emphasis lies not on developing positive theological systems, but on the mystical aspect of this union. The whole purpose of theological epistemology and ecclesial practice is to help the faithful to attain to deification, or mystical union with God. In order to explain the nature of this union with God, the Orthodox follow Palamas's inefable distinction between three aspects of God's being: a) the permanently unnamable and imparticipable divine essence (*ousia*); b) the three divine persons (*hypostases*) Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and c) the uncreated energies (*energeiai*) or divine



operations, forces proper to and inseparable from God's essence, in which He goes forth from Himself, manifests, communicates and gives Himself.<sup>33</sup>

Mystical union with God according to essence is impossible; if the creature could participate in the divine essence, the creature would be God, homoousios with God. Lossky argues:

If we were able at a given moment to be united with the very essence of God and to participate in it even at the very last degree, we should not be what we are, we should be God by nature. God would then no longer be Trinity, but 'of myriads of hypostases'; for He would have as many hypostases as there would be persons participating in His essence.<sup>34</sup>

Only the three Persons of the Trinity are united to each other in the divine essence.

Even though we share the same human nature as Christ and receive in Him the name of Sons of God, we do not ourselves become the divine hypostasis of the Son by the fact of incarnation. We are unable, therefore, to participate in either the essence or the hypostases of the Holy Trinity.<sup>35</sup>

Union with God according to energy is a real participation of creature in the divine life.<sup>36</sup> Lossky argues:

In the Church and through the sacraments our nature enters into union with the divine nature in the hypostasis of the Son, the Head of His mystical body. Our humanity becomes consubstantial with the deified humanity, united with the person of Christ.<sup>37</sup>

It is true that by postulating this distinction between essence, person and energies, Palamas was attempting to hold together two claims: firstly, that *theosis* is real, and secondly, that God remains totally *other*. However, such a distinction raises some major theological questions. Ontologically, in spite of the Palamite claims to the contrary, this distinction within the being of God runs the risk of compromising the principle of 'unity and simplicity' of the divine essence. To affirm that God's ener-

gies interpose between God's essence and the creation leads to the conclusion that there is a duality in God; a 'lower' part that in which one can participate, and an 'upper' part that is totally inaccessible. Or, from another perspective, the idea that within God there are two distinct realities can lead (if pressed toward its logical conclusion), to the implication that there are two gods related to each other in some mysterious way. Meyendorff dismisses both charges, arguing that for Palamas 'in virtue of the simplicity of His being, God is wholly and entirely present both in His essence and in His energies' and on the other side, 'no multiplicity of divine manifestations could affect the unity of God, for God is beyond the categories of whole and parts, and while in His essence always remaining unknowable, reveals Himself wholly in each energy as the Living God.'<sup>38</sup> Additionally, it raises the question of the ontological status as well as that of the intra-Trinitarian role of each category (aspect) of God's being. On the economic level, the main problem is to maintain a trinitarian soteriology, that is, a personal relation with God, whilst affirming that God communicates himself through *non-hypostatic* beings such as the uncreated energies.

## B.2 Evangelical Approach: Justification by Faith.

From an Evangelical perspective the relation between God and man has to answer the question 'How can a lost and guilty sinner stand before a just and holy God?' John Stott argues that,

This sense of our sinfulness, of the blinding holiness of God, and of the absolute incompatibility of the one with the other, is an essential evangelical characteristic, without which our understanding of the necessity and the nature of the cross is bound to be skewed.<sup>39</sup>

By stressing the reality and horror of sin, Evangelicals point to the cross of Christ as the only way of acceptance with God. The words of the Apostle Paul: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us' (Gal. 3: 13) affirms



that the only way we can be redeemed from the curse of the law is that Christ bore it on our place. This is called 'penal substitution.' J.I Packer considers it 'a distinguishing mark of the world-wide evangelical fraternity.'<sup>40</sup> In the same vein J. Stott contends:

The cross was a multifaceted achievement, and has many different meanings. It is the ultimate revelation of God's love and justice. It is the decisive conquest of evil. It is the ground of our salvation. It is the supreme example of self-sacrifice. It is the most powerful inspiration to Christian devotion. Moreover, the salvation won by the cross is illustrated in the New Testament by a variety of metaphors like propitiation, redemption and reconciliation. But evangelical Christians have always insisted that the richest model is justification.<sup>41</sup>

Some contemporary evangelicals argue:

Justification by Faith appears to us, as it does to all evangelicals, to be the heart and hub, the paradigm and essence, of the whole economy of God's saving grace.<sup>42</sup>

Justification is a legal word, borrowed from the law courts. J. Stott continues:

When God justifies sinners, he declares a verdict, in anticipation of the last day, that he has not only forgiven all their sins but has also granted them a righteous standing acceptance in his sight.<sup>43</sup>

Further, Stott argues that while insisting that 'to justify' means 'to declare' and not 'to make' righteous, evangelicals emphasize that justification is always accompanied by regeneration. Moreover, this new birth leads inevitably to a new life, this justification to sanctification. Sanctification begins the moment we are justified, but then it grows as the Holy Spirit transform us into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3: 18).

In conclusion, deification and justification by faith are two distinct ways to salvation. One focuses on mystical union through the uncreated energies, while the other deals with the legal aspect of the relationship between God and man.

### *c. Sociological Perspective*

The historical circumstances during the period which followed the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) placed Byzantium in a preeminent and to some degree self-sufficient position, from which it was to develop its theological tradition. Byzantium maintained its Christological commitment to the Council of Chalcedon, and for several centuries kept bridges toward the West intact, in spite of all tensions, political and doctrinal. During this period, however, neither the councils nor the theologians would show particular interest in positive theological systems. According to Meyendorff, with few exceptions, the seven conciliar statements assume a negative form; they condemned distortions of the Christian truth rather than elaborate its positive content. The greater part of the theological literature was either exegetical or polemical, and in both cases the Christian faith was assumed as a given reality upon which one comments or which one defends.<sup>45</sup>

From another perspective, Hopko argues that although the formal break between the Christian East and West occurred in 1054, from as early as the fourth century AD the Christians of the East had very little contact with the Christian from the West. The Turkish rule, which extended almost over the entire Orthodox world since the fifteenth century (fall of Constantinople 1453) and lasted until the end of the nineteenth century, further estranged the two churches. Consequently, political and cultural exchanges between East and West had been dramatically reduced, and due to this fact the ideas of the Renaissance, Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, which are considered to represent the genesis of modern Western culture, stopped short when they reached the borders of the Turkish Empire.<sup>46</sup>

During these centuries of political and theological separation, Hopko argues that the faith and the practice of the Orthodox Church have been preserved unaltered since apostolic times.

Whatever our earthly conditions and temporal circumstances, we Orthodox Christians live in the same ecclesial and spirit-



ual world. We identify with the same tradition of faith and life. We worship the same God through the same Christ. We are inspired by the same Spirit in the same church. We celebrate the same liturgy, participate in the same sacraments and say the same prayers. We meditate upon the same scriptures, which we believe to be God's Word inspired by God's Spirit, interpreting them within the same hermeneutical context. We accept the same councils and are guided by the same canons. We recognize the same teachers and venerate the same saints. We teach the same doctrines, defend the same dogmas, and employ the same symbol of faith. In our theology as well as in our worship, we use the same words and images, which we affirm to be 'adequate to God' and proper to the experience, which we share within God's covenant community, which we identify in history from the time of Abraham.<sup>47</sup>

According to the Orthodox belief, the uninterrupted continuity with the Apostolic Church is the mark of the true Church.

There can be only one church founded by our Lord, and in that Church can be but one single Faith. This one Church is the Orthodox Church; the one Faith is the whole Orthodox doctrine.<sup>48</sup>

Further, the Orthodox affirm that the Apostolic Tradition can be found today only in their Church, which is the only true church of Christ on earth. Consequently, no appeal to tradition other than the tradition of the Orthodox Church is acceptable.

The Eastern Tradition is not one of the regular forms of Tradition, but it is the Holy Tradition of the Church of Christ itself.<sup>49</sup>

Bratsiotis considers that the church would have ceased to be the Church if it had departed from the Holy Tradition. It is the very historical continuity with the Apostolic Church that marks the Orthodoxy as the true faith.<sup>50</sup> Hence the conclusion that *Extra Ecclesia nulla salus*.<sup>51</sup> George Florovsky asserts that 'outside the Church there is no salvation because *salvation is the Church*.'<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Lossky

argues:

In the Church and through the sacraments our nature enters into union with the divine nature in the hypostasis of the Son, the Head of His mystical body. Our humanity becomes consubstantial with the deified humanity, united with the person of Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Consequently, if one does not belong to the Orthodox Church, one is not saved due to the fact that the life giving Spirit does not operate outside the canonical boundaries of the Orthodox Church. Bulgakov argues that,

The Church, in her quality of the Body of Christ, which lives with the life of Christ, is by that fact the domain where the Holy Spirit lives and works. More: the Church is life by the Holy Spirit because it is the Body of Christ.<sup>54</sup>

This exclusive institutionalized ecclesiology lives little space for co-operation with other churches. Moreover, in the Orthodox countries, the Orthodox Church is also part of the national myth; that is, the Church is associated with national survival, the protection of the culture and identity. Subsequently, religious and national identity are overlapping realities. For example, to be a good Romanian one has to be Romanian Orthodox.<sup>55</sup> Some Orthodox theologians go as far as to argue that nationhood (ethnicity) is a divine principle for the canonical organization of the Church.<sup>56</sup> The outcome of such views are clearly seen in those regions affected by ethnic conflicts. Ethnic cleansing and religious cleansing go hand in hand. Some ultra-nationalist Orthodox advocate a one nationhood and one religion national state.

## C. Conclusions

Some Orthodox theologians are aware of the theological problems posed by a purely apophatic approach to theology and consequently attempt to realize a synthesis between apophasis and cataphasis. This new approach create space for a wider use of the Bible in the life of the Orthodox believers. Thus Timiadis argues:



To a certain extent the dissatisfaction expressed at the use by the early Fathers of Aristotelian terms, and notably the desire to make less use of terms such as 'essence' and 'energies', is very understandable. Whatever arguments may be advanced in their favour, they still risk being misunderstood on account of their impersonal character. It might be better to use more intimate and personal expressions, such as 'communion with the Holy Spirit,' more in line with those of the Old Testament and more connected with the historical Jesus. All modern anxiety about the absence of personal communion in human life with God, could thus be overcome, reassuring man in his loneliness and anguish that he can be visited and sustained, not by vague, immaterial, heavenly forces, but above all by God's personal intervention. A God who is reluctant to be with us, who sends us alternative powers and energies, contradicts the very sense of Christ's Incarnation.<sup>57</sup>

Consequently, there is a shift from exaggerated mysticism to a more Bible-study oriented Orthodox communities. Thus, Kesich affirms that,

The interest in Biblical research is definitely linked to what is going on in Orthodox parishes. In many Orthodox communities Bible studies are organized and held regularly as church activities. . . This is a challenge to Orthodox scholars and teachers, to translate their research and to convey in clear terms an Orthodox perspective within which the people would be able to use, to judge and evaluate new ideas which are appearing so frequently in our pluralistic societies. Revival of interest in the Bible accompanies theological awakening. A theological revival will not occur without genuine interest and active participation in Biblical research.<sup>58</sup>

This is an important point of convergence between Orthodox and Evangelicals in the area of theological methodology.

Regarding *theosis*, the Orthodox way of salvation, Evangelicals must pay the price to study Orthodoxy and unveil from within the theological problems posed by

this approach. Already, there are Orthodox theologians, who believe that,

Exaggerated mysticism could lead to the conclusion that God is so far removed from humanity that disparate efforts are required to obtain his intervention. We are then far from the OT promise to make us God's people, the New Israel, the redeemed heirs of His Kingdom, endowed with Pauline paresia, brothers of one another by grace and bearers of the Spirit (*pneumatophoroi*) incorporated into Christ's Body and enjoying all the spiritual gifts that membership of the Church provides.<sup>59</sup>

Regarding the Orthodox exclusive ecclesiology, which identifies the canonical boundaries of the Church with the sphere where the Holy Spirit operates, there are disagreements among Orthodox theologians concerning those who do not belong to the Orthodox Church.

Firstly, there is a 'rigorous group' who hold that 'since Orthodoxy is the Church, anyone who is not an Orthodox cannot be a member of the Church'. This view seems to be consistent with the Orthodox teaching that *Extra Ecclesia nulla salus*, because the Church mediates the saving grace of Christ through the Holy Spirit. This view leads to strong institutionalism and does not provide space for co-operation with other churches.<sup>60</sup> Second, the 'moderate group' holds that it is true to say that Orthodoxy is the Church, but false to infer from this that those who are not Orthodox cannot possibly belong to the Church. This view allows for a little more space for the freedom of the Spirit to operate outside the canonical boundaries of the Church, but it does not clarify the relation between the Spirit and the institution, between the believer and the institution and between the believer and the Spirit. Thus far, the preparatory commission of the great and holy Council of the Orthodox Church has produced a document on the *oikonomia* in the Orthodox Church, in which it affirms that 'the Holy Spirit acts upon other Christians in very many ways, depending on degree of faith and hope.'<sup>61</sup> Third, a group that could be described as 'open ended



institutionalism' renders a more favourable attitude for co-operation with those whom do not belong to the Orthodox Church. Zizioulas contends:

... it is certainly not easy to exclude from the realm of the operation of the Holy Spirit so many Christians who do not belong to the Orthodox Church. There are saints outside the Orthodox Church. How can we understand that theologically? How can we account for it without saying that the canonical limits of the Church are not important?<sup>62</sup>

Evangelicals should identify these trends within Eastern Orthodoxy and build bridges that allow for theological discussions. Alternatively, those Evangelicals who live in Orthodox countries dominated by exclusive ecclesiologies and religious nationalism should be ready to pay the price for their faithfulness to the Gospel and the Great Commission. While affirming their identity, Evangelicals should explore all the doors that lead to co-operation with the Orthodox Church. Alternatively, when the situation demands it, Evangelical should be ready serving Christ in a hostile world. We are not only to stand firm in the Gospel ourselves, but to fight for it in the public arena, as well.

## Notes

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- 3 V. Lossky, *In the Image*, pp 15, 97.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 15
- 7 V. Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1978, p 14.
- 8 V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, James Clarke & Co., London, 1973, p. 27.
- 9 Lossky borrows this distinction from Pseudo-Dionysius and John of Damascus. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, 1,1, 1000A, in Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works* (CW), (Tr. C. Luibheid), SPCK, London, 1987, pp. 135-141; John of Damascus, *De.fide orthodoxa*, 1,4 (NPNF, 2.Ed, vol.IX, p. 34.)
- 10 John of Damascus, *De.fide orthodoxa*, 1,4.
- 11 V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, p. 28.
- 12 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, II, 1025B, in CW, p. 138.
- 13 *Ibid.*, III, 1033C, in CW, p.139
- 14 *Ibid.*, III, 1032D-1033A, in CW, pp.138-139.
- 15 *Ibid.*, III, 1033A, in CW, p. 139.
- 16 *Ibid.*, III, 1033A-1033B, in CW, pp. 138-139.
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- 18 *Ibid.*, 1,4, 592B, in CW, p. 52.
- 19 V. Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, p. 33
- 20 V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, p. 40. See Gregory of Nyssa. *Con. Eunom* (PG, XLV 939-941).
- 21 V. Lossky, *In the Image*, p.13
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 40
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 39
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp 40-41
- 26 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio XXVIII* (*oratio theologica II*), 2 in NPNF, 2nd ed., vol. VII, p. 289.
- 27 V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, pp. 41-42
- 28 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, p. 167.
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- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
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