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Gjoko Gjorgjevski
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University

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ORTHODOXY AND PROTESTANTISM THROUGH THE CENTURIES

by Gjoko Gjorgjevski

Gjoko Gjorgjevski, PhD is the Dean and Professor of Old Testament at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, “St. Clement of Ohrid,” one of the faculties of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Maacedonia. Since 2001, he has been actively involved in interreligious dialogue. He is the former Ambassador of Macedonia to the Holy See from 2010 to 2014.

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe the history and actual relations between the Orthodox East and the Protestant West. This paper will both examine and show the beginning, the continuation and the present situation of the Protestant-Orthodox dialog, communication, influences, convergences and differences, as well as the disputes and attempts to overcome disagreements. It will give an overview of the most important dialogues and scholarly exchanges over the centuries.

Key words: Orthodox, Protestant, dialogue

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther published his 95 theses against indulgences and initiated a new worldwide Christian movement. The Reformation that began in Germany expanded its influence throughout Europe and America, leaving strong traces throughout the rest of the world. While in the past, Martin Luther had long been used as a symbol of Christian division; today, a special emphasis is placed on what Protestantism has in common with other Christian churches and communities, the same year that marks exactly half a millennium since the beginning of the Reformation. However, this is not the first jubilee of Protestantism during this decade. In 2009, 500 years since the birth of John Calvin was celebrated; in 2010, the 450th anniversary of the death of Philipp Melanchthon was marked; and in 2015, 500 years since the birth of Lucas Cranach the Younger was honored. The commemoration of the Reformation and its important figures are also an occasion to remind

us of the message of the evangelical theology: *Ecclesia semper reformanda (est)*, originally stated by Augustine, which is a common appeal to all Christian communities to constantly question the preservation of purity and the practice of faith.

What could be the significance of the celebration of the jubilee of 500 years of Protestantism for the Orthodox and what is the relationship between the Orthodox and the Protestants throughout the centuries and today? How were the Protestants viewed by the Orthodox when the reform process began? From the point of view of the Orthodox East, it was mainly seen as a phenomenon occurring in the West, without taking a side in the conflict of the Reformation with Rome. However, in the past, the Orthodox often utilized the discussions with the other side, much like the arguments against the papal primacy by the Protestants when faced with the unionism promoted by Rome, or the position of the Roman Catholics about the Sacraments as an argument in the debates with Protestants.¹

On the other hand, it is important to note the attitude of the protagonists of the Reformation toward the Orthodox East. In a debate from the year 1519, Martin Luther referred to the Orthodox as the ones who did not recognize the universal primacy of the Pope, stating : “The Greek Church does not agree on this point and nevertheless is not considered heretic for that.”² To Luther, the Church was not under Rome, but continued to practice the teachings of the whole Church,³ There was also the statement that the Church of the East was the most ancient Church,⁴ faithful to its Tradition.⁵ Thus, Luther's modest knowledge of

¹ Archbishop Job of Telmessos , “An Orthodox View on the Commemoration of 500 Years of the Reformation”, <https://panorthodoxcemes.blogspot.mk/2016/11/an-orthodox-view-on-commemoration-of.html?m=0>

² Џон В. Фентон, „Првите лутерани и Православната црква“, <http://www.pppe.mk/2017/prvite-luterani-i-pravoslavnata-tsrkva-o-dhon-v-fenton/>; Archbishop Job of Telmessos, “An Orthodox View on the Commemoration of 500 Years of the Reformation”, <https://panorthodoxcemes.blogspot.mk/2016/11/an-orthodox-view-on-commemoration-of.html?m=0>

³ Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther, vol. 3* (Albany: Books For The Ages, 1997), 61.

⁴ E. Benz, *Die Ostkirche im Lichte der protestantischen Gesichtsschreibung von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, München 1952; Џон В. Фентон, „Првите лутерани и Православната црква“, <http://www.pppe.mk/2017/prvite-luterani-i-pravoslavnata-tsrkva-o-dhon-v-fenton/>

Orthodoxy, noted in his polemic works, would later serve the Orthodox in their discussions with Roman Catholic theologians. However, Luther did not seem to have personal contacts with Eastern Orthodoxy, but his esteem towards the Orthodox Church would create a positive ground for later interactions.⁶

It should be taken into account that Lutherans at that time certainly did not consider themselves to be deviating or forming a new “denomination,” but regarded themselves as true successors to the western Christian heritage and hence the continuation of the Western Church. For them, the Reformation was not an innovation, but rather a return of the Church to the apostolic faith.⁷ The emphasis of the apostolic continuity in the title of the Augsburg confession was certainly not a coincidence, also described as “Confession of the Orthodox Faith.”⁸

After the appearance of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the orientation of the Protestant churches was mainly directed towards establishing their own unity, that is, overcoming the labels of “orthodox and liberal,”⁹ but in spite of that, some of them started a dialogue with the Eastern churches. For almost the entire seventeenth century, representatives of the Lutheran and Anglican churches had intensive communication with representatives of the Ecumenical and the Alexandrian Patriarchate.¹⁰ Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) had contacts with the Orthodox from Venice between 1542-1562 and even with the Patriarch of

⁵ Георгије Флоровски, „Православна Црква и екуменски покрет до 1910 године“ in Георгије Флоровски, *Хришћанство и култура*, Београд 2005, 115.

⁶ Michael Bremner, „Desinigration of Dialogue: Eastern Orthodox and Tübingen Lutherans First Contact, <http://michaelbremner.com/2013/07/129/>.

⁷ Georges Florovsky, “Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 2,” *Christianity and Culture*, Belmont 1974, 146; Џон В. Фентон, „Првите лутерани и Православната црква“, <http://www.pppe.mk/2017/prvite-luterani-i-pravoslavnata-tsrkva-o-dhon-v-fenton/>

⁸ Eve Tibbs, and Nathan P. Feldmeth, “Patriarch Jeremias II, the Tübingen Lutherans, and the Greek Version of the Augsburg Confession: A Sixteenth Century Encounter.” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2000), 5.

⁹ Jean Boisset, *Protestantizam – kratka povjest*, Zagreb 1985, 141

¹⁰ Марко Николић, “Екуменизам, екуменски покрет и Српска православна црква,” *Religija i tolerancija*, Vol. VI, № 10, 2008: 95-96.

Constantinople, Joasaph II. In 1559, in a turbulent historical context,¹¹ Melanchthon sent him a letter of the Augsburg Confession translated into Greek.¹² The dogmatic works of this famous Lutheran theologian, classical philologist and humanist, are also extremely important; in his Apology, he cites parts of the Liturgy of the Chrysostom, impressed by the fact that in the commemoration of the dead, along with the saints, there was no mention of the Roman Catholic teaching of the purgatory.¹³ However, Melanchthon did not succeed to start a real dialogue with the Orthodox Church.¹⁴

After Melanchthon, one should mention the first significant Protestant connoisseur of Orthodoxy, David Chytraeus (1530-1600), a Lutheran reformer of the second generation and a prominent professor in Rostock. The theological environments in Tübingen, represented by professors, Jakob Andreas and Martin Krussius, and assisted by Stefan Gerlach, pastor of the German Embassy in Constantinople,¹⁵ started a fruitful dialogue with the Patriarch of Constantinople, Jeremiah II (1572-1578).¹⁶ These Lutheran theologians also sent the

¹¹ "In his letter Melanchthon transmits the belief of the time of the Reformation in the proximity of the Day of Judgment and that only "repentance and inner renewal in the body of Christianity can help" in that state of things. The Greek Church already has been overrun by the Turks and the West is under a constant threat from them and "besides on the inner front from Papacy, which has raised its power in the middle of the temple of God." Cfr. Morten Møbjerg, "The Orthodox Church and the Lutherans - An ecumenical correspondence from 1573 to 1581. The ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah II comments on the Confession of Augsburg," <http://www.scriptoriet.info/en-orthodox.htm>

¹² There is a memory, that Philip Melanchthon worked with Demetrios Mysos (a Serbian deacon from the Patriarchate of Constantinople) for the translation of the Confession of Augsburg in Greek language. Cfr. ДОН В. ФЕНТОН, „Првите лутерани и Православната црква“, <http://www.pppe.mk/2017/prvite-luterani-i-pravoslavnata-tsrkva-odhon-v-fenton/>. He remained for about six months with Melanchthon in Wittenberg, where he learned firsthand information about the Reformation and the Lutheran Church. Cfr. Berthold F. Korte, "Early Lutheran Relations with Eastern Orthodox" in *Lutheran Quarterly* 1(195) 55.

¹³ Many West-European expressions, marked by legal language, which both the Roman Church and the Reformation used, is paraphrased and explained with expressions coming from the Orthodox liturgy.

¹⁴ Melanchthon gets no answer from Demetrios nor from the ecumenical Patriarch Josef II (1555 - 1565). The Greek dogmatist Ioannis Karmires thinks that the reason could be that the patriarch found so many interpretations not appropriate to the Orthodox Church, so he preferred to stay silent. But, this is only a guess, because nobody knows what happened to Demetrios or his message. It is also possible that Demetrios lost his life on the way to Constantinople and therefore the letter never reached its recipient. Cfr. Morten Møbjerg, "The Orthodox Church and the Lutherans - An ecumenical correspondence from 1573 to 1581", <http://www.scriptoriet.info/en-orthodox.htm>

¹⁵ Stefan Gerlach studied and later became a professor of theology at the university in Tübingen. He had the direct contacts and was personally present in Constantinople, where he succeeded in getting contact with the patriarchate and the patriarch, Jeremias II. Cfr. Morten Møbjerg, "The Orthodox Church and the Lutherans - An ecumenical correspondence from 1573 to 1581", <http://www.scriptoriet.info/en-orthodox.htm>

¹⁶ Сп. V. Peri, *Due date un'unica Pasqua*, Milano 1967, 26.

“Augsburg Confession” to the Patriarch of Constantinople, intending the teaching of the reformers to bring them closer to the Orthodox theologians,¹⁷ by asking them to give their opinion on the delivered text. The Patriarch responded with three letters¹⁸ in which he explained the teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy, setting the emphasis on the differences with the Protestant doctrine in the field of dogmas, faith, liturgy, and tradition. The theologians from Tübingen alternately responded to each of those letters and that correspondence lasted for six years, from 1576 to 1581. The constant call to the Tradition of the Church based on the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers and the Ecumenical Councils dominated the letters of the Patriarch. The clarity in thought and the consistency of the claims are remarkable, as well as the sympathy and kindness toward the Lutheran theologians. As the dialogue was progressing, two basic realities became apparent. First, the Orthodox had much more in common with Roman Catholic teachings and practices than the Lutherans expected (such as the number and nature of the Sacraments, the patronage of saints and the respect of icons, relics, as well as monasticism); on the other hand, the Lutherans followed some Roman Catholic teachings unacceptable to the Eastern Church (such as Filioque, the use of unleavened bread). However, the biggest disagreement was noted on the following topics: the Lutherans were refusing to accept the works of the Holy Fathers as the correct interpretation of the Scriptures, except when “the tradition agrees with the Scriptures”¹⁹ and the Orthodox were refusing to accept the sharply defined concepts of the Lutherans for justification and

¹⁷ Раде Кисић, *Кораџи ка заједништву, Рад Заједничке лутеранско-православне комисије*, Пожаревац-Београд 2016, 15.

¹⁸ The first three letters of Jeremiah, especially those of 1576, are pointing out the differences between Orthodoxy and Protestantism and clearly are presenting the official dogmas of the Eastern Church. The three official exchanges (and a few auxiliary letters) are cordial and thoughtful. Cfr. Џон В. Фентон, „Првите лутерани и Православната црква“, <http://www.pppe.mk/2017/prvite-luterani-i-pravoslavnata-tsrkva-o-dhon-v-fenton/>. Without permission of Jeremiah, the Roman Catholics would publish these texts several times (Dillingen 1582, Koln 1582 and Paris 1584), using them in their debates with Protestants. Cfr. G. Hofmann, “Griechische Patriarchen und römische Päpste. Patriarch Jeremias II“, *Orientalia Christiana* 25 (1932) 228.

¹⁹ Cfr. Џон В. Фентон, „Првите лутерани и Православната црква“, <http://www.pppe.mk/2017/prvite-luterani-i-pravoslavnata-tsrkva-o-dhon-v-fenton/>

free will.²⁰ Thus, both sides failed to convince and understand each other, so the discussion ended without noticeable results. The reason for the failure is partly due to the fact that the dialogue was guided by various motives;²¹ the Protestants to give notice, especially to the Pope, that the Eastern Church of Constantinople was their ally, while the Patriarchate intended to illuminate the non-Orthodox.²² Patriarch Jeremiah interrupted the theological dialogue, and despite the failed undertaking, the two sides did not condemn each other, but left room for further friendly communication.²³ Although it was a matter of correspondence of a private character, it was the first exchange of theological views on many important issues (the proceeding of the Holy Spirit, salvation, sacraments, icons, respect of saints, monasticism) between the Orthodox East and the Protestant West.²⁴

Towards the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, a circle of intellectuals and ecclesiastics was created with a strong pro-reformist orientation. In that period, the Orthodox widely used the model of the so-called “Confessional books” (“Catechisms”). Among the most important Orthodox confessions were those of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril Lucaris of 1629, which contained numerous Calvinist elements, as well as the catechism of Peter Mogila of 1640, known for his pro-Catholic contents, which in

²⁰ Цон В. Фентон, „Првите лутерани и Православната црква“, <http://www.pppe.mk/2017/prvite-luterani-i-pravoslavnata-tsrkva-o-dhon-v-fenton/>

²¹ According to Michael Bremner, “a lack of a common approach in order to obtain a common goal in dialogue has been shown to lead to an impasse of union through the dialogue between Patriarch Jerimias and the Tübingen Lutherans... Patriarch Jerimias II was not interested in convincing the Eastern Doctrines through argument, but rather his interest was expounding what the Orthodox have always believed...” He spent more time “clarifying the Orthodox perspective by showing the fathers held to their faith, whereas the Lutherans defaulted more to arguments for the validity of their interpretations through Scripture...” Both parties “had different understandings of what constitutes a convincing argument, leading to a breakdown of dialogue.” Cfr. Michael Bremner, „Desinigration of Dialogue: Eastern Orthodox and Tübingen Lutherans First Contact, <http://michaelbremner.com/2013/07/129/>.”

²² Athanassis E. Karathanassis, “La chiesa di Costantinopoli (1453-2000)”, 79; Цон В. Фентон, „Првите лутерани и Православната црква“, <http://www.pppe.mk/2017/prvite-luterani-i-pravoslavnata-tsrkva-o-dhon-v-fenton/>.

²³ Archbishop Job of Telmessos, „An Orthodox View on the Commemoration of 500 Years of the Reformation“, <https://panorthodoxcemes.blogspot.mk/2016/11/an-orthodox-view-on-commemoration-of.html?m=0>

²⁴ Georges Florovsky, “Patriarch Jeremiah II and Lutheran Divines” in Georges Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*, (Belmont 1974), 143-155.

many ways, still followed the Roman Catholic catechism of Canisius.²⁵ The activity of Cyril Lucaris was certainly due to his sincere sympathy for Protestantism, and partly with hope for support by the great powers of countries like England and the Netherlands. At that time, when all of Europe was involved in the Protestant-Catholic conflict, which dominated the religious sphere and crossed into the economic and political, Lucaris was already on the patriarchal throne and encouraging the creation of a circle of sympathizers of Protestantism, which led to a move of the conservatory spirit, and therefore the tranquillity of the Eastern Church.²⁶ Under the strong influence of the Calvinism and in a decisive antipode to Roman Catholicism, Lucaris attempted to reform Orthodoxy in the direction of Calvinism.

His “Confession,” first written in Latin and published in Geneva in 1629, immediately provoked strong opposition by other Orthodox leaders.²⁷ After the death of Lucaris, at the Synod of Yaschi in 1642, the representatives of the Orthodox churches censored the Protestant views of Lucaris²⁸ and ratified the *Confesio fidei* of the Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev, Peter Mogila, a text written in Latin, and translated into Greek.²⁹ The Jerusalem Synod of the Orthodox Churches in 1672 rejected the position of Lucaris and shaped its own confession, known as the “Confession of Dositheus (Patriarch of Jerusalem).”³⁰ This confession, considered to be a very important Orthodox dogmatic text of that period in relation to certain questions, had the same attitude

²⁵ Mogila’s writings were judged acceptable by the Orthodox bishops in a council in Kiev in 1640. And in 1642, a council in Iasi, in Moldavia, approved a modified version of Mogila’s *Confession of Faith*. However, even in its modified form, Bishop Kallistos Ware calls this confession the most Latin-influenced document ever endorsed by a council of the Orthodox Church. <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/church-history/seventeenth-century/saint-peter-mogila>

²⁶ Athanassis E. Karathanassis, “La chiesa di Costantinopoli (1453-2000)”, 80.

²⁷ According to Florovsky, “immediate use was made of the Confession by both sides in the Roman Catholic-Protestant controversy—by the Protestants to prove the essential oneness of their faith with that of the Eastern Churches, by the Roman Catholics to prove the apostasy of the Greeks” „Георгије Флоровски, „Православна Црква и екуменски покрет до 1910 године“, 129.

²⁸ Cesare Alzati, “I voivodati romeni e l’ecumene ortodossa”, ed. Andrea Pacini, *L’Ortodossia nella nuova Europa, Dinamiche storiche e prospettive*, Torino 2003, 106.

²⁹ A. Malvy – M. Viller, “La confession orthodoxe de Pierre Moghila, Metropolitte de Kiev (1633-1649) approuvée par les Patriarches grecs du XVII siecle”, *Orientalia Christiana X*, Roma-Paris 1927.

³⁰ Dennis Bratcher, “The Confession of Cyril Lucaris (Eastern Orthodox, 1629)”, <http://www.crivoice.org/creedcyril.html>.

towards the Lutherans as it had to the Roman Catholics. Among other things, it showed that for a long time, Protestants and Roman Catholics were considered to be two sides of the same Western Christianity.³¹ The seventeenth century was marked by numerous discussions and controversies about dogmatic arguments between Orthodox, Protestants, and Catholics until 1723, when the Constantinopolitan Council decided to end the dialogue.³²

The first distinguished representatives of the new movement in the Orthodox world were the emperors, Peter the Great (1682-1725) and Katherine II (1762-1796) in Russia, as well as the Greek Phanariot princes of Moldova (from 1709) and Vlachia (from 1716).³³ Protestant Europe (Lutheran and Calvinist) was known to serve as an inspiration for their management models.³⁴ The Church in Russia was also reorganized and subjected to the state power. The Patriarchate was suppressed by the creation of a Synod, according to the Protestant model in 1721, and the next year, the function of the “Ober-Prokurator,” a layman who would be appointed to manage the Synod, was introduced.³⁵ After that followed the nationalization of the church property, the forced transformation of the monasteries into hospitals, orphanages, and prisons, the separation of

³¹ Archbishop Job of Telmessos, “An Orthodox View on the Commemoration of 500 Years of the Reformation”, <https://panorthodoxcemes.blogspot.mk/2016/11/an-orthodox-view-on-commemoration-of.html?m=0>

³² G. Podskalsky, *Griechische Theologie in der Zeit der Türkenherrschaft*, München 1988, 329.

³³ In this context, it is good to recall previous events in Russia in the 16th century, when the newly elected Russian Tsar Mikhail Romanov intended to marry his daughter to the Danish prince Valdemar, who was Lutheran. The Russian Orthodox Church at the Council held in 1620 in the Moscow Cathedral rejected the possibility of recognizing the baptism outside the Orthodox Church, which created an insurmountable obstacle in the conclusion of the planned marriage. The dialogue that followed between the representatives of both churches did not bear fruit: the prince Valdemar refused to be baptized again and the plans for the marriage failed. Cfr. Раде Кисић, *Кораџи ка заједништву*, 17.

³⁴ Matei Cazaku, “Modelli occidental e modernizzazione del mondo ortodosso nell’epoca illuminista”, ed. Andrea Pacini, *L’Ortodossia nella nuova Europa, Dinamiche storiche e prospettive*, Torino 2003, 120.

³⁵ There is a similar phenomenon in the Greek Orthodox Church, when it self-declared as autocephalous in 1834, separating itself from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Then the independent Greek Archbishopric applied a similar organization, with the Holy Synod formed according to the concept of German Protestant churches, but this was certainly not under Russian influence, even more if one takes into account that during the time of Alexei I and Nicholas I Russia was opposed to the autocephaly of the Greek Church. Christian Hannik, “Ideologia occidentale della nazione e identità ortodossa nella Russia post-napoleonica e nei movimenti di liberazione balcanici”, ed. Andrea Pacini, *L’Ortodossia nella nuova Europa, Dinamiche storiche e prospettive*, 153; Сп. F. Heyar, *Die Orientalische Frage im Kirchlichen Lebenskreis*, 156.

religious education from the lay school, etc.³⁶ On the other hand, the literary activity was noticeable through the publishing of books in the Slavic language in order to popularize Lutheran ideas in Russia.³⁷ According to Georgy Florovsky, at that time, the theological schools in Russia were taught some sort of Lutheran Orthodoxy, which was to them completely normal learning.³⁸ This openness towards Lutheran theology was an illustration of the overall relation of Peter the Great toward the Lutherans.³⁹

The Epistle of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from 1895—although it was the answer to the circular Encyclical of the Pope Leo XIII, by which the peoples and rulers of the entire universe, including the Orthodox Church were called upon to unite with the papal throne—pointed out that the union of the churches was a “duty and desire of every Christian heart and especially of the Orthodox Church.” The only condition for this union was the existence of a generally accepted confession of faith, which originates from the “apostolic and devotional teaching,” according to which “the cornerstone of the Church is Jesus Christ himself.”⁴⁰ It was pointed out that the Orthodox Church was ready to accept any proposal for unity, under the condition that the Roman Pope renounced “the new things which has arbitrary introduced to his church,” which would return it to the secure road of the seven Ecumenical Councils of the undivided Church of the First Millennium. The Epistle insisted on the “infallibility” and “the immutability” of the doctrine and considered various teachings as an insurmountable obstacle.⁴¹

³⁶ Matei Cazacu, “Modelli occidentali e modernizzazione del mondo ortodosso nell’epoca illuminista,” 121.

³⁷ Раде Кисић, *Кораћи ка заједништву*, 19.

³⁸ Георгије Флоровски, “Православна Црква и екуменски покрет до 1910 године,” 135.

³⁹ Раде Кисић, *Кораћи ка заједништву*, 20. The question of the reception of the Lutherans in the Orthodox Church is again raised by Peter the Great. From the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah III he received the answer that the repetition of the baptism is not needed, but only the confirmation (cf. Augustin Nikitin, “Orthodox Lutheran Contacts in Russia since the Reformation” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23(2/1986): 261-262.

⁴⁰ A Reply to the Papal Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Reunion, The Patriarchal Encyclical of 1895, www.orthodoxinfo.com, translated by Владимир Димитријевић (ed.), Истина је само једна – Свети Оци о Римокатолицизму, (Горњи Милановац: 2001), 246-260.

⁴¹ Марко Николић, „Екуменизам, екуменски покрет и Српска православна црква, *Religija i tolerancija*, VI, 10 (2008): 99.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Joachim III, raised the question of the ecumenical relations between the Orthodox Church and Western Christianity with his famous Encyclical (1902), when he alleged: “It is, moreover, pleasing to God, and in accordance with the Gospel, to seek the mind of the most holy autocephalous Churches on the subject of our present and future relations with the two great growths of Christianity, viz. the Western Church and the Church of the Protestants.”⁴² It was an invitation to the Orthodox churches to move towards reconciliation and cooperation in order to respond appropriately to the call for unity.⁴³ This initiative was followed by concrete results, giving rise to the first associations of inter-confessional character. This dialogue was characterized by “a combination of a principled dogmatic approach and a fraternal love.” That principle was formulated in the Epistle of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1903 as a method of theological dialogue with the Anglicans and the Old-Catholics, where it was said that in relation to the non-Orthodox, “there must be fraternal readiness to help them with explanations, normal consideration for their best wishes, all possible forbearance towards their natural perplexities, given the centuries long division...” Our task with regard to them should be: not to place unnecessary barriers on the road to unity with inappropriate impatience and suspicion.”⁴⁴

The modern ecumenical movement was formed at the International Conference of the Missions in Edinburgh in 1910 by unifying three thematic Christian movements from the beginning of the twentieth century: “Life and Work,” “Faith and Order,” and “International Council of Missions.” The first movement aimed at the accomplishment of inter-church cooperation in the function of promoting peace and service to humankind, the second aimed at establishing and defining the common theological basis of Christian churches as the basis

⁴² Patriarchal and Synodical Encyclical of 1902, <http://www.montenet.org/2001/moc.html>.

⁴³ Emmanuel Clapsis, *Orthodoxy in Conversation*, (Geneva 2000), 1.

⁴⁴ „Основни принципи односа Руске православне цркве према инослављу“, *Православље и екуменизам* (ед.), Београд 2005, 17-18. <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/attitude-to-the-non-orthodox/iv/>

for their further rapprochement, and the third, on coordination and harmonizing the work of previously established missionary associations, in the direction of creating a common Christian testimony in the world. They all strove towards the same goal, but used different paths.⁴⁵ The ecumenical movement generally had, above all, a pragmatic nature and as such, it was a significant factor at the time. From the outset, the aim was to establish a visible establishment of the unity of the Church, by means of harmonizing the factors of its “invisible unity.” As the main instrument for its achievement, the creators of the ecumenical movement, at the beginning of the twentieth century, defined theological dialogue, as well as the cooperation and mutual assistance of the churches.⁴⁶

According to the Encyclical of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate of 1920, however, “rapprochement between the various Christian Churches and fellowship between them is not excluded by the doctrinal differences which exist between them”; and “rapprochement is highly desirable and necessary” because it was “for the real interest of the whole Christian body.”⁴⁷ This convergence was seen as the starting point and preparation for “the blessed union that will be completed in accordance with the will of God.” As crucial factors in this rapprochement, the Encyclical showed the existence of communication between the churches, as well as their goodwill, by pointing out that unity can be achieved over time by removing the mutual mistrust that occurs as a result of proselytizing intentions. Thus, a number of concrete steps were proposed, such as: the acceptance of a common calendar, close meetings for church representatives, cooperation of theological schools and its professors and students, convening inter-Christian conferences, independent and expert research of doctrinal differences, mutual respect of the customs and traditions, sharing church buildings, resolving issues related to mixed marriages, and close cooperation in charitable activities. The

⁴⁵ Александар Ђаковац, *Кратки преглед историје развоја Екуменског покрета*, 7.

⁴⁶ Марко Николић, „Екуменизам, екуменски покрет и Српска православна црква, *Religija i tolerancija*, VI, 10 (2008): 96; Јован Брија, „Екуменски покрет.“

⁴⁷ Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate 1920, www.inocommunion.org

Encyclical became relevant to the Orthodox understanding of ecumenism as it recognized that unity could not be realized by simply overcoming doctrinal differences, but also required inter-Christian *diakonia* and a common testimony of love in God for the life of the world.⁴⁸ In addition, the Encyclical presented the idea of establishing the League of Churches and required every local church to announce it in writing.⁴⁹ In parallel with these processes, the official dialogue of the Romanian Patriarchate with the Anglican Church commenced in 1925.⁵⁰

Today, a special place in the ecumenical movement is the World Council of Churches (WCC), an organization that was created after the Second World War by Protestant and Orthodox churches. It arose by merging the three mentioned movements on the basis of the initiative of one of their committees in Utrecht in 1938. Due to the outbreak of World War II, the decision was applied only 10 years later. In addition to the crucial influence of the Protestant theologians, the well-known Orthodox fathers and theologians, such as German of Thiatir, Stevan of Sofia, Dionysius of Poland, Georgy Florovsky, Sergey Bulgakov, Chrysostomos Papadopoulos and others, contributed to the creation of the Council.⁵¹

At the first General Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Amsterdam in 1948, 146 churches, including four Orthodox (Greek and Cypriot Archbishopric, Patriarchate of Constantinople, and the Romanian Missionary Bishopric for America) adopted the Declaration of the Organization, i.e., its program basis. It pointed out that the WCC was not a “universal Church,” whose nature and powers go beyond the rights of decision-making and control of its own members and that it had no powers in regard to any kind of interference in the inner life of the community. The Council was not an organization

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Clapsis, *Orthodoxy in Conversation*, 2.

⁴⁹ Марко Николић, „Екуменизам, екуменски покрет и Српска православна црква, *Religija i tolerancija*, VI, 10 (2008), 99.

⁵⁰ Јован Брија, „Екуменски покрет“, *Речник православне теологије*, (Београд 1999).

⁵¹ Марко Николић, „Екуменизам, екуменски покрет и Српска православна црква, *Religija i tolerancija*, VI, 10 (2008), 97; Јован Брија, „Екуменски покрет“,

with a high degree of internal unity in the sense that it represented some higher church, independent of its members, but rather a church forum for cooperation and dialogue.⁵² At the beginning of its activity, the organization emphasized the importance of the participation of laymen in activities, which led to criticism by the Orthodox churches, which, by a joint Declaration at the Conference in Toronto in 1950, stressed the need for the Council to be a mostly ecclesial organization, and its work to be based on church approach and church principles.⁵³ For that reason, the Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras in 1952 decided to limit the participation of certain Greek theologians in some of the Council's committees, in order to express his disagreement with the development trends of this organization.

The WCC operated on the principle of parliamentary democracy. Its Assembly was the body that made the most important decisions, which was made up of representatives of its churches-members. It gave rise to the legitimacy of the Central Committee, whose nature and function resembled a body of executive power. The Council's declaration stipulated that its members must be appointed for the position by the appropriate church. Each committee dealt with certain practical issues in the domain of the life and the functioning of the organization.⁵⁴

Looking back, it can be said that the Encyclical of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Joachim III, of 1902, initiated the preparations for the great Council of the Orthodox Church, and hence for the convocation of the Pan-Orthodox Conference of Rhodes in 1961, where the Orthodox churches agreed that they should engage in a bilateral dialogue with other Christian churches. Representatives of all local Orthodox churches recommended the study of the ways of bringing each other together. That recommendation, elaborated at the Second and Third

⁵² СИВ, Документи на Сојузната комисија за верски прашања, 19 ноември 1963, бр. 144, фасцикла 67, Архив на Југославија, Екуменски (светски) совет на Црквите, 1.

⁵³ The Toronto Statement, 1950, The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/1950/toronto-statement>.

⁵⁴ Марко Николић, „Екуменизам, екуменски покрет и Српска православна црква, *Religija i tolerancija*, VI, 10 (2008), 98. The Toronto Statement, 1950, The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches, 4.

Conference of Rhodes in 1963 and 1967, was taken over at the Orthodox Conference in Chambésy in late 1976, where it was decided to continue and strengthen the participation of Orthodox churches in the WCC.⁵⁵ At the conference in Chambésy, the Orthodox churches also pointed to their unequal position in the WCC, which was a logical consequence of the nature of that organization and their principles of functioning. Namely, for the Orthodox churches, given that they were much less represented in the WCC in relation to the Protestant churches, one of the most controversial principles was the majority principle of decision-making.⁵⁶ Father George Tzetzis of the Constantinople Patriarchate then criticized the noticeable absence of the Moscow Patriarchate, especially at the beginning of the work of the WCC, as a result of the decision of the Synod in Moscow in 1948, underlining the “pioneering role” played by the Patriarchate of Constantinople.⁵⁷

According to the significance of its decisions, the Third General Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi in late 1961 stood out, at a time when more Orthodox churches became new members, namely the Russian, Jerusalem, Bulgarian, Polish, and Romanian, and when the third ecumenical movement—The International Council of Missions—was officially united. It was then pointed out, in regards to its Christological character, that the central purpose of the organization was “the Lord Jesus Christ, who collects the association of churches that confess and who seek a way together to fulfil His call to the glory of God the Father and the Light Trinity.”⁵⁸

Otherwise, the Orthodox churches have joined the Council in the following order: the Patriarchate of Alexandria in 1948, the Patriarchate of Antioch in 1952, the American Orthodox Church and the Antiochian Orthodox Archbishopric in America in 1954. The

⁵⁵ Николић, „Екуменизам, екуменски покрет и Српска православна црква,” 100-101.

⁵⁶ Николић, „Екуменизам, екуменски покрет и Српска православна црква,” 102.

⁵⁷ Fr. George Tzetzis, “The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement, A Short History,” www.intercommunion.org

⁵⁸ Брија, 3.

Church of Georgia in Paris joined in 1962, the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade in 1965, the Church of Czechoslovakia in Geneva in 1966, and the Japanese Orthodox Church in Geneva in 1973.⁵⁹ The Roman Catholic Church is not an official member, but has had intensive cooperation and dialogue with this organization since the early twentieth century.

At the Third all-Orthodox Conference in 1986, the ecclesiological grounds for Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement were clarified saying that “it is not counter to the nature and history of the Orthodox Church” and that “it constitutes the consistent expression of the apostolic faith within the new historical conditions.”⁶⁰ A few years later, during the consultations in Sofia, a discussion took place about further Orthodox participation in the dialogue, and it was concluded that it was necessary because it actually represented “an indispensable source of catholicity.”⁶¹

The eighth meeting of the World Council of Churches in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998, ended with fears about the future of the Council. It was partly (but not only) because of the Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement due to certain difficulties associated with some views of the WCC.⁶² The crisis that “was initially attributed to the differences between Orthodox and Protestant members of the Council was in fact a crisis among the representing different theological and ecclesiological traditions and between churches, each of which had its own distinctive interpretation of the Holy Scripture and a different perception of moral, social and political issues.”⁶³ In 1997, The Georgian Orthodox Church terminated its membership of the WCC and only one year later, so did the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Паковац, 9.

⁶⁰ „The Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement – Decision of the Third Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference”, ed. Gennadios Limouris, *Orthodox Vision od Ecumenism*, (Geneva, 1994), 112.

⁶¹ Todor Sabev, ed. *The Sofia Consultation: Orthodox Involvement in the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva 1982), 18.

⁶² Clapsis, *Orthodoxy in Conversation*, 1.

⁶³ Homily by Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, at the 60th Anniversary of the WWC at the cathedral church “Saint Pierre” in Geneva on February 17, 2008. Ed. John Chryssavgis, *Speaking the True in Love*, (New York, 2011), 238. https://www.patriarchate.org/patriarchal-documents/-/asset_publisher/2lzbCNORLysD/content/

Regarding bilateral relations, the dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Lutheran Church is particularly important. In the first half of the twentieth century, their cooperation took place on multilateral platforms, but the greatest encouragement was given by local bilateral dialogues, which had opened a new dimension in their mutual relations. Namely, high-level visits between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Lutheran Church, as well as some separate dialogues on both sides began in 1967. The fourth Preparatory Meeting of the Pan-Orthodox Conference officially encouraged the global ecumenical dialogue with the Federation in 1968. The same year, the Federation Executive Committee discussed and approved plans to participate in such a dialogue. The fundamental preparatory process led to decisions by the Orthodox in 1976 and the next year by the Lutherans. The decisions were referring to the further development and implementation of plans for dialogue with separate Orthodox-Lutheran meetings, which were held in 1978, 1979, and 1980. The Joint Lutheran-Orthodox Commission met for the first time in Espoo, Finland, in 1981. God's revelation, the Holy Scripture and Tradition, the canon and inspiration of Scriptures, the Sacraments, the apostolic succession, and the priesthood were placed as the main topics of conversation. The last seventeenth session of the Commission was held in November 2017 in Helsinki (Finland) on the theme "The Mystery of the Church," and the next is scheduled for 2019 on "The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church." At the end of the last session, the Commission issued a statement stating that "this common statement identified areas where Orthodox and Lutherans agree and disagree on several topics between the two traditions."⁶⁵ It is considered that one of the greatest achievements of these commissions is the publication of their joint statements. The first joint statements referred to general topics for which was assumed that there were no major theological differences, and later

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⁶⁴ "Orthodox Churches (Eastern)", <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/church-families/orthodox-churches-eastern>

⁶⁵ "Lutherans and Orthodox finalize statement on ordained ministry", <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/lutherans-and-orthodox-publish-statement-ordained-ministry>

more specific topics were selected. Thus, the first declarations became documents⁶⁶ in which harmonious and common positions prevailed, but later in these documents, the confessional specialty and partition in the statements became more visible. Theologically observed, perhaps the results of the work of the Commission are modest (which is also due to the poor or even non-existent reception of them), but its work should not be reduced exclusively to the joint statements, given that through them, inter-church relations at all levels have been established and significantly improved.⁶⁷

It is also necessary to point out that the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), which includes the reformed and united churches in its membership, is also active in encouraging regional dialogues with Orthodox churches.⁶⁸

In 2015, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) announced the interruption of ecumenical relations with the Church of Scotland and the Church of the Protestant Unity of France, whose Synods have previously approved the possibility of blessing homosexual marriages (France), and giving opportunity to appoint pastors who are in a homosexual conjugal union (Scotland),⁶⁹ Regarding the same phenomenon, the ROC has previously interrupted relations with the Episcopal Church of America (2003) and the Swedish Church (2005), and in 2008, they withdrew from participation in the Conference of European Churches (KEK).

Knowing the history of dialogue over the centuries is of particular importance, especially given the latest dialogue between Protestants and Orthodox Christians. At the

⁶⁶ Commission reports and documents are published in: Кисић, *Кораџи ка заједништву*, 59-246.

⁶⁷ Cf. Кисић, *Кораџи ка заједништву*, 251.

⁶⁸ "Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue", <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/lutheran-orthodox-dialogue>

⁶⁹ The Church of the Protestant Unity of France, however, announced that their church does not conduct any official dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church and there is nothing that can actually be interrupted. At the national level, the relations are through the Council of Orthodox Bishops, where all Orthodox churches in France are present, where they have interlocutors of the Protestant Federation and not directly their church. A similar response came from the World Mission of the Scottish Church: "The news arrived through the newspapers, but up to today (May 8) we have not received any official communication from the Russian Church. For this reason, there will be no official response by our side... The only official relation that the Scottish Churches hold with the Russian Orthodox Church is through the joint membership of the Ecumenical Council of Churches (KEK), and there is no bilateral dialogue." Luca Barato, "La ritirata di Russia", <http://riforma.it/it/articolo/2015/06/10/la-ritirata-di-russia>

thirteenth session of the Lutheran and Orthodox Joint Commission, a document was published that provided an overview of what the Orthodox Church and Lutherans agree on,⁷⁰ a serious basis for further continuation of the talks. The awareness that “the Christian division has become an open and bleeding wound on the Body of Christ,” that “the tragedy of the division has become a serious visible distortion of Christian universality” and “an obstacle in the way of her testimony to Christ before the world”⁷¹ offer a serious optimism in the direction of better mutual understanding.

⁷⁰ *Common Statement*, 13th Session of the Lutheran – Orthodox Joint Commission, Bratislava 2006; Кисић, *Корац ка заједништву*, 191-200.

⁷¹ „Основни принципи односа Руске православне цркве према инослављу“, *Православље и екуменизам*, (Београд 2005), 13. <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/attitude-to-the-non-orthodox/iv/>.