

UNIT 3C: MINISTRIES AND MISSION

87: Ecumenism

(Note: Orthodox ecclesiology admits of only one use of the word “Church” in the strict, exact and exclusive theological sense, namely, as pertaining to that single communion of local Orthodox autocephalous churches and their dependencies. In this lecture, the use of the word “churches” in relation to heterodox Christian communities should not be read as implying membership of the Orthodox Catholic Church. Much distress and confusion has arguably been caused to a number of Orthodox in the plausibly imprecise usage of this terminology, especially when considering the status of baptism in heterodox communities. This was a particular problem in the non-reception by some local churches, bishops and believers, of the deliberations and decisions of the meeting held in Crete over Pentecost in 2016, accepted by some as a Council (short of being Ecumenical) and not by others.¹ Furthermore it should be recognised that the use of the word: “Christian” suffers from the same imprecision in use; some, (but not of course the Orthodox), taking it to include such disparate groups as the Quakers and the Unitarians.)

I. The Quest for Ecumenism: How Should We Relate to Other Christians and to Others . . .and to the Orthodox Church Itself?

The word *ecumenical* is from the Greek word *oikoumenikos* meaning “related to the inhabited world.” Today, the word is primarily applied in the context of the ecumenical movement as “a movement within the Christian church towards unity on all fundamental issues of belief and worship.”² This dictionary definition, however, betrays its own assumptions concerning the phrase “Christian church”, as if all self-designated Christians and groups already belonged to this “church”—a view which is in flat contradiction to the principles and practice of Orthodox ecclesiology (see Lecture 86).

The practical questions for us are: **How should Orthodox Christians relate to other Christians and to other human beings? How should the Orthodox Church relate to other Christian churches and other religious and secular groups?**

¹ <https://www.holycouncil.org/home>

² *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1999), p. 418.

Furthermore, there is an initial question to be faced: How committed are each of us to the Orthodox Church and to living the spiritual life of an Orthodox Christian? Peter VII, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and all Africa framed this question forthrightly when he wrote in 2004:

It is obviously wrong to drift into Orthodoxy because it offers a safe harbour. Orthodoxy involves struggle, noncomplacency. The Orthodox Christian is literally a 'soldier of Christ', a fighter, constantly championing the cause. He struggles throughout his life, in a daily and unremitting battle. For in Orthodoxy, we do not experience religious 'moments', but rather our whole lives are sanctified we are truly blessed by our participation in the sacramental life of the Church, through which we receive the Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit. Orthodoxy is not about a good time, an easy-ride; rather it involves a spiritual struggle against transgression, passion and sinful desires. The Orthodox Christian must fight constantly with the old self, searching, through God's Grace, for the new self, reborn in Christ. Those who are spiritually idle or indifferent have no place in such an environment; not because they are inadequate, or that the Church is indifferent to them, but because of their own accord, they isolate themselves from the Church; they do not want to belong.... [I]t is the religiously complacent, the deluded, and those who seek material reward, who forsake Orthodoxy. They have never truly lived in the spirituality of the Orthodox Christian life, and so they abandon it, betray it, turn their backs without ever understanding. It follows, therefore, that Orthodoxy is available to all mankind, and it is up to each of us to decide how Orthodoxy will live within our own life.³

³ Cited at <https://plus.google.com/105308674896439420128/posts/bmoTtTgFX3A>

In an important sense then, our understanding of and participation in the sacramental life of the Orthodox Church, its prayer life and ecclesiology, has to precede our personal response to the practical questions set out above.

II. The Church Is One—But What About the “Others”?

It may be helpful to see all Trinitarian heterodox Christian communities participating to a greater or lesser degree in Orthodox faith and practice. For some Orthodox, this commonality is substantial, for others, less so or even not at all.⁴ However partial participation is not the same as membership of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, which is always identifiable as the Eucharistic body of all Orthodox Christians in communion with each other and their bishops. In this context, some disagreement exists in contemporary Orthodoxy concerning the status of baptism and its benefits in heterodox bodies. Strictly speaking, baptism outside the Orthodox Church, even in economy according to prescribed forms, is a dormant sacrament until it is integrated by chrismation. Such a dormant sacrament outside the (Orthodox) Church can hardly be regarded by any Orthodox as exactly the same as baptism inside the Orthodox Church with all its attendant benefits—for ecumenical or any other reasons or purposes. Some Orthodox ascribe more value to such rites than others; and this was the fundamental fault line of response from local churches after the contentious meeting at Crete in 2016, (ante).

Although St Paul’s exhortation remains as true today as when it was recorded about 55 A.D. in First Corinthians, one of the earliest writings in the New Testament (NT): “*For in one Spirit were we all baptised into one body*” (12:13), he did not have to face precisely the same problems and issues encountered today. Pertinently, Father Georges Florovsky has pointed out, “*the prototype of this*

⁴ <http://www.orthodoxresource.co.uk/comparative/comparative.htm> In this resource Archpriest Gregory Hallam (co-author of this lecture) shows how the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions relate to one another. See also Andrew Stephen Damick, *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy: Exploring Belief Systems Through the Lens of the Ancient Christian Faith* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith, 2011) or expanded Kindle Edition of 2017 covering the charismatic movement.

[Christian] unity is the consubstantial Trinity,” while “*the measure of this unity is catholicity or community (sobornost)*” as expressed in its greatest depth by the Christians of the early Church in which “*personal consciousness is softened—and even removed*” because “*those who believed were of one heart and soul*” (Acts 4:32).⁵ In other words, **to the extent that we can achieve unity as Christians today we continue to live in unity with the original model of the Trinity in a community of such deep neighbourliness that each individual ego has been subsumed into the one body of common belief and common property.** That is a quite a challenge, one that calls across the centuries to contemporary heterodox Christians and their churches to abandon their isolation from the communion and membership of the Holy Orthodox Church. Invisible and branch-type unions are not acceptable to the Orthodox.⁶ The Church is an identifiable organic community of persons.

So, this idea that “the Church is one” and identifiable is like a lightning rod that brings down spiritual energy, grounded in the NT, the Tradition of the early Church and the doctrine of the Trinity. However, **it is quite difficult to understand precisely what it means to assert that “the Church is one.”** It is true, as the Russian layman and theologian, A. S. Khomiakov wrote in 1844 or 1845: “**The Church is one. Her unity follows of necessity from the unity of God; for the Church is not a multitude of persons in their separate individuality, but a unity of the grace of God, living in a multitude of rational creatures, submitting themselves willingly to grace.**”⁷ That is precisely what we seek—as “a multitude of rational creatures” to submit ourselves “willingly to grace.”

However, as Fr Georges Florovsky has pointed out, when the Orthodox Church receives believers from other Christian bodies the Church does not always require a “second” baptism, (strictly a first baptism because in that case the “first” was of

⁵ Georges Florovsky, “The Limits of the Church,” *Church Quarterly Review*, 1933 online at: www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/crete-01-e.html . See also Florovsky’s “The Doctrine of the Church and the Ecumenical Problem,” *The Ecumenical Review*, 1950, pp. 152-161.

⁶ See Father John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine and Spiritual Culture* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 252.

⁷ A. S. Khomiakov (1844-1845/1873), *The Church Is One* (Seattle, WA: St Nectarios Press, 1979), p. 17. On line at: www.westernorthodox.com/khomiakov .

no account). This suggests to some that “the sacraments can be celebrated outside the strict canonical limits of the Church,” although other Orthodox would demur. More clearly and univocally the Orthodox are at best agnostic about the efficacy of such sacraments, and they certainly do not confer membership of the Orthodox Church by either intention or remote participation. However, this recognition by economy of “what other Christians do”—however limited—is very important in the context of understanding ecumenism both as a bringing together of all humanity and of all Christians. Fr Georges Florovsky phrases it logically and powerfully:

If sacraments are performed ... it can only be by virtue of the Holy Spirit, and canonical rules thus establish or reveal a certain mystical paradox. In what she does the Church bears witness to the extension of her mystical territory, even beyond her canonical borders.... **Where the sacraments are accomplished, there is the Church...** As a mystical organism, as the sacramental Body of Christ, the Church cannot be adequately described in canonical terms or categories alone. **It is impossible to state or discern the true limits of the Church simply by canonical signs or marks.** Very often the canonical boundary determines the charismatic boundary as well, and what is bound on earth is bound by an indissoluble bond in heaven. But not always. And still more often, not immediately. **In her sacramental, mysterious being, the Church surpasses all canonical norms. For that reason a canonical cleavage does not immediately signify mystical impoverishment and desolation...**⁸

To put it bluntly, it is very difficult to state precisely who has in the past, does now or will in the future belong within the oneness of the Orthodox Church.⁹

⁸ Florovsky, *The Limits of the Church*. Emphasis added.

⁹ For example, John Wesley’s emphasis upon a “second blessing” and his extension of what Florovsky calls “the charismatic boundary of the Church” may well have been helpful in drawing people to Christ and in creating conditions which would later lead their ancestors into the Orthodox Church. See E-Quip Lecture 72 on Healing and Deliverance, p. 12. Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) writes: “I have never been convinced by the rigorist claim that sacramental life and the grace of the Holy Spirit can exist only within the visible limits of the Orthodox Church.” *The Inner*

Within the Orthodox Church today and its canonically defined members (who often include believers attached primarily to their own national cultural heritages) there are strongly opposing views about ecumenism. Therefore, it is necessary for each of us to develop “integrative thinking”—to learn how to hold “two opposing ideas in fruitful tension” and to develop “a synthesis that is superior to either opposing idea.”¹⁰ To achieve such a synthesis, it is necessary to understand the extent to which the contemporary, earth-bound heterodox Christian churches have become fragmented, the reasons for that fragmentation, and the prospects for a recovery of the earlier spiritual and organic unity with the Orthodox Church. Otherwise, the position will remain precisely as Archbishop Iakovos (d. 2005), former Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, analysed it: “Orthodox and Catholics and Protestants are all ... equally self-assured that theirs is the one true faith, that theirs is the true church.”¹¹

III. An Historical Perspective: The Consequences of Heterodox Institutional Fragmentation

The controversial nature of contemporary ecumenism arises primarily because of the impact of four historical realities: (1) Roman Catholics broke away from the Orthodox Catholic Church; (2) Protestants broke away from the Roman Catholic Church; (3) Protestants split into many different groups; and (4) A significant number of people, especially in the West, have drawn away from contemporary Christianity and find it irrelevant to their lives, although they sometimes retain either a lingering respect or indeed animosity to Christianity

Kingdom (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press [SVSP], 2000), p. 8. Metropolitan Kallistos also cites the work of Vladimir Lossky in support of this view.

¹⁰ Roger L. Martin, *The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win Through Integrative Thinking* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2007), p.6.

¹¹ Demetrios J. Constantelos (Ed.), *The Complete Works of His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos*, Vol 5, “What Kind of Unity Do We Seek?” (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), p. 148.

as they conceive it. Each of these four historical realities has drawn some people progressively further away from the Orthodox Church.¹²

Since the eleventh century the Church has tended to call herself simply “Orthodox” in order to differentiate from those who have broken away from the original teachings and worship of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. In the closing paragraph of *The Church Is One*, A. S. Khomiakov has summarised the position bluntly, but accurately:

When false doctrines shall have disappeared, there will be no further need for the name Orthodox, for then there will be no erroneous Christianity... the Church is not bound up with any locality; she neither boasts herself of any particular see or territory, nor preserves the inheritance of pagan pride; but she calls herself One Holy Catholic and Apostolic; knowing that the whole world belongs to her, and that no locality therein promises any special significance, but only temporarily can and does [a locality] serve for the glorification of the name of God, according to His unsearchable will.¹³

To Khomiakov’s appropriate rejection of the term “Orthodox” could be added an equally firm rejection of the term “Eastern” which has been made necessary by the manner in which “false doctrines” have arisen in the West.

The quest for contemporary ecumenism occurs within a global framework in which there is both a tendency toward spiritual disintegration and a desire among some Orthodox people and groups for an accelerated unity with other Christians and, indeed, unity with all of humanity. In a sense then, **from an Orthodox perspective, for some Orthodox Christians and within certain local churches in different dioceses, the ecumenical quest is primarily a desire to return to roots—to recover the unity with God and with all people that continues to exist in the historically grounded Orthodox Church.** This was certainly the view of Fr Georges

¹² See Father Alexey Young, *The Great Divide: The West severs itself from its Orthodox Christian roots: an historical review* (Richfield Springs, NY: Nikodemos Orthodox Publishing Society, 1989).

¹³ p. 48.

Florovsky who closed his essay, *The Limits of the Church*, with the exhortation: “The whole of our attention and our will must be concentrated and directed towards removing the stubbornness of dissension. ‘We seek not conquest,’ says St. Gregory of Nazianzen, ‘but the return of our brethren, whose separation from us is tearing us apart.’”¹⁴

Can such a “return of our brethren” happen after one thousand years together and one thousand years apart? What does the next one thousand years hold? The advice of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow in the early nineteenth century remains sound, because he said: “Mark you, I do not presume to call false any Church which believes that Jesus is the Christ”. The Metropolitan refused to “give judgement” because he believed that Christ as “the Head and Lord of the Church heals the many deep wounds” that have arisen over the centuries. It was this deep faith in Christ that led him to assert: “I attest my faith that, in the end, the power of God will triumph openly over human weakness, good over evil, unity over division, life over death.”¹⁵

The objective of unity, both with other Christians and with all humanity is praiseworthy, although the extent to which it can be achieved in this life can certainly be debated. The underlying question is: What is the relationship of the spiritual unity of the Church expressed in the sense that “the Church is one” with the contemporary reality of continuing institutional fragmentation? Consider the evidence that is relevant to this question from two principle sources: - (1) the Bible and the Tradition of the Orthodox Church; and (2) the contemporary debate about the desirability or undesirability of the quest for ecumenical unity in relation both to (1) and the canons.

¹⁴ For a recent strong defence of Father Georges’ approach to ecumenism see Tamara Grdzeldze, “Ecumenism, Orthodoxy and” in McGuckin (Ed.), *The Concise Encyclopedia of Orthodox Christianity* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 167-173.

¹⁵ Cited by Father Georges in the second and third paragraphs from the end of *The Limits of the Church*. The original quotations by Metropolitan Philaret are in *Conversation between a Seeker and a Believer Concerning the Orthodoxy of the Eastern Greco-Russian Church* (Moscow: 1831), pp. 27, 135.

IV. Evidence Relevant to the Quest for Ecumenical Unity

The Bible and the Tradition of the Orthodox Church

(1) Personal and Institutional Fragmentation in the Old Testament (OT)

The human tendency to decide in favour of sin and personal disintegration is immediately evident in Genesis in the stories of both Adam and Eve (Genesis 3) and Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). Yet this increasing corruption of humanity (Genesis 6) gives way to God's response of love, as demonstrated by His trust of and covenants with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17), Abraham (Genesis 15:9-21; Genesis 17) and Moses (Exodus 19-24). Just as the physicist and theologian, John Polkinghorne, has characterized God's creation as "a universe endowed with becoming," so the Christian writer, Hillary Brand, reflecting on the purposes of Lent, has suggested that we too need to understand that "God made us not just to be, but to become."¹⁶ It is this possibility of becoming that permeates the Pentateuch,¹⁷ the opening five books of the Bible—both in the context of the specific individuals with whom God forms covenants and in the broader pattern of the emergence and preparation of the wandering Israelites to become settled in order to grow as a united community into the fullness of God's purposes.

The formation of the Israelites into a single unified kingdom under David (2 Samuel 1-5:5; 1 Chronicles 10-29) and then Solomon (1 Kings 1-11:13; 2 Chronicles 1-9) gives way to the geographical division of the kingdom into Judah and Israel, a continuing schism between God and numerous kings devoid of personal integrity in all parts of the divided kingdom (1 Kings 11:14-25.30; 2 Kings; 2 Chronicles 10-36), and a rejection of many kings by many people (2 Chronicles 10 ff.). While the causes of these many divisions no doubt rested in personal sin and rejection of God, the consequences were that the people of Israel returned to their tents and angrily stopped their quest to achieve a united kingdom, because the people "saw that the

¹⁶ The quotation from Polkinghorne is from his *Science and Providence* (London: SPCK, 1989), p. 2 and is linked with Brand's own insights in *The Power of Small Choices: A Lent Course* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004), p. 13.

¹⁷ The Pentateuch is the opening five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

king did not listen to them” (2 Chronicles 10:16). Clearly, the period from the division of the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms in 930 B.C. until the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. was characterised by instability and violence.¹⁸ Yet with the subsequent leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah and the warnings of many prophets, unity was achieved in the 5th century B.C.¹⁹ **The question arises: How was this tendency toward personal and national disintegration overcome, and does this process of returning to unity offer clues as to how ecumenical unity might be achieved today among Christians and with all humanity?**

(2) Recovering Personal and Institutional Unity in the OT

Confronted with this question, it is helpful to recall that throughout the OT situations often arise in which human failure, incompleteness and disintegration are moulded by God into completion and unity (i.e. the birth of Isaac, Genesis 18 & 21; Jacob’s transformation into Israel, Genesis 32:24-32; the plot among Joseph’s brothers which sends him to Egypt, Genesis 37:18-36; the anger of Moses at the golden calf and his shattering of the tablets containing the Ten Commandments, Exodus 32 & 34; the Israelite rebellion at Kadesh, leading to the loss of the slave mentality because no one who had lived in Egypt subsequently entered the promised land, Numbers 13 & 14, esp. 14:20-23 ; King David’s adultery with Bathsheba, his subsequent role in her husband Uriah’s death and the later birth of Solomon, 2 Samuel 11-12:25; and Job’s testing by Satan, with the rejection of Job by his close friends, and God’s subsequent affirmation of Job’s integrity (Job 1:13-22; 4-37; 38-42, especially 42:7-9).

In each of these scenarios God is drawing individuals and communities to trust Him, to become what they are capable of becoming precisely because they rely on Him and not on themselves. The role of the prophets is central in this process of drawing people away from their sins and closer to the Lord. However,

¹⁸ The firm dating is based on integrating Biblical data with Assyrian chronological records and is set out in the New American Study Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), p.444.

¹⁹ Although unity was achieved, it should be noted that certain tribes disappeared; and there is no reliable evidence today about what happened to them.

while the Hebrew canon formulated by the Jewish authorities places the Prophets in the centre of the OT (after the Law and before the Writings), the Christian presentation concludes with the Prophets at the end of the OT, anticipating the imminent coming of Christ. The distinction is important, because while the Jews today consider the OT as their full Bible, Christians see the OT as having spiritual value in its own right, as well as a preparation for **Christ to lead humanity to a deeper unity with God.**

(3) Seeking Mutual Understanding about “the Mind of the Church”

The challenge of how to relate the Bible and the Tradition of the Orthodox Church to the quest for ecumenical unity is so large that it is helpful to focus our initial reflections on two significant books, Johanna Manley’s *The Bible and the Holy Fathers*,²⁰ with a foreword by the now Metropolitan Kallistos, and Fr John Anthony McGuckin’s *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*.²¹ **What we are seeking in reading Scripture, as Metropolitan Kallistos reminds us, “is always the mind of the Church;”** and we discover this mind (phronema) “by how Scripture is used in worship, and how it is interpreted by the Fathers. Our approach to the Bible is both liturgical and Patristic.”²² **Intriguingly, this is precisely what we need to gain in the ecumenical quest—the mind of the Church, in the past, in the present and in the years to come.**

Just as “we read Scripture, not as isolated individuals, but as members of the Church,” so we also seek Christian unity and human unity as members of different Christian groups. Both Joanna Manley and Metropolitan Kallistos refer to “the corporate memory of the Church” in the positive context set out by Father Justin Popović that “in the Church the past is forever contemporaneous.”²³ However, this unity of the past and the present also means that sins from earlier generations as well as present sins need to be forgiven before there is the possibility of moving from disunity to unity. **Some Orthodox Christians have not forgiven the**

²⁰ Menlo Park, CA: Monastery Books, 1990.

²¹ London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

²² p. 3.

²³ p. iv-vi.

Roman Catholic Church for leaving us, just as some Roman Catholics have yet to forgive Protestants or converts to Orthodoxy for leaving them. This situation is not a joke, but a painful reality.

The conclusion of the prayer from *The Divine Office of the Hours* which Joanna Manley selects to close more than a thousand pages of spiritual readings is an appropriate starting point for the quest for ecumenical unity:

... O Thou who callest all men [and women] to **repentance** through the promise of blessings to come: deign, Thou, O Lord, at this very hour to receive our supplications and to direct our lives in the way of Thy commandments. Sanctify our souls, purify our bodies, set our minds aright, cleanse our thoughts; deliver us from all affliction, wrath, danger and necessity; surround us with Thy holy angels, so that, guided and guarded by their hosts, we may reach **the unity of the Faith** and the comprehension of Thine ineffable glory, Thou who art blessed for ever and ever. Amen.²⁴

It is indeed this “unity of the Faith” that we all seek both as individual Christians and as Christian communities. The path to such unity begins with repentance, for both the sins of the past and of the present, for each individual and for each group.

The final word with which Joanna Manley introduces her closing prayer is from Archimandrite Sophrony, raising **the issue of how to achieve mutual understanding:**

The language of human words and concepts is able only to a very limited extent to convey one man's inner state to another. The indispensable condition for mutual understanding is a common or identical experience. Without it there cannot be understanding because behind our every word lies our whole life. Into every concept each one of us introduces the compass of his own experience, and it is therefore unavoidable that

²⁴ Manley, p. 1062. Emphasis added.

we should speak in different tongues. Yet since we all share a common nature, it is equally possible to provoke by words a fresh experience in the soul of another, and thus awaken new life in him. If this applies to human intercourse, how much more so does it apply to where divine action is involved. The word of God does, in fact, given a certain inner disposition of the soul, offer new life—the eternal life which is contained within it.²⁵

In a spiritual context, Archimandrite Sophrony's striving for understanding is praiseworthy; and his emphasis upon how the Word of God communicates and offers eternal life is certainly appropriate. However, **we are all different; we cannot gain "mutual understanding" simply because we have "a common or identical experience" or "a common nature."** Such commonalities will not in themselves lead to unity. Our experiences are not identical; and our nature contains both good and evil impulses.

Consider the two best known vignettes of disunity: in July 1054 when the Papal Legate, Cardinal Humbert, placed on the altar of Hagia Sophia Pope Leo's IX bull excommunicating the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Keroularios, because of the failure to resolve disputes on a number of issues; and in October 1517 when Martin Luther presented his Ninety-Five Theses in a scholarly discussion at the University of Wittenberg (not a posting by Professor Luther to any church door) because he was so infuriated by the failure of the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church to address the corruption of indulgences and other failings in church life.²⁶ In each of these situations, there was considerable innocence, anger, ignorance and lack of understanding on both sides. **In essence, there was a gross failure to listen, to share and evaluate the information that was available; yet "managing a crisis**

²⁵ Sophrony, *Wisdom from Mount Athos: Writings of Starets Silouan 1866-1938*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1975), p. 115.

²⁶ On the conflict between Rome and Constantinople, see Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681-1071* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), pp. 305-318. On the Ninety-Five Theses, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/The_Ninety_Five_Theses. **In both disputes, the role of papal authority was a major disputed issue.**

properly depends on managing information.”²⁷ Of course, these events took place some five hundred to a thousand years before Claude Shannon had set out in his Information Theory the necessity to communicate clear meanings between two points or two persons. One scientist who worked with Shannon mused later: “It is hard to picture the world before Shannon as it seemed to those who lived in it. It is difficult to recover innocence, ignorance and lack of understanding.”²⁸

Now we no longer need to look at the past with the expectation that mutual understanding will never be achieved when there is personal and institutional conflict. As James Gleick phrases it, now it is possible that “the past does come back into focus. *In the beginning was the word*, according to John.”²⁹ Each new pattern of how we can communicate—printing, telephones, smartphones, radio, television, computers, automobile travel, air travel, space travel —“transforms the nature of human thought” and the possibility of mutual understanding. “**In the long run, history is the story of information becoming aware of itself.**”³⁰ It is precisely that possibility—of Christians and their communities becoming aware of “the story of information”—of how they have related in the past that offers the possibility of changing relationships in the future.

(4) Understanding the Church as a Spiritual Body

The NT vision of the Church as “one body in Christ” (Romans 12:5; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13) as well as Patristic insights about the nature of the Church³¹ have now been joined to “the writings, sermons and sayings of sixty generations of lovers of Christ.”³² **Yet these forces for theological unity are confronted by schisms—that is, “a division in the church that is caused by reasons other than**

²⁷ Gary Noesner, *Stalling for Time: My Life as an FBI Hostage Negotiator* (New York: Random House, 2010).

²⁸ John Robinson Pierce (the Bell Telephone Laboratories engineer who had named the transistor), quoted by James Gleick, p. 11.

²⁹ Gleick, p. 12.

³⁰ Gleick, p. 12. I have applied Gleick’s insights in a spiritual context, although he is writing largely in a secular context.

³¹ See “Church,” in John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp. 64-68.

³² Manley, p. 2.

theological”—as well as heresies—that is, “a division over basic matters of the interpretation of the faith.”³³ It may well be that St Augustine was right when, after years of fruitless attempts at reconciliation with the Donatists, he “came to the conclusion that schism would always result in heresy in the end.” St Augustine’s conclusions were also in keeping with the views of the Eastern Church “whose canons often presume that the lapse into schism is itself a serious theological disruption of the mystery of the Church, which endangers the continuing ecclesial identity of those who broke away.”³⁴ **Here then is the crux of the quest for ecumenism: What is the relationship of division in the Church in its earthly, institutional form, as compared to the unity that exists in the Church as “a mystery,” that is, a spiritual body?**

The concept of the Church as a spiritual body is linked to the awareness that, as previously noted, the Church is “one body in Christ” (Romans 12:5). As a note on this verse in the New American Standard Bible phrases this awareness: “**The key to Paul’s concept of Christian unity [is that] it is only in Jesus Christ that any unity in the church is possible. True unity is spiritually based.**” Precisely because Christ is “head over all things to the church, which is His body,” the Church has the capability of becoming “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:23). This process of growing into unity in Christ was explained by Gaius Marius Victorinus:

Christ is the fullness of the Church. This entire fullness is in process of being filled up. At one stage everything which is being filled is made empty. So Christ was emptied or emptied himself. Having recovered all things again through the mystery of salvation and saved the full number of souls, Christ is filling all in all.³⁵

³³ “Schism,” in McGuckin, p. 303.

³⁴ “Schism,” in McGuckin, pp. 303-304.

³⁵ *Homily on Ephesians 3:1.20-23*, quoted in Mark J. Edwards (Ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VIII, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 126. Victorinus, a fourth century Roman grammarian, much influenced St. Augustine.

The “building up of the body of Christ” occurs because Christ gives His gifts to “some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

This communion of “the saints” that exists on earth among human beings on earth “extends beyond the visible community of the faithful to embrace the saints and angels before the time of Jesus,” so that this communion is “not disrupted by death, or constricted by time or space, since it [is] first and foremost a communion of [and with] the resurrection [of Christ].³⁶ As Father John McGluckin has explained, the communion of the saints

... was universally present in the Latin and Greek churches until the time of the Reformation, when it became a highly disputed notion for the West. It continued to be developed in Byzantine theology as a primary mode of conceiving of the church as a mystical communion in the resurrectional life of Jesus, a bond of *koinonia* [Greek for “fellowship” or “communion”] that was established in time and space, but destined to transcend it. It marks most Eastern Christian ecclesiology with a strongly mystical character, in distinction to the more institutional context of much Western ecclesiology.³⁷

In brief, the Church should be one with “the resurrectional life of Jesus.”

This possibility of oneness between the Church and Jesus Christ is a calling to the Church as a spiritual body, as St John Chrysostom (347-407) has explained:

Oh, how high he has raised the Church! For, as if he were lifting it up by some stage machine, he had led it up to a great height and installed it on that throne. For where the head is, there is the body also.³⁸

³⁶ “Communion of the Saints,” in McGuckin, p. 71. **This understanding of the communion of the saints brings many of the Old Testament prophets, teachers and pastors firmly into relationship with the New Testament Church as a spiritual body.**

³⁷ “Communion of the Saints,” in McGuckin, p.72

³⁸ *Homily on Ephesians 3:1.20-23*, quoted in Edwards, p. 126.

However, there is no assurance that the saints on earth will participate in this calling, for as St Clement of Rome (c. 96) lamented earlier:

Why do we divide and tear to pieces the members of Christ and raise up strife against our own body, and why have we reached such a height of madness as to forget that *we are members one of another*?³⁹

The challenge to the individual members of the Church has been set out by an unknown contemporary of St John Chrysostom, often linked to St Ambrose: “This is what it means to love Christ, that we should encourage one another to live in a way which corresponds to the way in which the body is made perfect in Christ.”⁴⁰ **In a very real sense, it is a responsibility of all members of the Church on earth to participate in the Church as a spiritual body, in “the resurrectional life of Jesus.”**

As Michael Welker has reflected in his essay on “What is the ‘spiritual body’...”, we need to first understand “the role of the resurrection in divine creativity in general” in order to then recognise “the nature and the importance of the ‘spiritual body’ of Jesus Christ in particular.”⁴¹ Then as we appreciate the spiritual body of Christ, we come to understand how “the fullness of the person and life of Christ accentuates the witnesses in Spirit, faith and canonical memory”⁴²— that is, guides each of us as members of the Church as a spiritual body present on the earth. In this growing awareness of both “the role of the resurrection in divine creativity in general” and “the nature and the importance of the ‘spiritual body’ of Jesus Christ in particular,” **we participate ourselves in “the transformative power of this spiritual body [of Christ]” as we become aware of “the involvement of human beings and other creatures in it.”**⁴³ Thus we too can join Saints Peter,

³⁹ *The First Epistle of Clement*, on Rom 12:5 in Gerald Bray (Ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI, Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 311.

⁴⁰ *Commentary on Paul’s Epistles*, on Romans 12:5, quoted in Bray, p. 311. The name “Ambrosiaster” is now recognised as not being St Ambrose, but his identity is unknown.

⁴¹ Welker, in Davies & Gregersen, pp. 329-359.

⁴² Welker, in Davies & Gregersen, p. 356.

⁴³ Welker, in Davies & Gregersen, p. 350.

James and John in experiencing the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-8) as a foreshadowing of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, leading “not to self-made religiosity” but to an appreciation that a “faithful realistic response to [Christ’s] presence [in our lives] and his word ...purifies [our] witness to Christ and [our understanding of] the workings of the Triune God.”⁴⁴ **The question that then arises is: How well are the Church itself and we as individual members of the Church now doing in becoming unified with the spiritual body of Christ while we are still on earth? That is the essence of the ecumenical quest.**

The Contemporary Scene

(1) The Case against Striving for Christian Unity

Many Orthodox theologians, individual priests, lay people and communities emphasise that the Orthodox Church herself is the One True Church of Christ. For them, this belief implies that “the Orthodox Faith is just that—faith” in which “enlightenment is not attained through an open mind but an open heart.”⁴⁵ Within this context, ecumenism is viewed as “a movement that generates a multitude of questions,” all of which “spring from and flow into a single desire for only one thing: the True Church of Christ.” Therefore, the most appropriate response to contemporary ecumenism is simply to understand and present “the teaching of the Orthodox church about the True Church of Christ, the apostolic, patristic Church of Holy Tradition.”⁴⁶

This approach for which the Serbian monk, Archimandrite Dr Justin Popović, is a fitting example, is firm and uncompromising, rejecting both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism with equal vehemence:

⁴⁴Welker, in Davies & Gregersen, p. 359. The quotation is taken from Welker; however, his multidisciplinary theology grounded in “the interrelation between God, matter, and information” has been applied in a more personal context. He does not mention the Transfiguration specifically.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Emmanuel Stanley, translator from the Serbian of Archimandrite Justin Popović, *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism* (Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 2000), p. iii. [First Serbian edition, Thessalonica, 1974].

⁴⁶ This is the approach of Archimandrite Popović who opens his study of ecumenism with an 88-page study of the teachings of the Orthodox Church.

‘Ecumenism’ is a collective name for pseudo-Christianities, for the pseudo-Churches of Western Europe... And all these pseudo-Christianities, all these pseudo-Churches, are nothing but a collection of heresies... Orthodox dogma, the universal dogma of the Church, has been rejected and replaced by the Latin heretical and universal dogma of the primacy and later infallibility of the Pope, a man. This universal heresy has engendered other heresies: the Filioque,⁴⁷ the removal of the *epiclesis*,⁴⁸ the introduction of material grace, unleavened bread, purgatory, a repository of surplus deeds, a mechanical teaching on salvation and, thereby, a mechanical teaching on life, on papo-centrism, on the Holy Inquisition, indulgences, the killing of sinners because of their sin, jesuitry, scholasticism, casuistry, absolute monarchy, social humanism and so forth.

Protestantism, the dearest and most loyal child of papism, blunders from heresy to heresy through its rationalist scholasticism, constantly drowning in diverse poisons of its heretical fallacies...**In principle, every Protestant is an independent pope, an infallible pope, in all matters of faith.** This inevitably leads from one spiritual death to another, and there is no end to this dying, for man’s spiritual deaths are innumerable.⁴⁹

For Father Justin and others, both Roman Catholics and Protestants have “no way out ... without wholehearted repentance before the Theanthropos, the Lord Christ, and His Orthodox Church.”⁵⁰ However, even Father Justin’s publisher acknowledges

⁴⁷ The Latin word “Filioque” means “and from the Son” and is used in the Nicene Creed to define the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. In its original Greek form, adopted by the Orthodox Church, the Creed says that the Holy Spirit proceeds “from the Father.” However, the Latin text, adopted by the Roman Catholic Church, states that the Holy Spirit proceeds “from the Father *and the Son*”. The distinction is not as great as first appears, because of differing interpretations of the word “proceeds” in Latin and Greek.

⁴⁸ The *epiclesis* (from the Ancient Greek for “invocation” or “calling down from on high”) is that part of the Anaphora (Eucharistic Prayer) by which the priest invokes the Holy Spirit upon the Eucharistic bread and wine.

⁴⁹ Popović, p. 153. Emphasis added.

⁵⁰ Popović, p. 154.

that “there is an over-strictness and generalisation in some of Father Justin’s expressions, which are not an overall Orthodox view.”⁵¹

A more balanced, but still suspicious, approach to ecumenism is offered by Hieromonk Seraphim Rose (1934-1982):

To an objective observer, Orthodoxy is a minority view, at variance with the spirit of the times; it is outside the mainstream of the Western confessions which are more adapted to the world and therefore seem more credible. This credibility is based on a common foundation of the Western mentality which Orthodoxy does not share. A thousand years ago, however, East and West spoke a common language.⁵²

Father Seraphim reflects upon the twin dangers of believing on the one hand that “Orthodoxy is scarcely different from the Western confessions at all, and if only a few more ‘joint theological committees’ will work out a few more ‘agreed statements’ about the faith, we can all be one again and even share the same Holy Mysteries;” or on the other hand that some Orthodox theologians create “a definition of Orthodoxy so narrow that it proclaims all but a small group of today’s Orthodox to be without Grace.”⁵³

Father Seraphim’s resolution of these twin dangers is forthright:

Both of these extremes are perilously close to losing their very identity as Orthodox. Perhaps the crucial test for the extremists of either side is that of *continuity*: Are they teaching the same teaching they received from their own fathers in the faith, who in turn received it from their Fathers, and so on in an unbroken line with the past?...

⁵¹ Proto-Stavrophore Milenko Zebić, in Popović, p. xi.

⁵² Rose, quoted in the Frontispiece of Father Alexey Young, *The Great Divide*.

⁵³ Rose, *About the Author, Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky: Theology in the Ancient Tradition*, in Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: A Concise Exposition*, trans. & ed. by Hieromonk Seraphim Rose & the St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood (Platina, CA: St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 3rd Ed, 2005), p. 19. Father Seraphim notes that when “for the sake of truth, he [Father Michael Pomazansky] does find it necessary to criticize a view, whether inside or outside the Orthodox Church, he does it with such gentleness and good intention that it is impossible for anyone to be offended by him.” p. 23. This contrasts sharply with Archimandrite Dr Justin Popović’s style as set out above.

Meanwhile, the genuine Orthodox Tradition continues as it has always been, trying to preserve its integrity in the midst of these conflicting currents. Fortunately, this Tradition has a way—with the help of God, Who looks after His Church—of preserving itself from the extremes that often try to deflect it from its course.⁵⁴

Father Seraphim is following in the footsteps of Father Michael Pomazansky, whose book he has translated from the Russian and edited, in stressing the apostolic foundations of the Orthodox Church:

... both for reasons of an historical character and for reasons of an inward character, the Apostles are the *foundations* of the Church. Therefore it is said of the Church: It is *built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone* (Ephesians 2:20). **The naming of the Church as “apostolic” indicates that it is established not on a single Apostle (as the Roman Church later taught), but upon all twelve; otherwise it would have to bear the name of Peter, or John, or some other.**⁵⁵

Thus both for Father Seraphim and Father Michael **maintaining continuity with the Apostolic church is a litmus test for whether a person or a denomination is truly Orthodox.**⁵⁶

There is another problem that confronts ecumenism; and those who have been associated with “non-denominational” charismatic groups may have experienced this problem—the lack of spiritual depth in worship because of a tendency to be “doctrine-lite.” Father Pomazansky sets out the issue politely, but firmly:

... the fact that one part of this broad Christian world outside the Church, namely the whole of Protestantism, denies the bond with the heavenly Church, that is, the veneration in prayer of the Mother of God and the

⁵⁴ Rose, in Pomazansky, p. 20. Italics in original.

⁵⁵Pomazansky, p. 248. Italics in original text.

⁵⁶ It is this lack of continuity with the Apostolic Church that also troubles Father Alexey Young in *The Great Divide: The West severs itself from its Orthodox Christian roots: an historical overview* (Richfield Springs, NY: Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, 1989).

saints, and likewise prayer for the dead, indicates that they themselves have destroyed the bond with the one Body of Christ which unites in itself the heavenly and the earthly. Further, it is a fact that **these non-Orthodox confessions have ‘broken’ in one form or another, directly or indirectly, with the Orthodox Church with the Church in its historical form; they themselves have cut the bond, they have ‘departed’ from her. Neither we nor they have the right to close our eyes to this fact.** The teachings of the non-Orthodox confessions contain heresies which were decisively rejected and condemned by the Church in her ecumenical Councils. **In these numerous branches of Christianity there is no unity, either outward or inward—either with the Orthodox church of Christ or between themselves. The supra-confessional unification (the ‘ecumenical movement’) which is now to be observed does not enter into the depths of the life of these confessions, but has an outward character.**⁵⁷

In other words, not only have many Protestant groups broken with the Orthodox Church, but when Christians who have joined these confessions seek to worship and “unite” with other Christians, they are not entering “into the depths of the life” that is possible within their own confessions. In brief, they risk becoming further estranged not only from the Orthodox Church but also from their own confessional traditions of corporate and personal worship and doctrine.

In an attempt to overcome this conflict between ecclesial and ecumenical commitments, the ecumenical movement has at times encouraged the formation of local ecumenical communities whose members are encouraged to be active in both the local ecumenical community and their own confession. This has the advantage of drawing Christians of differing beliefs together, as well as retaining the strengths of important denominational doctrines (such as the Eucharist or the services of the Hours, specific musical traditions, etc.), but the weakness of

⁵⁷Pomazansky, pp. 249-250. Emphasis added.

creating divided loyalties, especially over how time and energy should be shared between the local ecumenical community and the denominational commitment. In practice, the fellowship and genuine love within the ecumenical community is often so strong that the confession becomes secondary in the life of many persons in this situation. While this is, in many ways, an attractive way to live as an individual Christian, the participating churches lose many potential leaders and the underlying doctrinal issues are deliberately ignored in order to avoid doctrinal disagreement and personal conflict.

Reflecting on this “tendency in contemporary cultural society to place all confessions on one level,” Father Michael points out that:

All of such ‘uniting’ and ‘equalising’ views indicate a forgetfulness of the principle that there can be many teachings and opinions, but there is only *one truth*. And **authentic Christian unity—unity in the Church—can be based only upon oneness of mind, and not upon differences of mind. The Church is *the pillar and ground of the Truth* (1 Tim 3:15).**⁵⁸

Anti-ecumenist Orthodox see the ecumenical movement as heretical in its ecclesiology and for this reason regard its allure as dangerous, precisely “because its goals of unity and brotherly love seem so admirable.”⁵⁹ Many Orthodox Christians who share this view do not strive for Christian unity because they find a secure home in the Orthodox Church, a bulwark against error. Ecumenism is at best a distraction, at worst a fatal compromise with heterodoxy. Fr John Jillions explains:

Theology, spirituality and liturgy are firmly bound together in Orthodox thought. Intellectual life cannot be understood apart from the Church’s inheritance of worship and prayer. Indeed, where others speak of

⁵⁸Pomazansky, p. 250. Italics in original. Bold emphasis added.

⁵⁹ Father John A. Jillions in “Orthodox Christianity in the West: the ecumenical challenge” p. 282 in Mary B. Cunningham & Elizabeth Theokritoff (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 276-291, quoting Alexander Kalomiros. In the section of his essay, “The Problem of Ecumenism,” Father Jillions notes that “it would be a mistake to dismiss this outlook too quickly, even though one might disagree profoundly.” p. 282. See also Archpriest Alexey Young, *The Rush to Embrace* (Richfield Springs, NY: Nikodemos Orthodox Publication Society, 1996).

contextual theology in terms of geography, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., the Orthodox think of the Church as the universal context that transcends these secondary milieux. **We are first and foremost members of the Body of Christ. This deep sense of the Church gives [Orthodox] theology a communal dimension that cuts across time and geography as a corrective to rampant individualism.**⁶⁰

Here then is perhaps the strongest possible reason for *not* striving for Christian unity by the ecumenical route endorsed today: - **as Orthodox Christians we are members of the Body of Christ, and any move away from the Orthodox Church risks succumbing to “rampant individualism” and doctrinal heresies, as well as losing the depth of the Orthodox faith. However, this approach has certain limitations, as will be considered below.**

(2) The Case for Striving for Christian Unity

An important goal of Orthodox theology is “the transformation of the person through communion with God: *theosis*.... The Orthodox conviction is that the centuries-long church experience of prayer and inner life can be learned.”⁶¹ On a personal level, this goal of *theosis* is a legitimate and praiseworthy goal for any Christian. The question immediately arises: can such a goal be reached by persons who are not professing members of the Orthodox Church? Fr Georges Florovsky’s understanding of the Church, as set out above in Section II, suggests that it is not possible to know the precise limits of what many would term “the True Church.” Therefore, on a personal level, it follows that **it is indeed possible for Christians to be united with and transformed by God, whatever their confessional affiliation**, although often such Christians living outside of the defined boundaries of the Orthodox Church may also be somewhat loose in their own denominational commitment, especially when they are linked to conventional ecumenical activity.

The more difficult issue is the extent to which Christian unity is possible at a local, national or international level among earthly institutions, rather than

⁶⁰ Jillions, p. 279. Emphasis added.

⁶¹ Jillions, p. 281.

solely among individuals genuinely searching for unity with Christ. Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon suggests that a crucial issue is “the nature of the local Church.”⁶² In “The Local Church in a Perspective of Communion,” the final chapter of *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, he questions whether any confessional group (i.e. Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, etc.) has “*per se* the right to be regarded as Church?” His response is firmly “No,” a single confessional local group does not have the right to consider itself alone as the true church, because “a condition of ecclesiality is to be inseparably linked with that of locality,” and

A Church must incarnate people, not ideas or beliefs. A confessional Church is the most disincarnate entity there is; this is precisely why its content is usually borrowed from one or other of the existing cultures and is not a *locality* which critically embraces all cultures.⁶³

For Metropolitan John, in the closing paragraph of *Being as Communion*, “the Church is a true Church only if it is a local event incarnating Christ and manifesting the Kingdom in a particular place.” Therefore, he argues that “we must be prepared to question the ecclesial state of *confessional* churches as such, and begin to work on the basis of the local Church.” His conclusion is stark and challenging and will perhaps also unsettle many Orthodox Christians:

... we must be prepared to question the ecclesial status of *confessional* churches as such, and begin to work on the basis of the nature of the local Church...we must be ready to admit that as long as confessionalism prevails no real progress towards ecclesial unity can be made. Taking the reality of the local Church and its theology more seriously than we have done so far may prove to be of extreme importance to the ecumenical movement.⁶⁴

⁶² Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1997), p. 259. Cf. Jillions, p. 285.

⁶³ Zizioulas, p. 260. Italics in original.

⁶⁴ Zizioulas, p. 260.

Both Metropolitan John and Father Jillions agree that striving for unity in such a context is, as Father Jillions phrases it, “a radical suggestion that ... has not yet been taken up by the Orthodox Churches,” although a number of Orthodox theologians have been exploring this possibility of moving beyond confessionism as a foundation for Christian ecclesiology.⁶⁵ It is plain to see why this vision antagonises many faithful Orthodox who identify in this conception of an ecumenical local emergent united church a total violation of Orthodox faith and life; a healing of schism by the rehabilitation of heresy, or at least, indifferentism in doctrine.

This radical search for Christian unity also raises other difficult issues. As Metropolitan John reflects, such unity requires “a local church to be in full communion with the rest of local Churches;” however, for such full communion to be created he suggests that three conditions must be met:

- (a) That the problems and concerns of all local Churches should be the objects of prayer and active care by a particular local Church...
- (b) That a certain common basis of the vision and understanding of the Gospel and the eschatological nature of the Church exists between a local Church and the rest of the local Churches. This requires a constant vigilance concerning the true faith in all local churches by every single local church.
- (c) That certain structures be provided which will facilitate this communion...the utmost care must be taken so that the structures of ministries which are aimed at facilitating communion among the local Churches do not become a superstructure over the local church.⁶⁶

Father Nicholas Afanasiev (1893-1966) has proposed that, as Father Jillions phrases it, **“the reunion of the Churches in love will lead to their reunion in dogma**

⁶⁵ Jillions, p. 285. Father Jillions cites as examples such theologians as Nicholas Afanasiev, Paul Evdokimov, St Maria Skobtsova and Christos Yannaras. pp. 285-289.

⁶⁶ Zizioulas, pp. 257-259. Metropolitan John rightly insists that: “All eucharists and all bishops are local in character—at least in their primary sense. In a eucharistic view of the Church this means that the local Church...is the only form of ecclesial existence which can be properly called Church...All structures aimed at facilitating the universality of the Church create a *network of communion of Churches, not a new form of Church.*” p. 258. Italics in original.

(exactly the reverse of the current Orthodox position)” in which disagreements over dogma prevent intercommunion and acceptance of each other in love.⁶⁷

Such a call for Christian unity is not only spiritually challenging, but also very difficult to implement in practice. **What is required is nothing less than a *kenosis*—that is, a self-emptying not only of the person in a personal search for *theosis* but of each confession in a recognition, as Paul Evdokimov proposes, that the present “internal Christian schisms – Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformation Churches – will be healed when we [each] admit that we are incomplete, that we need each other’s gifts to be whole, and we freely accept each other.”**⁶⁸ St Mother Maria (Skobtsova) (1891-1945), writing in 1937, argued for just such a confessional and personal *kenosis*. She wrote:

We must not allow Christ to be overshadowed by any regulations, any customs, any traditions, any aesthetic considerations, or even piety. Ultimately, Christ gave us two commandments: on love for God and love for people. There is no need to complicate them, and at times supplant them, by pedantic rules.⁶⁹

Father Jillions has termed St Mother Maria’s approach “**kenotic ecclesiology**”—that is, an understanding of the Church that is grounded in the divine *kenosis* of Jesus Christ “who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2:6-7).”⁷⁰

Thus, far this survey of the contemporary scene suggests that **the case *against* striving for Christian unity leads directly into a deep awareness that the Orthodox Church itself is “the One True Church,” while the case *for* striving for**

⁶⁷ Afanasiev, “Una Sancta” in M. P. Plekon (Ed.), *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in Our Time: Readings from the Eastern Church* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2003), pp. 3-30. First published in *Irénikon* 36 (1963), 436-475. Noted by Jillions, p. 286.

⁶⁸ Jillions, p. 288, citing Paul Evdokimov (1900-1970), “To the Churches of Christ (a message),” in M. Plekon & A. Vinogradov (Eds. & Trans.), *In the World, Of the Church: A Paul Evdokimov Reader* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 2001), pp. 90, 94.

⁶⁹ St Mother Maria Skobtsova, in S. Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova, 1891-1945* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1982), p. 73. Quoted by Jillions, p. 289.

⁷⁰ Jillions, pp. 289, 280.

Christian unity leads directly into a deep awareness that together all Christians and all Christian confessions *should* comprise the One Church. Can these two opposing views be reconciled at the international, national and local levels?

(3) Patterns of Possibility

On the international level, as the Greek Orthodox philosopher and theologian, Christos Yannaras, has pointed out in “Towards a New Ecumenism,” fifty years ago the goal of ecumenism “was to give the various traditions and confessions a chance to know each other.”⁷¹ Numerous meetings have now been held in an attempt to build this attempt at knowing each other into mutual respect and a shared theological understanding of the Church.⁷² Opinions will differ as to the degree of success of these efforts, but **Christos Yannaras is right to suggest an analogy between the quest for ecumenism and St Peter’s walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33).** Yannaras notes that when St Peter responded to Christ’s call to “Come” and began to walk on the water he then “receives his existence not from his own nature, but from his relationship with the Lord.”⁷³

This analogy can be developed further by asking: **What are the guidelines for a person or a group that wishes to walk on water?** First, take the first step.

⁷¹ Yannaras, *Towards a New Ecumenism* at:

<http://orthodoxytoday.org/articles/YannarasEcumenism.php>.

⁷² In this vast literature, see especially John Borelli & John H. Erickson, *The Quest for Unity: Orthodox and Catholics in Dialogue: Documents of the Joint International Commission and Official Dialogues in the United States 1965-1995* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP & Washington, DC: US Catholic Conference, 1996); Emmanuel Clapsis, *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation* (Geneva: WCC Publications & Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004); *The Church of the Triune God: The Cyprus Agreed Statement of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue* [co-chaired by Bishop Mark Dyer and Metropolitan John of Pergamon] (London: The Anglican Communion Office, 2006); Gennadios Limouris (Compiler), *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Statements, Messages and Reports on the Ecumenical Movement 1902-1992* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994); Paul McPartlan (Ed.), *One in 2000? Towards Catholic-Orthodox Unity, Agreed Statements and Parish Papers* (Slough: St Pauls, 1993); and Todor Sabev, *The Orthodox Churches in the World Council of Churches: Towards the Future* (Geneva: WCC Publications & Bialystok, Poland: Syndesmos, The World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, 1996; and Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima (Ed.), *Grace in Abundance: Orthodox Reflections on the Way to Porto Alegre* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005).

⁷³ Yannaras, *Towards a New Ecumenism* at:

<http://orthodoxytoday.org/articles/YannarasEcumenism.php>. Yannaras suggests that: “We exist according to the mode of ecclesial existence when we are able to walk on water, and the whole life of the Church is an ascetic struggle designed to teach us to walk on water.”

Second, walk slowly. Third, do not look down at the water and consider the danger of sinking. Fourth, define the objective clearly and focus on that objective. Fifth, rely on Christ, in prayer, seeking to implement His will. These five guidelines offer a sensible approach to participation in future international ecumenical gatherings.

On the national level, many non-Orthodox Christian confessions, as well as many Orthodox Christian individuals and groups are seeking to define possible patterns of Christian unity. However, as Metropolitan Kallistos has commented, **“In all truthfulness, it has to be said that the Anglican Communion and particularly the Church of England, was far closer to Orthodoxy during the inter-War period in the 1920s and 1930s than is the case today.”**⁷⁴ In part, this is because of recent decisions taken within the Anglican Communion about ordaining women priests, bishops and sexually active non-heterosexual candidates. However, the Orthodox Churches also bear considerable responsibility for the failure to advance genuine ecumenism, because, as Father John Meyendorff has commented: **“Unless the eucharistic nature of the [Orthodox] Church is freed from under the façade of anachronism, and ethnic politics, which hide it today, no ecumenical witness, no authentic mission to the world is possible.”**⁷⁵ The leaders of a number of Orthodox jurisdictions in a number of countries believe that stressing and supporting the cultural origins of their largely elderly membership is a way to ensure the survival of the national church, especially away from “the homeland;” however, in reality such a strategy might be justified in the short-term but is likely to lead to the death of such a church in a matter of decades.

On the local level, Metropolitan John has set out above the importance of ecumenical encounter.⁷⁶ In most Western countries there are already a number of structures to facilitate, what Metropolitan John has termed, “communion among the local Churches;” however, there is also the danger, which he has noted, that these ecumenical structures might become “a superstructure over the local

⁷⁴ Metropolitan Kallistos, *Orthodox Christian Outlook*, No 106, October 2007, p.17.

⁷⁵ Meyendorff in Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, Foreword, p. 12.

⁷⁶ See p. 23, note 75 of this talk.

church.” Rather than setting up new structures, ecumenical dialogue might be better advanced by his proposal that members and pastors of local churches should seek to develop a “certain common basis of the vision and understanding of the Gospel and the eschatological nature of the Church.” If such an agreed vision and understanding could be developed among local Orthodox and evangelical Protestant churches, this might grow to include Roman Catholic and Anglican churches and create the deep sharing that Metropolitan John and many others seek. Whether such an understanding can develop is an open question to which three different responses are possible—Yes, No or Maybe.⁷⁷

On an international, national and local level, considerable advances toward ecumenical unity can be made from the experience of reconciliation and peace-making within different Chalcedonian Orthodox jurisdictions at loggerheads with each other and also between these and the Oriental (Miaphysite) Orthodox churches.⁷⁸ The Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) have united, with most local ROCA churches in agreement. Regional Episcopal Assemblies now exist in all major regions of the Orthodox diaspora to foster and encourage common work, prophetic witness and pastoral

⁷⁷ See Bradley Nassif, Michael Horton, Vladimir Berzonsky, George Hancock-Stefan & Edward Rommen, *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004). Using this book as a study guide for several meetings could prove helpful to encourage a shared ecumenical vision at the level of the local churches.

⁷⁸ See Christine Chaillot & Alexander Belopopsky (Eds.), *Towards Unity: The Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches* (Geneva: Inter-Orthodox Dialogue, 1998); and Thomas FitzGerald & Emmanuel Gratsias (Eds.), *Restoring the Unity in Faith: The Orthodox-Oriental Theological Dialogue: An Introduction with Texts* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007 for The Joint Commission of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches [i.e. The Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas & The Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches of America]. Metropolitan Kallistos has suggested that: “The most encouraging ecumenical contact we have as Orthodox is with the Oriental Christians—the Copts, the Ethiopians, the Armenians and the Syrians. Here I do not think there are any fundamental theological differences...we use different terminology when speaking of the person of Christ, but we both believe that he is fully and truly God and fully and truly Man. **Here I do indeed hope that in my own lifetime we should be able to restore Communion. We Orthodox ought to put our main effort into the dialogue with the non-Chalcedonians.**” *Orthodox Christian Outlook*, No 106, October 2007, p.18.

collaborations.⁷⁹ Locally, in the United Kingdom, but often elsewhere in the diaspora as well, there is often less contact between Orthodox churches in a local area than between Orthodox churches and other Christian confessions; and if Orthodox pastors and lay people wished to change this situation, regular communication might prove fruitful, leading to a deeper cross-cultural awareness of the depth of the Orthodox faith. However, a continuing commitment to local Orthodox churches focused on ethnic origins, as promoted by many Orthodox jurisdictions, certainly does not encourage spiritual unity among the Orthodox in a local area, although it does increase the number of local Orthodox churches.

Underlying these practical suggestions for how Christian unity might be advanced, there is a difficult confrontation between our egos and God's will for each of our lives and for each Christian confession. Christos Yannaras poses the challenge:

I dream of an ecumenism which will begin with a confession of sins on the part of each Church. If we begin with this confession of our historic sins, perhaps we can manage to give ourselves to each other in the end. We are full of faults, full of weaknesses which distort our human nature. But Saint Paul says that from our weakness can be born a life which will triumph over death. I dream of an ecumenism that begins with the voluntary acceptance of that weakness.⁸⁰

Such confession of sins and awareness of weakness is difficult for all of us, whatever our confessional Christian affiliations.

⁷⁹ These were set up at the Chambesy Pre-Conciliar Conference of 2009. See: <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/assets/files/docs/chambesy/diasporadecision-pdf.pdf>

⁸⁰ Yannaras, *Towards a New Ecumenism* at: <http://orthodoxytoday.org/articles/YannarasEcumenism.php>.

(4) Ecumenism and the Quest for Unity with All People

In an important sense, humanity is already unified because “God has created humankind as one.”⁸¹ Furthermore, this God-created unity has been further strengthened because “the incarnate Christ present in the particular humanity he assumed enters into communion with other humans, thereby imparting to them his divine life.”⁸² Yet, as Sister Nonna Verna Harrison and others have pointed out, there is also a deeper unity:

Human unity is only fully actualised in the Body of Christ, the communion of saints and of all the faithful in God’s kingdom. It is the saints who are most aware of natural human unity and unity in Christ, and they pray fervently for every person’s ultimate inclusion in the eschatological unity of God’s kingdom, as Christ prayed for it (John 17). In this final unity humankind is embraced within the mutual love and self-offering of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁸³

This deeper linking of natural human unity with unity in Christ can be foreshadowed “in this world but has its fulfilment only in God’s Kingdom, which is to come.”⁸⁴

However, in another sense humanity is deeply divided in this world because of the ancestral sin of Adam and Eve, as well as our own focus on our own lives and needs, rather than others.⁸⁵ Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) has set out in detail how “the fear of the other is pathologically inherent in our existence,” and that “even if we accept certain others, we accept them on condition that they somehow are

⁸¹ Sister Nonna Verna Harrison, “Human Uniqueness and Human Unity” p. 207 in John Behr, Andrew Louth & Dimitri Conomos (Eds.), *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West: Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 2003), pp. 207-220.

⁸²Harrison, p. 209.

⁸³Harrison, pp. 209-210.

⁸⁴ Harrison, p. 220.

⁸⁵See John S. Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin* (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr Publishing, 2002) and [Metropolitan] John D. Zizioulas, edited by Paul McPartlan, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2006). Metropolitan John has noted: “The rejection of God by Adam signified the rejection of otherness as a constitutive of being. By claiming to be God, Adam rejected the Other as constitutive of his being and declared himself to be the ultimate explanation of his existence. This gave rise to the *Self* as having ontological priority over the Other. It also meant that otherness and communion could not ultimately coincide.” p. 43.

like ourselves.”⁸⁶ Precisely how we can reconcile communion with all humanity with otherness is a topic beyond the scope of this talk. On a practical level, there is clearly a need to strengthen “our awareness of global responsibility” and to learn “to make individual choices in the context of a global ethic” in which we are linked “to millions of people we have never met”—many of them in great need and living lives very different from our own.⁸⁷ On a spiritual level, just as it is “the nature of Divine Love to make itself known through self-giving,”⁸⁸ so we are each confronted with the need to overcome fear and love others.

V. Conclusion: Evaluating the Evidence and Living Our Lives

To suggest that this long talk on ecumenism can now be summarised and concluded is somewhat misleading. **Evidence has been presented which is for you to evaluate in relation to your own life.** Perhaps you have experienced a considerable *kenosis*—an emptying of your previous ideas about ecumenism. That would be an appropriate initial response, because such an emptying can lead to new ideas and initiatives, just as the Crucifixion led to the Resurrection. Clearly, such a re-orientation can lead in two different directions, a move towards ecumenism, or a move away from ecumenism. Nonetheless, whichever path persuades, it is important for all Orthodox to practice integrative thinking whereby flashpoints between opposing views can create light rather than heat. It is, after all, Light, Christ Himself, the Light of the World, whom we seek for ourselves and for others.

One path ahead might be to pray about precisely on what you should now focus—to reach out initially to other Orthodox Christians? to all Christians? to all people? If each of us seek to love God and to love others, then perhaps we are being truly Orthodox *and* truly ecumenical.

⁸⁶ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Nick Boyle, *Who Are We Now?* (London: T&T Clark, 1998). Quoted by Archbishop Rowan Williams in the final paragraph of his Commemoration Oration at King’s College, “Big Society—Small World?” London, 21 March 2011 at:

www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/3182?q=kings+college.

⁸⁸Hallam, “Science, Creation and the Seeking of Truth in Orthodox Christian Theology,” at: <https://vimeo.com/20367822>

APPENDIX

Ecumenism: Insights from Contemporary Science

(1) Religion and Science Are Not In Conflict When Properly Understood

In order to clarify whether contemporary science can make a significant contribution to the quest for ecumenism, it is first necessary to appreciate that **religion and science are not in conflict when properly understood**. The opening words of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), are as true today as at the beginning of the world. “The creation owed its being and purpose to God;” and as Archpriest Gregory Hallam explains:

... the supposed conflict between faith in a Creator and evolutionary processes is both unnecessary and harmful to the pursuit of truth. For this *not* to be case, humans would have to be a special instance in the development of life such that our biological genesis could not be connected to precursor species. However, the Scriptures of the monotheist religions make no comment on such matters; they do not even consider them. How could it be otherwise? The prevailing knowledge of the development of life lay in a pre-scientific age. Revealed truth concerning the dignity of humankind is built neither on the inclusion or exclusion of the theory of evolution and so it goes for every other discovery of science. There can, therefore, never be a conflict between religion and science if each remains true to its principles and methods.⁸⁹

In brief, humanity and the creation itself are free to evolve, free to grow or to decline. This proposition applies not only to the whole of creation and the

⁸⁹ Hallam, “Science, Creation and the Seeking of Truth in Orthodox Christian Theology,” Manchester Metropolitan University Multicultural Studies Lecture, 24 February 2011, pp. 3-4. See: <https://vimeo.com/20367822> . The appointment and subsequent years of work by a committed Christian, Dr Francis Collins, as head of the US National Institutes of Health, one of the pre-eminent scientific institutions in the world, also confirm the reality that there does not need to be conflict between religion and science “if each remains true to its principles and methods.”

whole of humanity, but also to parts of creation, individual human beings and specific groups.

(2) Seeking Meaning in a Chaotic, Dynamic Creation The truth of the classic Biblical account of creation in Genesis 1 guides any search for meaning as to the purposes of both the physical universe and human life. Michael Welker, Director of the Research Centre for International and Interdisciplinary Theology in Heidelberg, Germany, has pointed out that creation *ex nihilo*, that is, from nothing, is both subtle and complex:

Through the word of God, chaotic matter becomes enabled not only to win forms and shapes, energy, and life. The heavens, the stars, the earth, the waters, and the humans are to actively participate in God's creative energy and power. The same verbs used for the divine process of creating are also used for the co-creativity of what and who are created.... it has to be recognized that the Biblical account of creation does not think in one-to-one structures [God and creation, God and world, God and the human being], the account thinks in one-to-many structures in which selected creatures gain a graded share in the creative divine activity. In various ways selected creatures participate in the formation of creation. The heavens part, the stars govern the times and festive days, the earth brings forth creatures, and the humans are assigned the task to rule over creation and thereby reflect the image of God.⁹⁰

This account of creation affirms not only that “the world is a hierarchy of interlocking complex systems,” as Arthur R. Peacocke has explained, but also that **“the determinative power of complex systems on their components can often**

⁹⁰ Welker, “What is the ‘spiritual body’? On what may be regarded as ‘ultimate’ in the interrelation between God, matter, and information,” p. 352 with brackets in the original text, in Paul Davies & Niels Henrik Gregersen (Eds.), *Information and the Nature of Reality: From Physics to Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 349-364.

best be understood as a flow of ‘information’, understood in its most general sense as a pattern-forming influence.”⁹¹ “In this search for patterns, human memory and imagination have the capacity to be transformed, just as the earthly Jesus Christ was transformed into the risen Christ.”⁹²

Although this transformation can be understood in what might be termed a major key in music, there is also a minor key here in which mental constructs allow “common understandings, consensus, and the guided common search for truth.”⁹³ In the context of the quest for ecumenical unity, it is this minor key which is of crucial importance in striving to form truth-seeking communities. **The question then that emerges from a close study of creation is readily formulated, but not so easily answered: How can truth-seeking communities be created that draw both Christians and all humanity into ecumenical unity?**

(3) Harnessing the Power of the Unconscious Mind

Research in a number of disciplines, including neuroscience, psychology, anthropology and genetics has shown conclusively that “we are not primarily the products of our conscious thinking. We are primarily the products of thinking that happens below the level of awareness.”⁹⁴ It is largely within our unconscious minds that we make decisions, as we permit self-consciousness to fade away and become “lost in a challenge, a cause, the love of another or the love of God.”⁹⁵ As

⁹¹ Peacocke, p. 265, “The sciences of complexity: a new theological resource?” in Davies & Gregersen, pp. 249-281. Peacocke calls this understanding of creation “emergent monism.” p. 250 ff. “The wholes and parts are intimately interlocked regarding their properties, and so in the very existence that a creator God gives them.” For further reflections on the importance of information, see the next section of this lecture, “Learning to Communicate the Meaning of Information.”

⁹² Welker, pp. 363, 355-362.

⁹³ The quotation is from Weller, p. 363, but he has stressed the spiritual side of “experienced material reality,” while this lecture draws upon his secondary point of the role of memory and imagination. Therefore, the terms “major key” and “minor key” have been added to his analysis to draw out the distinction between his presentation of these ideas and their use in this lecture.

⁹⁴ David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011), p. x. See also Rachel Coutland’s interview of David Brooks, “Meet Homo irrational,” *New Scientist*, 19 March 2011, p. 52.

⁹⁵ Brooks, p. xi. “John Bargh of Yale argues that just as Galileo ‘removed the earth from its privileged position at the center of the universe, so this intellectual revolution removes the conscious mind from its privileged place at the center of human behaviour.’”

we share our lives in fellowship with others, spiritual states arise within the unconscious that are communicated to others.

In some way that is not yet fully understood, divine creativity arises within a person, so that it is initially within the unconscious that “brain matter produces emotion, where love rewires neurons.”⁹⁶ If we are to establish deeper and more trusting links with other Christians and with the whole of humanity, we need to move beyond “an overly simplistic view of human nature” (whose shallowness is grounded in fear and insecurity) into a far deeper understanding of the centrality of human cooperation.⁹⁷ However, this dual awareness of these two key theoretical principles—the importance of the unconscious mind and the need for human cooperation—still needs to be implemented in practice. Can this be done?

(4) Learning to Communicate the Meaning of Information

Side by side with an understanding of the role of the unconscious mind and the need for human cooperation in seeking to form truth-seeking communities, has come an awareness that in the midst of conflict and disagreement we cannot change other people—“we can only really ever change ourselves”⁹⁸ with prayer and God’s grace and perhaps, to a limited extent, the institutions in which we live, work and pray—the family, the local community, the local church.⁹⁹ In the midst of praying about specific ecumenical issues and whether or how we should

⁹⁶ Brooks, p. xvii. Brooks suggests that his book “will not try to discern God’s role in all this.” However, he is clearly writing within a Jewish context with a strong awareness of personal faith in God.

⁹⁷ The phrase, “an overly simplistic view of human nature,” is drawn from Books, p. xv. However, he applies it solely to public policy, not in an ecumenical context. On the importance of human cooperation as “the secret of humanity’s success,” see Michael Marshall’s interview with the evolutionary biologist and Christian, Martin Nowak, “The mathematics of being nice,” *New Scientist*, 19 March 2011, pp. 34-35. See also Nowak and *New Scientist* editor, Roget Highfield, *Super Cooperators: Altruism, Evolution, and Why We Need Each Other to Succeed* (New York: The Free Press, 2011).

⁹⁸ Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan & Al Switzler, *Crucial Confrontations: Tools for Resolving Broken Promises, Violated Expectations, and Bad Behavior* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), p. 23. See also Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton & Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* (London: Penguin Books, 2000)

⁹⁹ It is indeed possible that our prayers and actions can lead to national and global changes, but this is linked to the Lord and to other people, even if we have begun the change.

confront them, we need to learn and implement modern communication skills in which we are genuinely both honest and respectful, alert and listening to others.

The Preaching and Teaching elements in this E-Quip course (Year 1 Term 2) have focused on how to improve our communication skills, building on the work of Parker J. Palmer¹⁰⁰, Ken Untener¹⁰¹ and Jane Vella.¹⁰² These communication skills are essentially a product of both applied theology and applied science. In a theological context, Jaroslav Pelikan has pointed out that we are seeking to unite two attributes of God – “the capacity to love and the capacity to communicate.”¹⁰³ In a scientific context, the earlier work of Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver to quantify information has grown into information theory with its strong emphasis upon connecting both people and ideas, leading to an awareness of how the availability of information itself influences both the knowledge that is available to us and how we perceive ourselves.¹⁰⁴

Recently, various forms of information including “Shannon information” have been linked to the theological proposition that God is “the ultimate informational principle” because “the ultimate ontological reality is indeed information, but that information is ultimately held in the mind of God.” The Christian theologian Keith Ward, Emeritus Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University, has concluded that this linking of God and information “expresses one of the most coherent and plausible accounts of the nature of ultimate reality that is available to us in the modern scientific age.”¹⁰⁵ Building on Ward’s insights, John F. Haught,

¹⁰⁰ *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

¹⁰¹ *Preaching Better: Practical Suggestions for Homilists* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

¹⁰² *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

¹⁰³ “Writing as a means of Grace,” pp. 123-124 in William Zinsser (ed.), *Going on Faith: Writing as a Spiritual Quest* (New York: Marlowe, 1999), pp. 121-136.

¹⁰⁴ For the origins of information theory, see Claude Shannon & Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1949). For its present manifestations, see James Gleick, *The Information: A History, a Theory, A Flood* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011) and Sam Kean’s review of Gleick’s book, “Vast bits and bytes” in *New Scientist*, 26 February 2011, p. 52.

¹⁰⁵ Ward, p. 299 of “God as the Ultimate Informational Principle” in Davies & Gregersen, pp. 282-300.

Senior Fellow in Science & Religion at the Woodstock Theological Centre, Georgetown University, explores an understanding of God as “the source of information for a self-developing world” in which God is “at work in the entire cosmic process,” and proposes that this perspective is “far richer than the idea of a designer God at the edge of the universe.”¹⁰⁶

Such a theological understanding of the meaning of information is certainly controversial; however, there is an increasing awareness among many scientists that **modern information theory focuses on “the return of meaning”** and that Claude Shannon’s original insight in 1948 is still relevant: “The fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point. Frequently the messages have meaning.”¹⁰⁷ **This understanding of information linked to communicating meaning in both a scientific and theological context is profoundly relevant to understanding the quest for some pattern of ecumenical unity. Different individuals and Christian churches have different perspectives on the information that is available to them about both the ecumenical movement and the wider quest for human unity. Creating a better convergence between these variant approaches is a vitally important task.**

¹⁰⁶ Paul Davies & Niels Henrik Gregersen, p. 8 of “Introduction: does information matter?” in Davies & Gregersen, pp. 1-9; and John F. Haught, “Information, theology, and the universe,” pp.301-318 in Davies & Gregersen. In this lecture, reference has been made to only 5 of the 16 essays in this remarkable interdisciplinary study of the relationship between science and religion which grew out of an earlier symposium sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation and the Copenhagen University Research Priority Area on Religion in the 21st century.

¹⁰⁷ Gleick, pp. 3, 413-426.