

Encounters: Dialogue & Theological Exchange
Between Catholic Nouvelle Théologie & Modern Orthodoxy
International Conference / Fribourg – August 29–31, 2024

Abstracts

ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

Pantelis Kalaitzidis,

Introduction: From the 'Return to the Fathers' to the need for a Modern Orthodox Theology

Peter De Mey

Deepening Roman Catholic Ecclesiology and Ecumenism through Contacts with the Orthodox: the Experience of Chevetogne

During the Council committed Roman Catholic ecumenists such as the Dominicans Yves Congar and Christophe-Jean Dumont and the Benedictine Emmanuel Lanne gave their best efforts as periti to allow the Council to deepen the ecclesiological and ecumenical convictions of the Catholic Church so that after the Council a fruitful dialogue especially with the Orthodox Church could be set up. Their theological opinions – especially in the fields of ecclesiology and ecumenism – were partially formed through their fruitful contacts with the Orthodox during conferences and by opening up their journals (a.o. *Istina*, *Irénikon*) to the intellectual input of Orthodox theologians.

At the eve of the centennial of the Monastère de l'Union of Amay-sur-Meuse/Chevetogne I will focus on the Orthodox input made during the Journées œcuméniques between their first meeting in 1942 and the start of the Council as well as on Orthodox scholarship published in their journal *Irénikon*. Special attention will be given to the Catholic-Orthodox exchange in three volumes that were edited in Chevetogne in the decade prior to Vatican II: *Le Concile & les Conciles (1954-55)* – with Congar's famous essay "Neuf cent ans après" – which appeared 70 years ago, *L'Eglise et les Eglises (1960)* and *L'Infaillibilité & L'Eglise (1961)*.

RESSOURCEMENT

Stavros Yangazoglou

Yves Congar and John Zizioulas on Pneumatology. "Nouvelle theologie" and "neo-patristic synthesis" in dialogue

Yves Congar's relationship with Orthodoxy goes back to the 1920s, when he was still a student at Saulchoir. Yves Congar came into contact with the Russian liturgical tradition, Dostoevsky's literature and the thought of Slavophile theologians. Later he becomes acquainted and associated with the Franco-Russian circles of émigrés in Paris and connects with significant personalities of Russian theologians and intellectuals of the diaspora. Although initially influenced by the Sobornost's concept of ecclesiology, the intense anti-Westernism of the Slavophiles leads Yves Congar to be critical of this current. At the same time, the idea of Sobornost and Afanassiev's Eucharistic ecclesiology oriented him to criticise classical Roman Catholic hierarchical and juridical ecclesiology, building an ecclesiology of collegiality and communion. During the Vatican II period, Yves Congar had direct and frequent collaboration with the Orthodox observers of the Council. In the 1970s and 1980s, Yves Congar, summarizing his ecclesiological contribution with the pneumatological significance of communion as its axis, recognizes in the ecclesiological work of John Zizioulas a crucial and original contribution to the ecumenical dialogue. Yves Congar recognizes in the pneumatologically conditioned Christology of John Zizioulas the genuine voice of the common Tradition for the unity and catholicity of the Church. At the same time, John Zizioulas is the Orthodox theologian who systematically dialogued and discussed in depth the ecclesiological positions of Yves Congar. In the person and in the contribution of these two theologians, "nouvelle theologie" and "neo-patristic synthesis" are encountered and discussed in the most fruitful way. In this paper we will present the

positions of these two theologians on the organic synthesis and mutual interaction of Christology and pneumatology in ecclesiology and more broadly in the theology of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Anne Carpenter

“The Spirit of the Age”: On Looking Backward

One of the tasks that this conference involves is looking backward — backward into a place, into an era, into a theological moment or even movement, a “something” that is both complex and wide-ranging. For my contribution to this conference, I would like to thematize the “looking” itself. By “looking backward,” I do not mean the problem of hermeneutics, however related it might be; nor do I mean the discovery or uncovering of historical facts, however difficult and important that task is. I mean the movement from past fact to present use. I mean to argue for this movement’s possibility while admitting its challenges. To make my argument, I will explore one predecessor and one observer of the *nouvelle théologie*, and one Russian emigré in tension with them: Maurice Blondel, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Georges Florovsky. It is Blondel who warns us, in his “History and Dogma,” that “To think in our day in precisely the same terms as five centuries ago is inevitably to think in a different spirit.” Admitting this forces a new problem into the light, and that is the problem of looking to the past in a present age — any present age, but also this one. Our own. What spirit might we, or should we, “think in” when we look backward? How does one break open possibility from a moment now ended? After exploring the problem in its Blondelian shape, I will place Florovsky in generative tension with Blondel, particularly Florovsky’s interest in patristic Christian centuries over-against other centuries — an interest nevertheless also about his own present, his own age. And finally, I will argue that Balthasar’s conceptuality allows something like a bridge or an embrace of the resulting tension — rather than its abrogation — in his “seeing the form.” In other words, I will argue that it is intelligible form alone that can live again, illumined by the light and life of present intelligence.

INTELLECTUAL PARALLELS

Paul Ladouceur

Orthodox Influences in Catholic Theology: Louis Bouyer and Thomas Merton

Louis Bouyer (1913–2004) and Thomas Merton (1915–1968) were important Catholic theologians and spiritual figures in the late twentieth century. Both were strongly influenced by modern Orthodox theology and by early Eastern Christian theology and asceticism. This paper traces the impact of modern Orthodox thinking in Bouyer and Merton, with particular emphasis on influences of leading Orthodox figures, such as Vladimir Solovyov, Sergius Bulgakov, Nicolas Berdyaev, Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas, for example in the assimilation of sophiology, apophaticism, the Palamite theology of the divine energies and personalism, in Bouyer and Merton.

Aristotle Papanikolaou

Trinity and Apophaticism. Karl Rahner and Vladimir Lossky

If the contemporary revival of trinitarian theology is marked either by a robustly cataphatic drive to say as much as possible about the immanent Trinity or an exclusive focus on the economic Trinity, there have been attempts to think apophatically the relation between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. These apophatic approaches to the Trinity restrict what can be affirmed about the immanent life of God, no matter how complete the revelation of God is in God’s economy. Two theologians in particular who offer robust trinitarian theologies but who also stand within the twentieth-century revival of apophatic theology in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions are Karl Rahner and Vladimir Lossky.

Brandon Gallaher

Sergii Bulgakov and Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Cosmic Liturgy

The theologies of both Sergii Bulgakov (1871-1944) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-88) are best described (after Balthasar) as ‘kneeling theologies’, or, adapting Bulgakov, both Bulgakov and Balthasar found their theologies ‘at the bottom of a Eucharistic chalice.’ Both theologians saw the Eucharist as a Trinitarian act of eternal self-sacrifice but also a cosmic act where the Church gathers and manifests the Kingdom which is to come as the new Eden or paradise. Firstly, we can see in Bulgakov and Balthasar the life of God as a divine heavenly sacrifice of love in the Trinity with an

eternal self-giving self-offering of the Son's sonship in his eternal begetting by the Father who simultaneously receives that filial sacrifice which is then brought to completion by the Spirit. But this eternal Trinitarian self-offering, secondly, is then joined in time with the Lord's freely willed self-sacrifice on earth on the cross where he distributes himself as love by the will of the Father and with the Spirit resting upon him. Lastly, the Son freely chooses out of love, being sent out by the Father through the Spirit being poured out in Pentecost, to liquify and distribute his earthly substance, manifesting his humanity, not only in heaven at the Ascension but also in the earthly forms of bread and wine in the Eucharist. In this way, the Church is the ongoing Incarnation as a perpetual Pentecost that is renewed at every liturgy, for the Eucharist makes the Church. Yet the liturgy is not only this nexus of divine-human eternal-temporal sacrifice concretized in the Eucharist but within it, through the eschatological movement of ascension and descension of the Word, the divine world of the Holy Trinity, God's pre-eternal counsel, is revealed on earth, complete with all its eternal archetypes or logoi, which were implanted in creation and guide its providential development. These logoi find their summation and focus within Jesus Christ as the one Logos who is both the offer and the offered in each liturgy/mass and of the cosmic liturgy of creation. Theology, as a discipline, is both an act of worship in offering up all our thoughts to God in a sacrificial spiritual and gratitude filled offering but also it is a contemplation of creation as a cosmic liturgy of Christ as our great High Priest who is imaged at every liturgy. The paper will look at the two thinkers' Eucharistic theology with particular attention to their common dialogue partners (especially, Maximus the Confessor) and how liturgy serves in their theologies as a sort of common theological grammar and the points at which we can trace a direct line of influence of Bulgakov on Balthasar.

Barbara Hallensleben

Sergii Bulgakov and Hans Urs von Balthasar on Sophia

CONVERSIONS

Ivana Noble

Resilience and Adaptability of the Vision of All-Embracing Love in the Life and Work of Fr Lev Gillet

This paper investigates the interplay of Western and Eastern inspired ways towards inner sources that sustained the theological vision and spiritual practice of Fr Lev Gillet (1893–1980). It analyses (i) how the grasp of what he later called limitless love was born out of crises; (ii) why a life of solidarity with the needy was not grounded in notions of redemptive suffering; (iii) how the liturgical renewal movement he encountered among Benedictines, and the monastic-ascetic renewal movement among the Studites interplayed, and found expressions in Fr Lev's different projects; (iv) how the centrality of the invocation of the name of Jesus could coexist with radical openness to other religions. The final part considers how Fr Lev reflected on what we may call the negative capacity and the positive capacity of resilience, and how his own experiences of vulnerability contributed to the ability to adapt to what the vision of all-embracing love may mean in many different situations. Apart from the historical, theological and spiritual books, the paper draws on the personal correspondence of Fr Lev, especially around the two transition times: when he decided to do "his Solovyevan act" and join the Orthodox communion without leaving the Roman Catholic one; and when, after the Second World War he underwent a deep crisis, that led to new forms of engagement.

Andrew Louth

From Transmutation to Transfiguration: Clément the convert

Although not in the common, debased sense of the word, viz., a convert as one changing his/her jurisdictional allegiance, Olivier Clément was a convert, in the fundamental sense of the word, that is, one who accepts Christ by conversion, by turning from the world to Christ by *μετάνοια*, a Greek word better translated by 'conversion' than by the traditional 'repentance'. Clément was, in this sense, a convert and *μετάνοια* was central to his grasp of Christianity. But though he converted, he never rejected anything that had meant something fundamental to him, including his early interest in the occult, including alchemy, with its cosmic entailments; conversion did not close him up, but opened and extended his vision of reality. In this brief communication, I shall explore something of what this paradox meant for Clément.

DEIFICATION

Mark McInroy

Encountering Theosis: Portrayals of Deification in Émigré Orthodoxy and the Reception of the Doctrine in la Nouvelle Théologie

This paper maintains that interest in deification among figures associated with la nouvelle théologie was both provoked and conditioned by treatments of theosis advanced by Russian Orthodox émigrés living in Paris in the early twentieth century. Myrrha Lot-Borodine's seminal studies of the doctrine were particularly significant, as they presented a model of theosis that captured the attention of Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou, and others. Depictions of theosis by Sergii Bulgakov, Georges Florovsky, and Vladimir Lossky also played important roles. Although some of these portrayals of the doctrine were not lacking in contentious declarations of various sorts, they nonetheless elicited enormous enthusiasm among a number of highly influential French Catholics, who in turn played a pivotal ambassadorial role for Western Christians uncertain of the authenticity of the doctrine. In attending to the reception of deification in la nouvelle théologie, this paper addresses a major lacuna in current treatments of the history of the doctrine in the modern period.

Georgiana Huian

Myrrha Lot-Borodine: networking concepts of personhood, freedom and love

Myrrha Lot-Borodine played a central role in the "rediscovery" of the concept of "deification" in the 20th century, thereby deepening the understanding of personhood, freedom and love. This enabled encounters between eastern and western theology, while revisiting patristic thinking. This paper looks at how meetings and intellectual exchange with philosophers such as Nikolai Berdiaev and Jacques Maritain marked Lot-Borodine's synthesis. On the one hand, I focus on the polemics with Berdiaev on slavery, freedom and eschatology. On the other, I look at how exchanges with J. Maritain revolve around conceptions of person and love, with reflections of patristic and medieval literature. Additionally, the paper inquires how Lot-Borodine's interest in ecumenism is nourished by her disseminating ideas on love of God, freedom and contemplation in societies with Catholic public and by experiencing ecumenical meetings between Orthodox and Anglican. MLB appears as a cultural interpreter between the language games of philosophy, theology and literature, as well as between eastern and western ways of engaging with human freedom and divine dynamics of grace and love.

CALL FOR ACTION

Regula M. Zwahlen

"The human mode of ecclesiastical reality." Yves Congar and Sergii Bulgakov

Yves Congar met Sergii Bulgakov several times in the early 1930ies and was mainly inspired by his book on "The Orthodox Church" (1932). They shared a common desire for (dogmatic) Christian unity, a deep concern for the modern "social question", a high esteem for the concept of the absolute dignity of the human person, and a strong interest in fostering the role of the laity in the Church. Both inspired by and critical of the Ecumenical movement of their time for similar reasons, the theologians developed methods and ways to eschatologically strive and work for the one Church's catholicity/sobornost' by overcoming each Christian denomination's 'incompleteness'. Bulgakov's (and Nikolai Berdiaev's) endeavors to develop an active Christian humanism struggling for human dignity and social justice "in this world" corresponds to Congar's suggestion that Orthodox theology should put more emphasis on *ecclesia militans*. By the means of "irenic controversy," these Ecumenical actors hoped to pave the way to dogmatic unity by developing a theological anthropology and ecclesiology that would "take sufficient account of the human mode of ecclesiastical reality" in view of the process of modernization.

Kateřina Kočandrl Bauer

Liberating Power of Creativity and a Call for Action in the Life and Work of Mother Maria Skobtsova: A Parallel with the Worker-Priest Movement

The paper investigates the liberating power of creativity and the call for action in the life and work of an Orthodox nun, Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945). It shows that creativity and a desire for a life

lived to the maximum realisation of love for others were present all her life. The personal experience of the historical traumas of the Bolshevik revolution, exile, and WWII intensified this desire and need. First, the paper analyses her notion of creativity in her art: poetry and painting. It shows that artistic expression was the source of her overcoming the traumas of her time and personal crisis until the end of her life in a concentration camp. Second, it shows her creative potential in her political engagement, which is linked with a socialist view, where creativity was transformed into social engagement and a need to act in favour of the ordinary people. This call for action also entered her monastic life in exile in Paris, where the love for those on the margins meant the realisation of her creativity in searching for new ways to live an ascetic life in the new historical and cultural conditions. The paper shows a parallel in the worker-priest movement, which spread in the Catholic Church in France during WWII and elaborates on Catholic female communities linked to the movement. It especially addresses Sister Madeleine Hutin (1898-1989), who established a women's congregation of the Little Sisters of Jesus and the community of lay women around French Catholic mystic and poet Madeleine Delbr el (1904–1964). As the paper shows, their experience of active social engagement can inspire the contemporary context of multiple crises.

COSMOLOGY

Ivan Ilin

Reditus ad mysterio: Sophiology and Nouvelle Th ologie as Sacramental Ontologies

In his book *Nouvelle Th ologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (OUP, 2009), Hans Boersma attempted to unfold and explore a deep “shared sacramental sensibility” that lies at the heart of the main Nouvelle Th ologie figures’ oeuvre. Boersma argues that the primary concern of the NT theologians was rediscovering the “mysterium” dimension of creation by focusing on “the sacrament (sacramentum) as making present the reality (res) of the mystery of God.” This rediscovery would involve a two-sided approach: (1) challenging the autonomy of nature and its separation from the supernatural, and (2) arguing for the “rootedness” of creation in the mystery of Divine reality. A similar focus on the sacramentality of creation and its two related aspects, *mutatis mutandis*, can be found in Russian Sophiology, especially in the work of Sergii Bulgakov, who writes in *The Wisdom of God* that “[the] union [of Divine and creaturely Sophia] initiated by the Incarnation and the descent of the Holy Ghost is primarily sacramental.”

In this paper, I shall attempt to bring together NT and Sophiology as sacramental ontologies, exploring commonalities and differences with regard to their respective “sacramental mindsets.” If John Milbank is correct in asserting that “the scope, ambition, and modernity of Russian [Sophiological] theology is greater than that of their Latin contemporaries [because] they tended to start at the point where de Lubac and Balthasar ... only finally arrived” (“Sophiology and Theurgy”), then such a comparison seems fruitful and promising for understanding how both “schools” responded to the challenges of “sacramentless” modernity.

First, the paper will address critiques of the concept of pure nature from the Nouvelle Th ologie side and of “immanentism” from Sophiology. Then, I intend to move to a discussion of the sacramentality of creation in Nouvelle Th ologie and Sophiology to demonstrate how both can be considered as sacramental ontologies.

Julija Naett Vidovic

Olivier Cl ment’s Theological Reflection on Technology: Western and Eastern Perspectives

This presentation explores Olivier Cl ment’s views on the rise of industrial civilization, especially in his work “Le Christ. Terre des vivants”. Cl ment reinterprets the interactions between Western and Eastern thoughts, both intellectually and spiritually. The study examines Cl ment’s sources and the critical approach he uses to develop three main hypotheses:

1. Western Technology and Biblical Revelation: Modern Western technology stems from biblical revelation, emerging in the context of Judaism and Western, Old Testament-oriented Christianity, which is detached from the cosmos, unlike Eastern traditions.
2. Orthodoxy and Technology: Orthodox liturgical cosmology, with its “apophatic” anthropology, offers spiritual grounding against technological excess, harmonizing technical progress with deep, historical spirituality.

3. New Testament Approach to Technology: A new, apocalyptic New Testament attitude towards technology is needed, transcending simple critique and adaptation, for spiritually enriched technological engagement.

Clément critiques modern technological developments, questioning their compatibility with Christian spirituality. He proposes that Orthodox spirituality offers a framework for reconciling with the technical world. This presentation enriches understanding of Western and Eastern Christian traditions and contributes to theological discussions on technology and spirituality, encouraging a rethinking of the foundations of technical civilization and spiritual alternatives to modernity.

PERSONHOOD

Jack Pappas

Theology and the Personalist Turn: The Ecumenical Reception of Existential Philosophy in Berdyaev, Mounier and Beyond

This paper will examine the “personalist turn” in both modern Eastern Orthodox theology and Roman Catholic *nouvelle théologie*. The centrality of the human person and his or her unique dignity has been emphasized in both Orthodox and Catholic contexts since the mid-twentieth century. On the Catholic side, the embrace of personalist language is evident not only in the work of theologians as different as Henri de Lubac and Jacques Maritain but also in official documents of the Second Vatican Council and a range of papal encyclicals. On the Orthodox side, documents from recent general synods and statements by the Ecumenical Patriarchate evince the continuing relevance of personalist theologies within the Eastern context often indebted to the work of figures like Vladimir Lossky and, more recently, John Zizioulas. On the Orthodox side especially, this personalist theology is typically traced back to its patristic roots and linked to the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the early Church. Leaving aside ongoing debates over the historical accuracy of this theological lineage, I will instead explore how the “personalist turn” in recent Catholic and Orthodox theology remains decisively shaped by modern sources, namely from figures associated with interwar existentialist philosophy and more radical currents of French Christian democracy.

More specifically, it will explore the work of Nikolai Berdyaev, Gabriel Marcel, and Emmanuel Mounier, who each embraced personalism as a means of reconciling the Christian legacy with the demands of the contemporary world, over and against the shadow of totalitarianism, static forms of Christian metaphysics, and the alienating aspects of modern life diagnosed by their non-Christian contemporaries. To this end, I will link the contributions of these varied thinkers by examining how each conceives of the relationship between personhood and nature, intersubjectivity, and divine-human communion. By tracing the turn to the personalist turn back to defiantly contemporary Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic thinkers, I aim to challenge the continued reliance of both traditions on ancient and medieval thought-forms and insist that the legacy of the personalist turn remains relevant for our own context.

Olga Laham Lossky

The concept of personhood according to Elisabeth Behr-Sigel: backgrounds and implications

At the crossroad of different cultures and Christian denominations, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel holds a special place in the Orthodox landscape of the 20th century. From the “Réunions de Clamart” at Berdyaev’s place, in the 30s’, and her friendship with Mounier or Bouyer to her participation on the WCC about the ordination of women in the 70s’, the theologian developed a innovative thought about what means being a person in an ecclesial context, thanks to the encounter between her creative approach and a pleiade of significant Eastern and Western Christian thinkers on the topic. I will try to highlight how these encounters shaped and influenced her vision of personhood, leading her to reaffirm the role of laypeople and to open new fields like the place of women in the Orthodox Church.

John Behr

Being a Person or Being Human?

While much of the twentieth-century theological discourse has focused on the word ‘person’, usually attempting to ground it in the word ‘hypostasis’ as used by the Greek Fathers, this paper will suggest that in fact it’s most natural analogue in Patristic is ‘human being’. Consideration will also be given to the background of the focus on the ‘person’ in modern discourse, its advantages and disadvantages.