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THE TRAJECTORY OF POST-REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIAN DIASPORA THOUGHT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO RUSSIAN EXCEPTIONALISM

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Abstract: *Attention is being paid to the rise of post-Soviet nationalism, particularly given the conflict in Ukraine. To this end, the present paper examines Russian thought and its relationship to exceptionalism in the context of the post-Revolutionary diaspora. Examining the prevailing approach taken to freedom of thought, in light of Nikolai Berdyaev, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov and other thinkers, a trajectory can be identified that departs from the exceptionalist narrative. In the diaspora, this was accented by emergence in the context of the ecumenical movement and the keenness demonstrated by the emigres, which was fitting to the East / West interaction of the movement. In an important sense, the notion of Sobornost emerged as a sign of the diaspora's theological development – in light the evolution of the notion and its ecclesiological aspect, but also in the journal by the same name, which was published under the auspices of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius. This altogether demonstrates a trajectory of thought that emerged in the diaspora intelligentsia, which stood in opposition to exceptionalism, messianic or nationalist sentiments, inasmuch as it was a inheritor of pre-Revolutionary Russian thought, is a contrast to the post-Soviet milieu.*

Keywords: *Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Sobornost, Ecumenism.*

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Introduction

One of the developments of the crisis of the current global situation is the awareness of the multiplicity of strands of Russian thought – in a historical sense, modern revivals and their modern manifestations. Examples of literature, philosophy and theology, combine into a complex tapestry. In recent times, due to its effect on post-Soviet nationalism, attention has been paid to Alexander Dugin – as an example, perhaps, of post-Soviet exceptionalism and messianism and nationalism – and, to a great degree, the justification of violence.

Such conversations, however, oft-times stand at the threshold of religion and culture, and justifiably, the spotlight has now turned in their direction, in order to better understand the complexity of Russian thought and its various manifestations. This speaks to the possibility of effective religious dialogue and cooperation, which is relevant to the rethinking required in light of the insufficiency of Francis Fukayama's "end of history" hypothesis, as well as the possibility of religious dialogue and cooperation.

Contrary to Fukayama's hope, human grievances did not come to an end, to be sure, the need is now great to reassess, reflect on and better understand the complexities that give rise to conflict. Long-standing problems often put on the shelf have resurfaced. In an important sense, the prevailing underlying question is starting to emerge: is the prevailing approach to thought in any era amenable to recognising the "other", or is it mired in exceptionalism, messianism or nationalism such that it is incapable of looking beyond itself.

This is an important question facing the *milieu* of post-Soviet Russian thought, and is related to the scaffolding of thought that underpins the development of the current crisis.

In this light, there is a need to focus on the history of the theology and religious philosophy of the Russian diaspora that followed the 1917 Revolution. On two occasions recently, I have examined the intellectual formation of its protagonists – comparing and contrasting on the one hand the ecumenical theologies of Fr Sergius Bulgakov and Fr Nicholas Afanasiev, demonstrating in the ecumenical context, before and after the Second World War, the development of a theological consciousness out of the encounter of East and West.

In an important sense, the post-Revolutionary Russian diaspora is too often regarded as predominantly an extension of the thought that preceded it in the homeland. While the connection itself is not incorrect, this in and of itself counteracts understanding of the great influence of the encounter with the West.

Later I extended this and argued for the analytical separation of independence of thought from national sentiment in this light, suggesting that the pervasive elements with which Russian thought is often associated – exceptionalism, messianism

and nationalism – did not in fact dominate the thought of the diaspora *milieu*. On the contrary, the tenor of that thought was a criticism of these elements.

The present paper is a development of that thought. Here, I develop the arguments earlier presented, establish the overall trajectory of the theology of diaspora thought, and from that, define its overall relationship to Russian exceptionalism, messianism and nationalism. I refer to critical examples that illustrate the developments took place, and further characterise the qualitative aspects of this important part of 20th century theology and religious philosophy in light of three discrete aspects: freedom of thought in the Russian diaspora; the development of the ecumenical movement; and finally, the recasting of the notion of *sobornost*.

At critical points I will compare and contrast with countervailing arguments to determine what the present analysis has to say in a broader context. Noting that the Russian diaspora was not a homogenous phenomenon, the purpose of this article is to estimate its intellectual trajectory and draw conclusions in respect of religious dialogue and cooperation. In conclusion, the argument is made that the tenor of the thought of the pos-Revolutionary diaspora was extremely different to notions of exceptionalism, messianism or nationalism, and that this presents a viable alternative to elements of Russian thought, which is in a timely sense adept to religious cooperation and dialogue.

1. Freedom of Thought and the Russian Diaspora

When examining the trajectory of the thought of the Russian diaspora – broadly referred to by Nicolas Zernov as the "Russian Religious Renaissance" – in relation to the politics of the Russian Revolution, its protagonists stood roughly in between its two "sides". On the one hand many were expelled on the "Philosophy Steamer"; equally, before, many were opposed to the Imperial government. This led to a critical sense of non-alignment – opposition to the Imperial government without loyalty to what followed.

The landscape of the diaspora of Europe was consequently broad: émigré centres popped up in Paris, Berlin, Prague, Belgrade and elsewhere. Thus, while we're able to speak of a trajectory, there was also the possibility of exceptions.

However, an important priority of the diaspora *intelligentsia* was the freedom of thought. This insistence, set in opposition to a prevailing sense of institutionalised power that extended even into the diaspora, was palpable and consistent. The tension between freedom of thought and its suppression manifested acutely at the *Sophia* Affair. While not the only reaction of Bulgakov's peers, the apt attribution of "ecclesial fascism" by Nikolai Berdyaev to institutionalised Russian Orthodoxy (Berdyaev, 1935, p. 73) is instructive.

There were in fact multiple defences from the St. Serge Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris of which Bulgakov was dean – most notably, by Nicholas Afanasiev

and Nikolai Lossky, who wrote of its cost to scholarship. (Lossky, 1952, p. 232) Previously I wrote on freedom of thought and two responses to the *Sophia Affair.* (Kisliakov 2023)

It was as if to channel the gravity of the criticism that Berdyaev referred to the treatment of Bulgakov to Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brother's Karamazov*, accusing the Church of emulating "the spirit of the Grand Inquisitor" (Berdyaev, 1935, p. 73) – in this instance, the "inquisitor" not being Rome, but the Russian Church.

There was no excuse, he noted, for the arbitrary judgement of individuals without the requisite scholarly integrity to make such call – a minimal condition of which was to read the books that one was commenting on in good faith. (Berdyaev, 1935, p. 73) The major problem with the condemnations of Bulgakov's sophiology by the Church in Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia was that they neglected to cite the works that they criticised. Berdyaev wrote in no uncertain terms: "There does not exist any charisma that permits judgement of books unread. Here we are dealing with a matter that is characteristic of our epoch. This is ecclesial fascism. Fascism is the dictatorship of the youth over thought. If fascism with its violence and disrespect to human dignity is repugnant in political life, it is even more abominable in Church life. From the very decree I could smell a musty seminarianism. And I understand how heavy the conflict of Fr S. Bulgakov, a person of high intellectual culture, was with old seminarianism, which at once denies thought, demands pointless faith, faith in authority, and which is saturated with the most vulgar rationalism." (Berdyaev, 1935, p. 73)

Thus, Berdyaev believed Bulgakov's conflict, in the main, to have been with the tyranny of the old status quo, even if the aspects of Bulgakov's sophiology were not accepted by all in his circle. Substantive disagreement was not at issue in this instance: the complaint related to the refusal of the parts of the institutional Russian Church to engage in good faith.

Which meant that the crux of the issue was the willingness of the Russian Church establishment to embrace free discourse, or conversely, the steps they took to deny it. In sum, the strength of the response testified to the need for the diaspora scholarly community to detach from elements of the institutional Church that undermined academic freedom.

This was, also, a question of scholars asserting the primacy of academic merit over institutional authority. Institutional interventions were a threat; freedom, in contrast, was of paramount importance. The nature of this freedom, however, was also important, both in terms of the rights asserted and in light of the theology produced. This is important: it characterises the nature of the freedom of the Russian *intelligentsia.*

In an important sense, the events were preceded by the asserting of the freedom of academic thought as a condition of the pursuit of authentic theological insight. Bulgakov's discussion with Fr. Pavel Florensky on the creation of a "free theological academy", (Gallaher, 2002, p. 33) in a similar way Bulgakov's dissertation *Filosofia*

Khozaistva, where he had already begun to work out a eucharistic theme, according to Brandon Gallaher "began to work out his sophiology through the notion of economy as man's free, creative and spiritual relation to nature." (Gallaher, 2002, p. 33)

Freedom was inherent to Bulgakov's *weltanschauung*. This began before the Revolution and continued in the diaspora. The motif was consistent over the course of his life.

Earlier, according to Regula Zwahlen, Bulgakov's period of political involvement in the *State Duma* sought to embed in the constitutional processes of the Russian Empire "principles like freedom, equality, and order – and love" (Zwahlen, 2020, p. 85) in light of humans being in the image of God. In the diaspora, this morphed into the desire of the free pursuit of theology in a context – the Western geo-political and socio-cultural *milieu* – in which it had little political investment. Thus, institutional power was a primary obstacle to the authentic freedom of Christ. This was strong in Bulgakov; it also permeated the life of the diaspora.

In ecumenical dialogue and at an address to the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, Bulgakov expounded on these thoughts in light of his experience of the *Sophia Affair*. Stressing his view as being extrinsic to his own experiences, he stressed the necessity of freedom, particcularly in the context of dogmatic theology. However, in this light, the context of the freedom itself – of it being *in Christ* – was important.

In an important sense, the freedom of the spiritual life in which authentic theology manifested was opposed to the status quo of the Russian Church, steeped in the power structures of which Berdyaev was critical. In Bulgakov's words: "Can freedom of thought exist in a Church which has obligatory dogmatic formulae? Is there not a contradiction between free seeking for truth and the revealed dogma dispensed by the Church? I am convinced that no such contradiction exists. The dogmatic teaching of the Church must become real … it is a fact of an inner, mystical life; apart from that it is dead. But this personal experience is impossible without freedom of thought, and freedom of the spirit." (Bulgakov, 1936, p. 4)

Which, as a whole, was a nuanced freedom to which the Russian status quo was not receptive: "I should say that it is in fact a heresy of opinion to regard every new idea in the dogmatic realm as a heresy. On the contrary, one cannot avoid putting new questions and giving and giving new answers as life goes on. The freedom is of course limited, determined by the dogmas which exist already. But from this comes an inner life which grows up and develops in our own thought and consciousness. We therefore conclude that dogmatic development itself requires freedom of thought." (Bulgakov, 1936, p. 5)

In this regard, there is clarity in respect of the nature of the preference for freedom of thought. The desire to be free, in Christ, of institutional, state or ecclesial interference also reflected a corresponding aversion of exceptionalism. This betrayed a behaviour that manifested wholehearted engagement with the West. Which is discussed in the subsequent sections of this paper. In contrast, the other approach was

a dictum – an ideological superimposition over those elements that led to freedom and theological authenticity.

On this evidence, the situation was in relatively dichotomous – the community of the diaspora needing freedom against elements of an institution that resisted it. Even if this wasn't consistent a phenomenon that was constant without respite, it was consistent. This was in the context of the state or institutional power that those characteristics typically flourished.

To this end, the parallels between the historical example and the current sociopolitical and political environments are noteworthy. In post-Soviet Russia, the growth of institutional control by the state and inside the official Church has corresponded with the growth of exceptionalism, messianism and its nationalism. That aspect will be discussed later.

To be sure, nationalist ideology favours control; the negation of this, however, favours freedom – which was, for the protagonists of the Russian diaspora, freedom *in Christ*. This was also consonant with the principles of religious dialogue and cooperation. Dugin, an example of an oppressive tendency of modern Russian thought, is emblematic of a phenomenon that has seeped into the life of the country and its Church in opposition to the tendency of the protagonists of the Russian diaspora.

The critical point in this instance, however, is that the trajectory of the theology of the Post-Revolutionary Russian diaspora theology ran contrary to this. The freedom of the diaspora reflected the development of theological insight to the point that its suppression was reviled. The result was a development of theological insight that counteracted exceptionalism.

2. Development of the Ecumenical Movement

In an important sense, the value of freedom of thought and the liberty that it begat manifested acutely in the ecumenical movement and the Russian emigres' involvement. The predominant approach of the *milieu* was not for the East to "teach" the West, or vice versa, but to pursue authentic insight in light of the possibilities available at the time.

Rather, as a result of the complex historical circumstances, the period heralded the first encounter of Christians separated for a very long time. There had also been an important convergence of patristic revivalist movements, including: the Oxford Movement in England, *Ressourcement* in France, and "neo-patristics".

A substantial increase in theological activity resulted, particularly in light of ecclesiology, while scholarship became an important focal point of ecumenical engagement.

To be sure, the participation of Russian diaspora theologians in the ecumenism was an incremental process that developed over the 1920s and 1930s. It began as an early meeting of theologians and morphed into a concerted collaborative effort. An

important early episode was Bulgakov's attendance at the seminar "New Testament Teaching on the Kingdom of God" in Pserov, Czechoslovakia, where he encountered and warmly received the tradition of biblical scholarship of the West. However, he added a proviso: "We are not studying the religion of Jesus… Jesus is not for us the Prophet Jesus, but the Lord and Saviour." (Zander, 1925)

For Bulgakov, the personalist theme of encounter with God continued to grow over the interwar period, and was instrumental to the development of his ecumenical theology.

Bulgakov, however, was not an isolated case. Important ecumenical conferences took place in Edinburgh and Lausanne, and the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius was formed in the 1920s. A critical part of the ecumenical interaction was the spiritual communion present, experienced in the absence of fraternal eucharistic communion, and in an important sense, the ecclesiological insight that resulted. The expectations of the participants were exceeded and the result was a new trajectory of theological reflection resulted.

The following recollection by Nicolas Zernov, a convenor of the FSASS, and his wife Militsa in their combined memoirs, details the convergence of thought that resulted: "The British were interested in Biblical criticism, the Orthodox in meta-history and the mystery of the Church. Mere theological debate would probably have resulted in failure. Both sides spoke on their own wavelength and found it difficult to grasp the problems of the other. But a realisation of their brotherhood in Christ came in the Chapel, where every morning Orthodox and Anglicans together worshipped the same Saviour. There the linguistic, theological and ideological barriers were removed and the gift of their oneness was experienced. (Zernov, 1979)

The strength of the convergence of East and West was broadly reflected in the experiences of the protagonists of ecumenism. A case in point was the example of Myrrha Lot-Borodine, who developed a keen interest in patristics, having translated Maximus the Confessor and Nicholas Cabasilas. She also attended the ecumenical gatherings of Berdyaev and Jacque Maritain. Later, in an introduction to her book, Jean Danielou spoke of Lot-Borodine's influence on him in realising the benefit of the Greek Fathers. (Louth, 2020, p. 6-7)

Lot-Borodine, however, was genuinely surprised by the effectiveness of the ecumenical movement. In a letter to Vasily Krivochene (1900 – 1985), she admitted that she "initially treated the ecumenical movement quite negatively, for the reason that it calls upon the Orthodox consciousness to find compromises." (Obolevich, 2019) However, as with Zernov, her initial scepticism changed when she witnessed common prayer. This seemed to be the very activity that facilitated strong connections between Christians. Elsewhere I drew the conclusion: "Like Zernov, Lot-Borodine saw the unique and timely potential of the ecumenical movement, which… demonstrated a capacity to facilitate fellowship between Christians who were no longer in eucharistic communion." (Kisliakov, 2021, p. 243)

In this way, the alternative trajectory to the thought that existed prior to the Revolution emerged as a result of the interactions of the ecumenical movement.

Moreover, a non-homogenous ecumenical theology also emerged as a result of this. An accurate assessment of the ecumenical theology that emerged requires an analysis that emerged is beyond the scope of this paper. However, its extent and degree of originality powerfully transmitted by Bulgakov in his essay *By Jacob's Well*. There, he argued for the restoration of fraternal eucharistic communion as a means of establishing the unity of the Church. This was in contrast to the prevalent in the ecumenical movement that the road to unity was paved by dogmatic agreement.

Bulgakov argued that the unity of the Church already existed, and that as a result, the objective of the ecumenical movement was for this to be realised: "What is required for a complete reunion, and where do we start? The predominant formula runs: sacramental fellowship must be preceded by preliminary dogmatic agreement. But is this axiom so indisputable as it appears? Here on one scale of the balance we have a difference in certain Christian dogmas and theological opinions, and an estrangement which has been formed through centuries; on the other hand we have the unity of the sacramental life. May it not be that a unity in the sacrament will be the only way towards overcoming this difference? Why should we not seek to surmount a heresy in teaching through superseding a heresy of life such as division? May it not be that Christians sin now by not heeding the common Eucharistic call?" (Bulgakov, 1933, p. 17)

Bulgakov's opinion, to be sure, did not represent the entirety of the theology of the ecumenical movement. Notwithstanding, as I have demonstrated in a comparative analysis of the eucharistic aspect of his and Afanasiev's ecumenical theologies, these sentiments were shared. The question was also hotly debated at the time of his proposal to Bulgakov's role in determining its trajectory should not be underestimated.

As the founding dean of the St. Serge Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, and as spiritual father to much of its community, he set the tone for much of the activity of diaspora theology. This was particularly strong in the ecumenical space.

In respect of the freedom of intellectual thought, this was consistent with his pre-Revolutionary tone. The development of the thought of the Russian diaspora in light of the ecumenical movement was also consistent with the openness that characterised that freedom. This represented the opposite of Russian exceptionalism. There was as a result also an apprehension of the exceptionalism that manifested elsewhere, demonstrated by the enthusiastic embrace of an entirely new theological focus.

3. Recasting the Notion of Sobornost in the Diaspora

This was not uncommon throughout their intellectual community. The intellectual contribution of the Russian diaspora should be seen in light of it having been a community. While it did not have a homogenous intellectual approach, its trajectory and approach to exceptionalism was consistent. The distance from exceptionalism and the embrace the full potential free theological discourse is particularly evident in the recasting of the pre-Revolutionary notion of *sobornost*.

In an important sense, the thought trajectory of the Russian diaspora was fundamentally opposed to exceptionalism, messianism and nationalism. A focal point of the trajectory of the theology of the Russian diaspora was the reconceptualisation of the notion of *sobornost*, which evolved from its pre-Revolutionary foundation in order to become the *raison d'etre* of Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement.

In a sense the meaning of the term is loaded, its origin and cumulative meaning from the time of the *Slavophiles* having undergone multiple developments and iterations. In an attempt to define the term, Professor Vladimir Ilyin, a protagonist of the diaspora *intelligentsia*, attempted the following comprehensive definition, which captured the extent of the complexity of its historical meaning, but also recognised its importance to ecumenism: "One cannot interpret the Russo-Slavonic word "sobornost" by any one equivalent word or expression, for it stands for a whole complex of meanings. The word "sobornost" conveys the fundamental particularities of the Church if Christ, but simultaneously it expresses the actual spiritual atmosphere in which members of the Church exist – viz. the spiritual oxygen, if we may put it that way, which they inhale and through which they are united. One particular meaning of "sobornost" corresponds to the word "Catholicity", Catholic… It denotes the community, the universality, the unity and oneness of the Church as the Body of Christ, for according to St. Paul's teaching Christ is not divided ("Is Christ divided?"), and a Christian cannot describe himself as "of Paul, or of Apollos, or of Cephas." According to this interpretation Catholicity as integrality is the opposite of "incompleteness", "sectarianism"…" (Ilyin, 1935, p. 5)

To which Ilyin stressed its universal ecclesiological meaning: "This is the way in which the ninth article of the Nicene Creed (381) defines the Church – "One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church." Generally speaking the universal and even the cosmic element is very much akin to the Christian spirit, to the spirit of Christian love. Christ does not exclude anyone from His bosom but calls everyone, for "he will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of His truth." The holy Apostle Paul, insisting on the universal nature of Christiaity, says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male for female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)" (Ilyin, 1935, p. 6)

To be sure, it would be disingenuous to deny any propensity of *sobornost* towards exceptionalism: Dmitri Biriukov recently argued for its potential for totalitarianism. (Biriukov, 2023) However, in the context of post-Revolutionary Russian thought, its intellectual meaning and how it came to reflect the organic unity of the Church in an ecumenical context – stood in opposition to the exceptionalist archetype. Its primary focus was the unity of the Church, seen in light of the activity of the ecumenical movement, embedded in a personalist conception of and experience of Christ, is clear from Ilyin's discussion on the subject.

In 1935, the importance of the notion of *sobornost* to the Russian diaspora *milieu* substantially gained a new platform when the name of the *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius* became *Sobornost*. This was a significant change. It was also instructive in understanding the trajectory of Russian thought and its differentiation in the diaspora from that which preceded it in the homeland in advance of the Revolution.

The editorial of the first edition noted: "One of the characteristics of Orthodoxy is the emphasis that it lays upon the Resurrection. The theology and devotion of the East look past Calvary to the Risen life. Theosis, the transfiguration of the world, the deification of man is the end. We need this emphasis today. There is a danger of our doing too much of our thinking and living on the wrong side of Calvary. We may be so concerned with the imitation of Christ that we lost sight of the Christification of man." (Editorial, 1935, p. 1)

Which, from the perspective of the journal, needed to be seen in light of the global socio-cultural and political crisis of the 1930s. The editorial continued: "We are living in a decaying civilisation. Economically, morally, and politically the old order changeth. "Planning" is in the air. But are the plans big enough? There is a recoil from selfish individualism, but the totalitarian start or the deification of the proletariat, are not sufficient alternatives. As Lucien Bonoparte said, the world demands transformations which are more than a mere "turning over of the dung-hill". Revolutions which are too much concerned with redistributing the loaves and fishes and which involve no transvaluation of values are like patriotism "not enough". (Editorial, 1935, p. 2)

Thus, the journal and its intellectual contribution, therefore, became adept at addressing the needs of the historical epoch. In an important sense, the change intended was encapsulated in the Resurrection. This had immense theological significance. Perhaps, the era's radicalism was channelled to the direction of theological authenticity and action. According to the editorial: "The Easter resurrection and revolution only come to life again in us who are part of Christ's Body as we are crucified with Christ. "I die daily", says St. Paul, and that is why he could also say, "To me to live is Christ."(Editorial, 1935, p. 2)

Or put differently: "There is no other way. A poultice of Christian ideology will not resuscitate the expiring carcase of Western civilization. But lives offered in sacrifice in union with Calvary will be channels of resurrection life. The deification of the world

begins with the deification of mankind, and that means actual individuals who die daily that the victorious Christ may live again in them." (Editorial, 1935, pp. 2-3)

In an important sense, it is not coincidental that the radicalism of the 1930s was channelled in the direction of the power of the Resurrection. *Sobornost* was adept to meeting this need. The journal and the tone of its theology and religious philosophy came to encapsulate a large part of the thought of the diaspora. The notion of *sobornost* in that context also came to reflect the unity in Christ to which theologians aspired, as an inheritor of an important thread of pre-Revolutionary thought and as a trajectory of its own context.

In the same article in which his definition was published, Ilyin reinforced this meaning, stressing both the dangers of institutionalisation and individualism – pointing to the balance that *sobornost* provided: "…the cultural-organisational and the strictly-canonical understanding of the Church is also fraught with danger – although a danger which is directly opposite to that of sectarian individualism. The menace consists in a loss of the inner spirit of binding love, and the substitution for it of a feeling of solidarity and discipline and a repression of personal freedom… It is precisely this marvellous activity of the Spirit of Love, Who is the Holy Ghost, that creates *sobornost*, viz. a free, mystical-ontological union of those, who, though they differ in personal qualities and in individual safety, are nevertheless one in the Spirit of Love." (Ilyin, 1935, p. 6)

Which, as a consequence of the unity it promulgated, meant that the notion of *sobornost* was ecclesiologically significant, in a way derived from trinitarian theology and the eucharist. Ilyin continued: "Proceeding from this assumption it may be said that God Himself is a perfect Sobor – viz. a perfect one-ness – a united life in common (ομοουσία) of the three Persons, the Hypostases of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Holy Trinity is a Heavenly Church, a Heavenly Sobor. Therefore we must say and we should insist on the fact that the Church-Soborny unity should be realized in the image of the triune God… However, in spite of the hierarchical-canonical structure of the "sobor", *all abide in it as active members* – for they are all in the one body of Christ. From the Orthodox point of view laymen also belong to an order – only this order is hierarchically lower than that of the priesthood. If we understand sobornost in this way there can be no question of collective coercion, or of personal coercion, or of personal coercion, for there must exist a hierarchical agreement of unity in multiplicity: putting it in another way, a Church symphony, which plays and sings a sing of a communion in love between the Creator and His mystical bride Creation as represented by members of the Church. (Ilyin, 1935, pp. 6-7)

Thus, the sentiment expressed by Ilyin resonated with the theology of the protagonists of the Russian diaspora. The pattern was evident in a broader sense and across generations. Aidan Nichols, for example, notes that Bulgakov and Afanasiev, despite substantial differences in their theologies and personal age, shared the "wellnigh ubiquitous Russian *sobornost* motif, but also the idea of the Church's foundation

in the bodily-sacramental being of Christ in the eucharist, as achieved through the Holy Spirit." (Nichols, 1989, p. 152)

Moreover, in the context of the theology of the Russian diaspora, *sobornost* was an effective corollary of the development of theological insight, particularly in light of ecclesiology. The *sobornal* element of Bulgakov's ecclesiology, for instance, is evident in his argument that given that the authority of the Church is derived from the body of the Church, including its people, the authority of the hierarchy is eucharistic in nature. (Bulgakov, 1935, p. 35) Nichols identifies this: "While not denying that a hierarchical principle has existed in the Church since its very origin, he (Bulgakov)… insists that *sobornost'* embraces this principle, bearing and generating it while not, however, being its creator *tout court*. Bulgakov claims, it seems, that in the first two or three decades of the Church's life the *sobornost'* of apostolic consciousness guaranteed a ministerial succession of some kind, a kind not yet of the threefold ministry. After this interlude, the same *sobornost'* was manifested in the 'ordained charism', conferred on by the laying-on of hands and issuing three degrees familiar from later Church order." (Nichols, 1989, p. 151)

To be sure, this does not deny the manifold differences of the protagonists of the theology of the post-Revolutionary Russian diaspora: Bulgakov and Ilyin, for example, might have undertaken different approaches to scholarship and had different interests, but the synergies of their thought are noteworthy, to the extent that it would be to exaggerate to say that as a whole, the thought of the Russian diaspora was exceptionalist.

Rather, the historical evidence shows that the diaspora *intelligentsia* embraced its new conditions wholeheartedly, even to the point that existing notions received new understanding. Indeed, the eclectic nature of the diaspora environment was pivotal due to the ideological captivity of the homeland – at the time, there wasn't much to be "nationalist" about. This in turn led to the broadening of theological insight, consistent with the ecumenical environment in which it emerged.

As a result, the diaspora engagement with the West and what came from it represented an entirely different trajectory. This means that the post-Soviet rise of nationalism is by no means the only tendency or even norm of Russian thought. In particular, the stress on freedom of thought stood at odds with the totalitarian instinct that this sentiment possesses; together with the development of theological insight that this garnered, a broadening and strengthening of theology and religious philosophy resulted.

In the end, it might be the case that these elements ebb and flow over the course of history, and the current tendency, which is averse to dialogue is an anomaly that will yet have its day. Meanwhile, the historic breadth of Russian thought and its multiple contribute to the overall discussion, and inform the work of international religious dialogue and cooperation.

Conclusion

The history of the intelligentsia of the Russian diaspora is instructive on multiple fronts – not least due to the fact that it represented a continuation of the thought that preceded 1917, but also as a result of its ability to harness the potential of its environment as a catalyst of a new direction of thought. This was particularly prominent in the context of the FSASS, but also manifested in France where synergistic lines of thought emerged in an ecumenical context.

The adaptation of the notion of *sobornost* – a conception of sufficiently nebulous origin in pre-Revolutionary theology and religious philosophy, to a conception that captured the breadth of the ecclesiological and eucharistic aspects of ecumenical engagement, with dogmatic consequence and influence on trinitarian theology. This was, to be sure, a discrete theological conception, but one that was emblematic of the trajectory of thought of the *intelligentsia* that had emigrated.

Observation of the development of the thought of the Russian diaspora after the Revolution reveal not only a continuation and preservation of the legacy that had been inherited, but the development of a trajectory of thought that was fitting to the context in which it found itself. As has been shown in this paper, this was prevalent in three areas: freedom of thought, the emergence of the ecumenical movement, and in the evolution of the notion of *sobornost*.

These three examples are not exhaustive: their value, rather, resides in their ability to reveal an alternative to anything that had been prevalent at an earlier time.

The salient point is that despite exceptions, "Russian thought" is not necessarily something that tends towards exceptionalism, or nationalism. Conversely, the experience of the *intelligentsia* betrays an ability to reach out and engage with the West, to make an overall contribution that exceeds the sum of the whole. The potential this brings to religious dialogue and cooperation is established by the fact that its historical record is clear – confirming that the needs to which ecumenism spoke were common, not a fact of "East" or "West".

Despite the "winter of ecumenism" (Evans, 1996) of the contemporary epoch in comparison to the time of the genesis of the ecumenical movement, the substantive point remains in force.

This, to be sure, is a stark contrast to the trajectory of thought in post-Soviet Russia, which has in large part favoured the exceptionalist narrative favoured by Dugin. As a historical example, it shows that by the fostering and promulgation of the alternative a trajectory is possible to sentiments that foster aggression. This is apt in light of the fact that exceptionalist tendencies were a feature of that epoch as they are of the present. The two ebb, flow and counteract each other – and this is a case for, at least in a conditional sense, optimism.

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