



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

Humanism, Ecumenism, and Ecology: How to render St. Justin's Theology fruitful for the West

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Abstract:

Religious believers tend to identify secularism as their main (and common) enemy. Ever since the 20th century, many Christian believers in the West have expected relief from inter-confessional (and even inter-faith) ecumenism. The hope was to develop a 'common voice,' securing greater social influence for believers within secularized Western societies. Dialoguing away inter-denominational (and even inter-faith) dissent is to offer a paradigm for "reconciled diversity," supporting secular pursuits of social peace under conditions of modern world view pluralism.¹

Some Western Christians aspired to even wider 'ecumenism' with confessing non-believers, achieved by agreeing on "secular" values with a claimed (Judaeo-) Christian origin.² Such agreement is (somehow) supposed to 'Christianize' even secularism. Christians in turn might join the Enlightenment's own putatively rational ecumenism of (allegedly) Christianity-derived moral commitments.³ Any particular religious customs, convictions, modes of worship and folklore here reduce to matters of contingent cultural diversity and individual choice.⁴ Both the de-institutionalized faiths endorsed in terms of Western "believing without belonging" and the institution-linked East European post-communist practice of "belonging without believing" can thus - so the assumption goes - peacefully co-exist with their

¹ A typical presentation of such concern, as linked with the phenomenon of ethnocentrism, is offered in the opening paragraphs of Rösen 2006, 29ff. See also H.T. Engelhardt 2017, 334 ff.

² Cf. Delkeskamp-Hayes 2016. Thus Rösen (2006, 252) speaks of monotheism's inherent tendency to "transcend itself" into the secular acceptance of universal humanity. The implication is that this would harmonize with a "public (or civil) religion" (cf. Wolf 1999, 72, Ratzinger 2006, 120.)

³ Kant 1960, 113. Thus Baumgartner (2006, 175f) develops a theological ethics that can be universalized within secular society by adjusting to the standards of scholarship accepted within that secular society without, so he claims, losing its theological character.

⁴ Rösen (2006, 251) here invokes the need for "aestheticizing" and "historical contextualizing."



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

respective secular environments.⁵

Saints tend to challenge any merely this-worldly peace. Christ Himself proclaims His gospel's divisive impact (Mt. 10,34). Only the "traditional" (minority) Christians in Western Europe insist on Christ's Own transcendence-linked offer of peace. They find themselves obliged in faith to include not only secularists among their opponents, but also their post-traditional fellow believers, discounting them as merely would-be Christians, or 'under-cover secularists' with religious frills. Conversely, post-traditional Christians cannot but regard such pre-Enlightenment remnants as "fundamentalists:" The latter's pious intransigence to inter-faith recognition or unification projects threatens Post-traditionalists' hope for secular acceptance. They perceive such intransigence as an impediment to social peace.⁶

This essay looks at the challenge St. Justin the New of Ćelije presents for ecumenism and its promise of man-made peace. Attending to the integrity costs involved in attempts at rendering his teaching accessible to an ecumenism-obsessed Christian West and illustrating those costs in view of recent inter-faith ecological projects, this essay concludes by advocating an un-mitigated Christian focus on the peace of Christ, as accessible not through anti-secularism but through a more thorough renunciation of (religious or non-religious) humanism.

I. Introduction

In addressing the challenge a recently recognized saint presents for ecumenism and its promise of man-made peace, this essay's first section explores the criticism the Venerable Justin the New of Ćelije directed against the dominant vision of that ecumenism. It highlights the paradox involved in the attempt, by some of his spiritual children and later followers, to mitigate that criticism in order – so we may assume - to render his theological teaching more acceptable to the non-Orthodox West.

The second section further illustrates that paradox. It focuses on mankind's ecological crisis as one of those social issues that have attained prominence among contemporary ecumenists. Here the question is discussed how much dialoguing accommodation would be needed to facilitate such Western acceptability, and whether this is possible without distorting the integrity of St. Justin's theology.

The conclusion advocates prioritizing concern for that integrity. Granted that support

⁵ As Cvetković 2017, 381 points out: For St. Justin the liberalism in Western Europe is just as man-idolizing as the communism of the European East.

⁶ In his brilliantly scathing analysis of theologically and historically misguided academic reception of St. Justin's theology in 21st century Germany, Cvetković (2021a, 1003) refers to Zeltner Pavlović's analysis of Western perceptions of Orthodoxy's Byzantine heritage as a 'culture of violence.'



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

for St. Justin' critique of Western ecumenism might initially lower the chances for a favorable reception in the West, in the long run greater profit is in store through the Saint's advocacy of another kind of "social" peace, a pursuit that follows Christ's own promise.

II. The meaning of St. Justin's critique of ecumenism

More radically than the Orthodox East, Western Christianity is denominationally divided. In the East, ecclesial (and thus also social) discord has always derived from personal failure to live up to the Divine-human reality of the Church; in the latter case, as St. Justin argues, such discord is systemic.⁷ Here an unsurmountable diversity of dogmatic teachings reveals the underlying humanism St. Justin identifies in the post-schism Christian West.⁸

One of the concerns that motivated the Enlightenment's call for secularization was social peace. The expectation was, once irrational religious dissent was set aside, harmonious human flourishing would no longer be endangered by power-hungry religious zealots. Seeking to salvage social space for their faith, even the post-traditional believers of today, in addition to "Christianizing" secularizers' humanist values, proclaim their ability to guarantee such peace on their own: Following a modernized rendering of Christ's call for unity (Jn. 17,21-3), they endeavor to "ecumenize" dogmatic dissent away.⁹ This strategy is expected to weaken believers' institutionally supported (i.e. "church"-based) dogmatism.¹⁰ Prioritizing doctrinal consensus over against faithfulness to -so it is argued - outdated religious commitments, post-traditional believers can attribute any remaining religious differences to cultural contingencies. Given the limitations hampering any finitely human attempts to capture the transcendent object of religious beliefs, such differences can be transformed into 'helpful' complementarity, reducing to a "reconciled diversity."¹¹

⁷ Popović 1994f, 183.

⁸ Popović 1994f, 169ff, 2023c, 85f, 100f.

⁹ Popović 1994f, 172. The interest of civil society in a structural weakening of particularity in religious claims and commitments (and thus of their potential for disagreement and aggression) is well captured by Rösen 2006, 255ff.

¹⁰ A prominent example is the 1973 *Leuenberg Agreement* which, inspired by the "pluralist theology of religions" of John Hicks, unified the various German Protestantisms into one German super-church (the *Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands*). This document, while explicitly invoking *Confessio Augustana's* article VII on conditions for church unity, attends only to the first (doctrinal consensus), while entirely disregarding the second (the right administration of the sacraments, cf. Kimme 1974, 101). Obviously, these as well promised no facile consensus (Brunner 1974, 69) and were thus set aside.

¹¹ In the case of German Protestant unification dialogues, this argument was used to justify the plurality of Christian confessions (Lienhard, 2003, 25, 37). For the transformation of disagreements in view of the "Divine law" into affirmation of a complementarity cf. Projektgruppe 2003, 181. A similar replacement was tried in



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

Speaking as a representative of the one holy universal and apostolic Church,¹² and thus as champion of the most traditional of all traditional Christian faiths targeted by such a strategy, St. Justin places Christ's call to unity in the context of Christ's own invocation of "fire" and "sword."¹³ He vigorously opposes doctrinal consensus-negotiation or claims to "reconciled diversity" among the "legion" of self-styled "churches."¹⁴ He endorses the task of dividing those who rightly recognize Christ's Divine humanity from those who do not (cf. Mk. 16,16).¹⁵ Here, "rightly recognizing," does not reduce to agreement to any set of dogmatic statements singled out as "essential": It requires an assent to holy Tradition that would be repudiated, and threatened with anathematized exclusion, by encompassing even just one single little heresy.¹⁶

The reason for this insistence on comprehensive doctrinal consensus for realized (and in a Christ-oriented sense 'discriminating') Christian unity lies in St. Justin's theology.

We will now (1.), explore in what sense that theology undergirds the need for such comprehensiveness, and (2.), examine some problematic ways in which St. Justin's followers have sought to repudiate his critique of ecumenism.

view of the pastoral office (cf. Regionalgruppe "Kopenhagen" 1982, 66, Bericht, 1981, 108 f., Regionalgruppe "Berlin" 1982, 50). A striking illustration for the way in which such complementarity is seen "to heal human shortcomings" is offered by the report of the Regionalgruppe "Amsterdam" 1982, 40 ff. For a charismatic variant of such justification of plurality see Cullmann 1972.

¹² Cf. *Letter 70 to Amfilohi Radović*, quoted in Cvetković 2021b, 310f.

¹³ Mt. 10, 34, Lk. 12, 49, cf. Popović 2023c, 53f.

¹⁴ Ever since 1965, Roman Catholic Popes followed the lead of Germany's Union-friendly Protestants in restricting inter-faith dialogue in ways that should avoid anything that might "unbrotherly exclude, or be experienced by others as demeaning," cf. John Paul II 1995, ##15, 27. St. Justin, in contrast, rejects alleged "dialogues of love" without truth, 1994f, 170ff. He identifies them as dialogues of falsehoods, loc.cit., 171. In the same critical spirit, he likens a meeting by the WCC in Upsala to an attempt at re-building the tower of Babel (2023, Aufz., 95).

¹⁵ Popović 2023b, 55f, see also 2023c, 83: "[What is needed is] a separation of the Divine, Divine-human, from the diabolical" [Translated by CDH].

¹⁶ Popović 2023c, 90, cf. Tit. 3,10. See also the statement through which St. Mark of Ephesus saved Orthodoxy from union with Rome: "One who departs even by a little from the Genuine faith is deemed a heretic and is subjected to the laws against heretics... Latins [Roman Catholic Church] are therefore heretics, and we have cut them off as heretics." (Quoted in Calington 2016, 25.)

To be sure, the Church always distinguished between "central" Christian truths and "adiaphora." Yet after Vatican II had conceded "elements of truth" also in non-Christian religions, Pope John Paul II separated what is central from what is peripheral in such a way that doctrinal disagreements can be taken to be overcome, as long as merely central Christian dogmas are agreed on (1995, ##11-3). On the Protestant side, this discursively selective approach, prominently represented by Jacques Dupuis, corresponds to the one endorsed by Schiefer (1983, 537) and to the claim that truths situated outside the "core" area of the faith are "salvationally insignificant" (Brunner 1974, 69, von Krause 1974, 252, see the criticism in Delkeskamp-Hayes 2015a, 114). Different Christianities can thus be conceived as having preserved either more or less "splinters" of the truth, thus either getting acknowledged as "a church" or denied that title.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

1. An overview of St. Justin's theology

St. Justin's theology turns on Christ's incarnation as the God-man. This central focus serves as a key to understanding the inner dynamic of salvation history;¹⁷ it defines the battlefield on which the Church must defend her faith. Christ's incarnation reveals

- humans' Divine creation and vocation,
- the meaning of their fall from grace,
- Christ's offer of renewed Divine grace,
- humans' diversely adopted acceptance or betrayal of that offer,
- and the respective eschatological consequences.

The appearance of the Logos and son of God, incarnate as the God-man, both illumines (as it were, backwards-looking) the Logos-ness of the created world¹⁸ which man, as the image of that creative Logos, was to sanctify. It also, (as it were, forwards-looking) invites fallen humans back into that sanctifying work through a Divine-human life in the Church, understood as the eternal incarnation of His resurrected presence.¹⁹ As communion with that eternal presence, such life is thus itself Divinely-human.²⁰ Here the holy Trinity dwelling within the human heart and mind (cf. Jn 14,23), supports the theological virtues²¹ required for man's worship of sanctifying the world, primarily by his eucharistic offering.

Man's initial fall from grace had resulted from his refusal to sustain his Divine-human task of mastery over the created world in love-sustained obedience to its creator. He had failed to live up to his Logos-like vocation. In preferring human autonomy as the self-centered pursuit of the God-like knowledge of good and evil, man exchanged his worship of the Divine Other for worship of himself.²² He lost his Divine-human life of grace. Christ's renewed offer of such grace, as manifested in His own Divine-human incarnation, invites fallen humans into renewed fellowship.²³ Here again, however, humans' refusal of that offer, whether among Christ's contemporaries who failed to acknowledge His Divine humanity, or among all later heretics who separated themselves from the Church, confirmed that original mis-choice of human self-idolatry, or, as St. Justin describes it, re-established humanism.²⁴

The term "humanism," both in pagan antiquity and in the post-medieval Christian West even until today, has a positive ring: It invokes the virtues of humane-ness as opposed

¹⁷ Popović 1989c, 96f.

¹⁸ Popović 1989d, 120f.

¹⁹ Popović 1989c, 99.

²⁰ Popović 1989d, 125ff.

²¹ Popović 1994a, 24, 26ff, 1994c, 55.

²² Cf. Rm. 1,25, Popović 1989c, 99, 1994f, 179, 2023e, 131.

²³ Popović, 1989c, 101.

²⁴ Popović 1989b, 88.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

to the vices of in-humanity. For St. Justin, that positive ring is deceptive: The affirmation of humanistic virtue, once separated from man's Divine calling, rests on the assumption of independent human competence to define how such virtue should be understood. That assumption thus re-affirms the very claim to independent human discernment of good and evil, the initial pursuit of which had triggered mankind's first trespass.²⁵ It proceeds in the direction of that first human turn towards wanting to be "like God" outside of obedience to God.²⁶ The affirmation of some independent "good" of humanism again re-enacts humans' fall from grace; it exchanges obedient worship of the un-created for worship of the created.²⁷

Even more, the Venerable discerns that same affirmation (and idolatry) not only among un-believers, but in the midst of Western Christianity itself. He even identifies that idolatry²⁸, ever after Rome's separation from the Church, as that Christianity's defining trait. This separation, inaugurated by papal claims to a primacy of power and to doctrinal authority (later canonized as 'infallibility'), was tantamount to betraying the Divine-human reality of the Church: It excluded Christ's eternal presence in His incarnate body by inventing a human vicarship for an absent leader. It in fact humanized that Divine presence away.²⁹

In the post-medieval West, the term "humanism" is usually associated with secularism's emancipation from religious, and especially Christian beliefs. The radical sense in which St. Justin charges the Christian papacy itself with such humanism, by contrast, stipulates the existence of a specifically religious, and even allegedly Christian, type of man-worship.³⁰ From this perspective, the major threat to the faith derives not only from Enlightenment-framed confessedly secularist ideologies East and West; it also derives from confessing Christians whom, ever since their separation from the Apostolic Church and right up to their post-Enlightenment morally culturalized variations, St. Justin discerns as no longer hospitable to the holy Trinity's offer of grace-filled in-dwelling in the human heart and mind.

St. Justin's landscape of humanist idolatries thus encompasses

- Fallen mankind before Christ (excluding – so we may assume - God's personal friends, such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses³¹, Elias, and others)

²⁵ Popović 1994d, 101, 105: "In the history of the human race there have been three principal falls: that of Adam, that of Judas, and that of the pope."

²⁶ Popović 1994d, 101: "Humanistic anthropocentricity is in essence devil-centeredness."

²⁷ Popović 1994d, 102.

²⁸ Popović 2023c, 98.

²⁹ Popović 1994d, see also 1989d, 135ff.

³⁰ Popović 2023e, 138ff.

³¹ Popović 1994e, 144.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

- Israelite and gentile addressees of the Divine-human Gospel who refused its saving offer
- Christian heretics
- Christians under a Roman Papacy that had exchanged worship of the God-man by worship of, i.e. religious compliance with, the man-made decisions and “truths” issuing from successive Popes
- Later Christian groups that opposed papal claims but, trusting in their variegated own ability to discern religious and moral truth, refused the Eastern Patriarch’s invitation of return to the Apostolic Church
- Confessing non-Christians (or “secularists”) who, with good Enlightenment-certified rational,³² moral, and political reasons, rejected the religiously camouflaged humanism, to which their Western experience had remained limited, in favor of an honestly pagan man-worship,³³ as well as, less trivially,
- Post-Enlightenment self-defined believers endorsing the humanist commitments they derive from their ancestral Western faiths. They have settled for a moral culture that is kept “religious” by reference to freely floating spiritualities and pious folklore.³⁴ They claim the confessed humanism of Western Europe’s secularist majorities to be reconcilable with the Christian faith secular humanism still insists on opposing. That faith is thus invoked for political concerns about social inclusion, non-discrimination and equal opportunities for sexual minorities openly violating traditional Christian norms.

The radical sense in which St. Justin opposes worship of Christ as God-man to worship of all man-made man-gods thus discloses not only the sinful character of confessed paganisms of all times and of the confessed secularism of the Enlightenment-framed ideologies East and West; it also discloses the sinful character of all post-schism Western Christianities.³⁵ Here he diagnoses heresy, because relief for human and social problems is sought through predominantly human methods, rather than primarily through the Divine-human resources offered by the Church.³⁶ Such “putting their trust in princes, in mortal man who cannot save” (Ps. 147,3), in repudiating the sanctifying mission of the Church, confirms his diagnosis of humanist man-worship, or of pagan idolatry at the heart of the Christian West.³⁷

This humanism also informs the epistemological assumptions undergirding Western

³² Popović (2023c, 91) calls rationalism the ‘basic disease’ of Europe.

³³ Popović 1994f, 181ff.

³⁴ Cf. Engelhardt 2017, 428f.

³⁵ Popović 1994a, 29f.

³⁶ Popović 1989c, 100.

³⁷ Popović 1994c, 56f.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

ecumenist aspirations. Here St. Justin likens the Logos' sowing His creative words like seeds, endowed with the power of generating things, to His proclamation of the Gospel planting the seed of eternal life into the human soul.³⁸ This is why the "truth" of the Christian faith is not primarily an object of discursive opinion. It is not a 'what' that could be subjected to ecumenist consensus negotiation, settlement for compromise, and relegation of further "undecidables" to the sphere of culturally or individually contingent preference.³⁹ Instead, Christian Truth is a 'Who,' i.e., Christ's own Divine-Human person,⁴⁰ Who appeared as incarnate God-man to His contemporaries and maintains His resurrected presence eternally incarnate in His Church. This is also why the unity Christ calls for among His followers arises from a primary unity with God,⁴¹ i.e., the in-dwelling of the Holy Trinity in their hearts and minds. Only in this way can the unifying creative love of God ecclesially incarnate those followers within one another.⁴²

Christ's call to unity, as divine-human unity with the resurrected Christ, thus comes as invitation into a new life, the life of the Church.⁴³ The mystical impact of that unity was lost in the West, when self-defined "vicars" of Christ relegated Him to His supposedly "native" transcendence, claiming their own lordship over the faith. Even that faith was no longer conceived as an ascesis of trust in, and openness to the in-dwelling of God. Instead, it was reduced to a compendium of rational "dogmatics:" The Divine-human work of prayer as the home of theology was exchanged by scholarly analysis.⁴⁴ Reason was here invoked as divinely created in likeness to the Divine Logos, but no longer recognized as distorted through man's fall from grace. Theology thus was moved from the monastery (with its culture of ascetic

³⁸ Popović 1989a, 79f.

³⁹ Even more, as Who-truth, it is not essentially a matter of discursive objectification, with historically contingent ways of expression, so that the difference between theological truth and falsehood could be construed as a mere challenge of translation (as in John Paul II, 1995, ##18,19). Nor can the varieties of such expressions be re-valued as enriching pluralism. (For the Protestant replacement of truth by variety see Künneth 1974, 106ff.)

⁴⁰ Popović 1989c, 97.

⁴¹ Popović 1989d, 129.

⁴² Popović 1994a, 24, see also the very helpful presentation in Cvetković 2017, 395ff.

⁴³ In contrast, ecumenists have reconfigured that "life in Christ as truth" by re-framing it in terms of a cross-denominational venture of discovery, which, merely as such, is taken to create a community (John Paul II, 1995 # 32). That human community is then accepted as Christian unity (op.cit. #59), based on a consensual grasp of such "truth" (op.cit., ## 15, 32, 33, 38).

⁴⁴ In consequence of this move, access to the sources of theology in the biblical self-revelation of an utterly transcendent God, first (in the Old Testament) to His chosen people and then (in the New Testament) to all humans, no longer focuses on the saints, als on experts in the Divine-human life with Christ. Instead, such access is sought in terms of the metaphysics of pagan philosophy according to scholarly standards. It is instructive to see that Thomas of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* discusses Christianity's theological virtues before even introducing Christ.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

virtue) to the academia.⁴⁵ Once theology was separated from its original Divine-human synergy, the papal dogma of infallibility infected the Church with the principle of human self-interest, or self-assertion.⁴⁶ That “church” itself thus became “humanized” and vulnerable to the impact of un-restrained passions.⁴⁷

A much more basic divide thus separates the Orthodox Church as the home of Christian unity, as unity with Christ, from the divided Western denominations. Differing discursive statements about the faith can contradict each other and divide their proponents. Partakers of the ecclesial life of that faith, by contrast, can differ only in their varying degrees of personal perfection. Inter-denominational discord, as evinced by various “religious wars” within Western Europe and as motive for the Enlightenment’s hope for peace through secularism, is thus not an inherent feature of true faith; it attends only its humanized distortions. Only on that distorted side of the divide, as signaled by Christ’s sword, can it sound plausible to seek an alternative peace through ecumenist attempts to subjectivize competing religious truth claims into matters of contingent culture and choice.⁴⁸ Only within that humanized version of the faith does negotiation about consensus formulars, mutual compromise and pragmatic adjustments make sense. On the non-distorted side of that same divide, the one represented by the Venerable Justin, discord takes a different form and calls for different remedies. As both *Acts* and *Apostolic letters* illustrate, the Church assembles both, saints and sinners. Here as well, believers’ un-redeemed passions engender conflict. Given fallen humans’ exposure to finitude and need, competition for scarce resources is a constant temptation, and the same holds for passionate pursuits of prominence and power. Still, the Divine-human life of the Church offers spiritual therapies: Here doctrinal deviation is removed by the “rejection” of persistent heretics. Personal or group discord, on the other hand, is restored by the mysteries of confession and absolution. Here, within a maintained unity of faith, trespassers can be restored to the Divinely humble and kenotic love that can teach members to “bear one another’s burdens.” (Gal. 6,2). Here, “peace” is sought in a decidedly non-worldly way (Jn. 14,27).

This opens up a quite different perspective on the discord which, during centuries of such “rejected” heresies pursuing their own denominational paths, has profoundly divided the post-schisma confessions of the West from the Church: Here that very discord can once again be attributed to alienation from those ecclesial virtues that support believers’ deification. Here

⁴⁵ Popović 1989d, 137f. On the long-term disruptive effects of the resulting rationalization of theology see Delkeskamp-Hayes 2015a, 115ff.

⁴⁶ Cvetković 2021b, 240.

⁴⁷ The implied “temporalization of doctrine” then renders the Gospel itself dependent on changing “spirits of the time.”

⁴⁸ Cf. Rösen 2006, 252f, with reference to the resulting privatization of positive religion and to the peace-preserving function of a pluralist civil religion: After all, “Religious claims to absolute truth are undiscerningly associated with the endorsement of violence.” (Delkeskamp-Hayes 2015b, 99f).



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

an effective therapy refers the alienated Christians to Christ Himself (2021, 323f), invites them to offer a repentant turn of heart and mind, and get them baptized into the Church that follows Christ's universal call.⁴⁹ From this perspective, Western-style ecumenist dialogues pursuing their discursive placebo remedies turn out to be foundationally distracting.⁵⁰ They persevere in their humanist idolatry of man. Ecumenism, as an invention by and for heretical Christians, thus deserves the epithet of a pan-heresy.⁵¹

2. Some problematic attempts at rendering St. Justin palatable for the West

With the 1974 publication of St. Justin's *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, Western readers came to perceive his critique of ecumenism as conditioned by a general "Anti-Westernism."⁵² A number of his spiritual children (with His Eminence, Bishop Atanasie Jevtić occupying a prominent place) and later followers have deplored the fact that "Popović's negative criticism of the West as such, including its non-Orthodox ecclesial structures, might invite a disqualifying approach."⁵³ These followers have sought to soften the harshness of his critique by pointing out that the original draft of 1972, published in 2010 with additional notes that were discovered only after St. Justin's passing away, shows a more sophisticated assessment of ecumenism. In these additional notes, the term "ecumenism" is understood as undergirding (rather than humanistically compromising) the "collegial" character of the Church,⁵⁴ as secured by her union with the Holy Trinity. The focus is here, so they emphasize, on concord between the created world, the cosmos at large and the believers who partake in the human Divine life of Christ,⁵⁵ incarnate in His eternal Church.⁵⁶ By highlighting such theologically "creative" Justinian-style "ecumenism", his followers seek to render his critique more acceptable to Western advocates of (Western-style) ecumenism.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Cvetković 2021b, 311 quotes from St. Justin's letters 70 and 71, but see also Popović 1994d, 112, 1994f, 170, and 2023c, 142.

It is the free decision of the human will to engage in that repentant turn, which explains humans' accountability for their faith, and thus also the sword which responds to such decisions. Unlike the (not sufficiently freedom-respecting) ecumenist passion for all-inclusiveness, God respects those who choose to exclude themselves from His offer of grace.

⁵⁰ Popović 2023c, 96f.

⁵¹ Popović 1994f, 169, 2023c, 85, 88.

⁵² Cvetković 2021b, p. 36f. As the author points out, such critique also surfaced in the third volume of his *Dogmatics*, and it is prominently present in his *On the infallibility of the European Man*.

⁵³ Lubardić 2022, 17.

⁵⁴ Cvetković 2021b, 357.

⁵⁵ Popović 2023a, 41, and 2023b.

⁵⁶ Popović 2023b, 47f, 1994g, 214f.

⁵⁷ Thus, bishop Maxim Vasiljević is quoted as criticizing the scholarly un-foundedness of St. Justin's critique of Western theology, thereby supporting the claim that the book *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism* was not



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

Facing the contrast between St. Justin's anti-ecumenist statements and his endorsement of Orthodox participation in ecumenist dialogues, moreover, Cvetković (2021,251) has attempted to limit St. Justin's opposition to particular historical phases and aspects of the ecumenist movement (op.cit. 236 f). He thus creates space for arguments which weaken the Saint's criticism:

- He relativizes St. Justin's early criticism of the Western denominations and his initial dependence on Dostojewsky's rather abstract constructions of the West. (op.cit. 251f).
- He cites letters to the Synod of the Serbian Church which encourage participation in inter-confessional theological dialogues (op.cit. 37f, 251).
- He connects St. Justin's own criticism of the papacy with the way in which Patriarch Meletius IV Metaksakis had pursued certain non-ecclesial goals by accommodating to heretical visions of that faith (op.cit, 252, 256ff).
- He quotes texts which (op.cit. 311) acknowledge the Christian character of both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (discounting the fact that only such recognition makes sense of St. Justin's charge of heresy).
- He limits later opposition to Protestant attempts to turn the WCC into a "super-ecclesiastical" organism (op.cit. 2021, 323), - attempts which were, as he points out, subsequently abandoned.

All in all, Cvetković gives priority to Justin's confessed "openness to dialogue" (op.cit. 252).

Likewise, Bogdan Lubardić (2022, 9) on the one hand agrees with St. Justin's opposition to Western ecumenism because "it cannot be the solution for a problem it has itself caused." Yet on the other hand, he points to the Saint's empathetic prayer for all people (East and West), thus showing that St. Justin's theological criticism does not repudiate his genuinely Christian love. But then Lubardić also seeks to defend the saint against the charge of having failed in view of "allowing an accommodation of otherness" (2022, 18). Given the fact that "accommodating otherness" is a code-word for relinquishing theological exclusivism, such a defense suggests that Lubardić agrees with a Western requirement that renders ecumenist dialogues intransigent to the question of truth, and thus to a concern the Venerable has always considered indispensable.⁵⁸

even written for Western audiences (Vidović 2015, 8, note 33.). He seems to encourage neglecting the theological (anti-Western) bases of St. Justin's anti-ecumenism.

⁵⁸ For readers of St. Justin's works, Lubardić's repeated characterization of his position as "maximalist" seems – once again – to accommodate to a Western prejudice ("one should not be a maximalist but a moderate") that betrays the Saint's faithfulness to the Holy Tradition.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

Likewise, Cvetković criticizes the academic trend among Germans to consider Orthodox spirituality incompatible with liberal values (2021a, 1002). He does so in a way that suggests a desire to defend the Venerable by claiming compatibility between such values and Orthodox spirituality.

All these followers of the Saint seem to have attempted to render their teacher relevant in terms of specifically Western commitments that might secure a more friendly Western reception not only of St. Justin, but also of Orthodoxy in general. Neglecting St. Justin's insistence on achieved holiness as condition for an effective missionary impact, and thus as condition also for his endorsement of Orthodox participation in ecumenical dialoguing,⁵⁹ they seem committed to justifying the mere fact of such participation.

There is a point to such a commitment, to be sure. The first decennia of Orthodox communications with the Western confessions involved Anglicans who, while opposing papism, still, and in contrast to Protestant critics, had maintained their own High-Church liturgical culture (and whom even St. Justin at a certain point would single out as "ready for conversion", cf. Cvetković 2021b, 248ff). Here, the ecumenist calls for efforts at overcoming century-old misunderstandings, for clarifying doctrinal differences which in many cases could be removed, and even for learning from one another by studying areas in which dialogue partners had outperformed one's own efforts at Christian faithfulness, were often quite successful. To a lesser extent, such positive experiences also benefited the ecumenist exchanges with Protestants and Roman Catholics.

The mistake was, however, to assume that the achieved agreements would finally result in full consensus. In fact, the opposite happened: After all the not-so-divisive side issues had been cleared away, the remaining disagreements proved unresolvable. Yet even given this result, St. Justin still could see good reasons for continued Orthodox attendance in those dialogues. As Cvetković realizes (2021b, 299), the purpose the Saint envisaged for such attendance was a robustly missionary one: He agreed with Bishop Nicolai Velimirović (another recently recognized Serbian saint) that only by meeting with Christians from other faiths could Orthodox theologians confront them with insights designed to awaken further interest. That missionary goal was also served by Orthodox minority statements that regularly complemented (and exposed as inconclusive⁶⁰) the consensus formulas other participants had achieved. And there was always hope for the impact of personal Orthodox witness of truth and holiness.⁶¹ That is to say, St. Justin's approval of Orthodox participation in ecumenist ventures is adequately presented by Cvetković as having turned not on the dialogues themselves, but on their implied opportunities for personal witness and encounter. That

⁵⁹ This core commitment of St. Justin is well captured by Jevtić 2023b, 169.

⁶⁰ Cvetković 2021b, 297

⁶¹ See the Cvetković 2021b, 324, Popović 2023a, 40f, 2023b, 67



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

approval therefore remained contingent on the availability of the required theological expertise (Cvetković 2021, 363) and attained saintliness (2021, 313). Once the Venerable's spiritual friend, Father George Florovsky (along with other respected theologians, cf. Cvetković 2021, 312), were no longer able to fulfill both conditions, St. Justin's approval was withdrawn.

Still, the core of both, Bishop Jevtić's argument and of Cvetković's impressive interpretation, does suggest that St. Justin was not quite as critical of dialogues as the great number of his rather hostile statements⁶² suggests. Again, the motive behind such a move is respectable: It is to help Western ecumenists, rather than simply dismissing St. Justin's theological contributions on account of his anti-Western hostility, to appreciate those contributions. The goal is, in other words, to remove a stumbling block to Justin's reception in the West.

This essay argues however that the policy of highlighting St. Justin's stated endorsements of ecumenist dialogues is not only hard to render compatible with faithfulness to his general warnings about Western religious humanism; it also fails to make proper use of the 'stumbling block' those warnings are meant to present. Such a policy resembles the decision to spare a patient the diagnosis that might motivate his looking for therapy. According to the tenor of St. Justin's work, ecumenism, not as ideal, and framed in a God-centered way, but as practiced by Western Christians, indicates a spiritual disease: It pursues a man-made (i.e. out-negotiated) peace within the Enlightenment-framed Western societies⁶³, - a venture the saint diagnoses as seriously misleading. This diagnose is confirmed by the entrance conditions imposed on participants: Designed to secure a "dialogical inclusivism," they impose acceptance of dialogue partners' diverse credal starting positions along with a conviction that all such positions are equally justified.⁶⁴ These entrance conditions obstruct the only legitimate goal Justin recognizes, i.e. the conversion of dialogue partners into members of the one true Church. To attain such a goal, after all, Orthodox participants must assume the role of missionaries, or at least teachers. But precisely that assumption sits squarely

⁶² In Popović 2023c, these statements abound, as e.g. in: "The ecumenist movement is the demonic confession of all humanisms of Europe." (2023c, 102). [Translated by CDH.]. This negative view has been faithfully adopted by another group of followers of the saint, well represented by Hieromonk Sava Janjić in his *Ecumenism and the Age of Apostasy*.

⁶³ Popović 1989c, 100. See also the succinct summary of his opposition in Barnes 1995. A good example of what the Saint opposed is provided by the *Leuenburg Agreement* between Germany's various Protestantisms, where in the end unity in truth was replaced by a purely human commonality (cf. Baur 1997, 60f.). An even more scandalous proof for the validity of St. Justin's association of humanism with the devil is offered by Paul Tillich's attempt to engage the Holy Spirit Himself against church-based truth (1978, 183).

⁶⁴ Bernhard (2007, 24ff)



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

with the ecumenist imposition of equal authority, subjectivist reduction of all truth claims,⁶⁵ and the confirmed willingness to modify one's initial faith position.⁶⁶ How can Christian mission be pursued in a setting that repudiates the very idea of objective truth? And how can it conform to the request that each participant should maintain "adherence to one's traditions," as St. Justin's teacher, Bishop, and fellow saint Nikolai Velimirović is reported to have said (Cvetković 2021b, 300), right after that Bishop's own insistence on conversion? If heterodox Christians are enjoined to preserve faithfulness to their heterodox faith, how can they be converted to the one and only true faith? And how is the quest for such conversion even conceivable in a setting defined by the duty to avoid all attempts at "proselytizing"?⁶⁷

Given these principles driving the ecumenism in today's West, the description of Justin's position "as a commitment to dialogue," as combined with "a refusal to question the dogmatic principles of the Orthodox Church"⁶⁸ seems incongruous: its first part affirms what the second (understood as ecumenists do) denies.⁶⁹ Cvetković's reference to the fact that the danger of an ecumenist super-church (which St. Justin opposes) no longer exists,

⁶⁵ Characteristically, John Paul II's 1995 encyclical about Christian unity, in altogether avoiding the term "heresy" (except in a quote from St. Augustine) has altogether renounced the quest for truth (1995, 94). Already Karl Rahner (1962, 153) developed his idea of "elements of supra-natural grace" in the non-Christian religions, which later developed into the supposition of an "anonymous Christianity" that would include even pagan religions. Within Protestantism (Bernhard 2007, 169f, refers to E. Benz and W. Pannenberg), Christianity is no longer (as with Karl Barth) opposed to the religions of the world, but placed among them, and deprived of its traditional claim to absolute and exclusive truth. That is to say: Both Christian (traditional) exclusivism and the newer inclusivism were supplemented by a pluralism that facilitates a new understanding of ecumenism based on a dialogue of mutual acceptance and exchange. In all these new approaches, the Christian claim to religious superiority is abandoned. The quest for truth is replaced by the authenticity of participants' personal confession.

⁶⁶ The demand for a tolerance that transcends mere suffering of what one recognizes as wrong, imposing instead a tolerance of recognition that includes an "emotional openness" towards those of other (religious) minds, is well captured by Robbers 2006, 260f. See also the discussion and commentaries in Taylor 1992.

⁶⁷ When Bishop Jevtić derides those who "scare people" with the vision of Western ecumenism as a "specter" (Jevti 2023b, 177), he surely is right in opposing panic-spreading and intimidation. But he underestimates the power exercised by those able to invite and finance meetings the rules of which they can then impose: The Orthodox representatives at the 1993 Balamand Conference wound up signing a *Declaration* that renounces the missionary ethos of the Church by refraining from "prosyletism." (cf. Joint Commission 1993). Those Orthodox thus either renounced an activism which Orthodoxy had never condoned in the first place, or they betrayed their mission to call back those who had been led astray.

It is the power of such rules which raises concern when even Sirka, after having emphasized St. Justin's sense of the importance of repentance for healing Christian dis-unity, again turns to claiming the Saint's indiscriminate endorsement of "dialogue," instead of using a more appropriate term like "encounter," which maintains openness for the missionary, pastoral goal he correctly sees St. Justin pursuing. (2018, 343).

⁶⁸ Cvetković 2021b, 363.

⁶⁹ To be sure, in Popović 2023e, 142, the Saint jumps back and forth between his own, truly catholic and apostolic "ecumenism" and the Western ecumenism bent on "Truth without [any offer of] repentance." But his opposition to the latter always is obvious and powerful.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

underexposes the many additional reasons for that opposition.⁷⁰

Can St. Justin's followers' appeal to Justin-type (i.e. conversion-inviting) Divine-human "ecumenism" (2021, 348) really be expected to fool post-traditional humanist ecumenists into promoting the study of his theology? Can those followers' advertising such Orthodox „ecumenism“ be understood in any other way than as an attempt at subversion, at planting a Justin-style Ortho-ecumenical Trojan horse? But how could such a strategy succeed after having been publicly proclaimed as such?⁷¹

Nor does the problem remain limited to such incongruities. When criticizing the humanism framing the Western Christianities ever since the papal schism, St. Justin also (and, as Cvetković argues,⁷² even primarily) focuses on the implied temptations for the Church, and here especially for her hierarchies. Already when discussing the ecumenist dialogues up to the 1950ies, the Venerable exposes the man-idolizing integrity costs imposed on the Church by Orthodox hierarchs, whenever they engage in intimate dialoguing with heterodox colleagues in pursuit of their own Church-destructive church-political ambitions.⁷³

In the decennia up to the nineteen-seventies, as Cvetković also shows (2021, 364), the initial ecumenist optimism regarding the attainability of a conclusive doctrinal consensus had waned. The project of securing social peace was transferred to the area of social cooperation.⁷⁴ Even without doctrinal agreements (for "who cares about doctrine today, anyway?"), Christian faith communities could, so it was stipulated, still present a unified witness of Christian love by engaging in a "conciliar process" devoted to social justice, peace and the

⁷⁰ Bishop Jevtić also seems mainly concerned with securing an ongoing Orthodox participation in the ecumenist dialogues staged by the West. He invokes the ecumenical spirit of the Apostle Paul, who would offer his witness to those proclaiming a "different Christ" or a "different gospel". (Jevtić, 2023, 170). But he fails to mention that Paul ends his proclamation by that very call to a turn of mind, to repentance, and to joining the Church, which also undergirds St. Justin's approval of participation. That is, he downplays the subversive character of the Saint's approval. In addition, Jevtić's undiscerning emphasis on the "inclusive" Character of the Church (loc.cit.) disregards her rigorous exclusion of heretics. He highlights Patriarchs' encyclical insistence on fear of God and unity of the apostolic faith (op.cit., 171) without addressing the profound lack of fear of God and unity of faithfulness to the apostolic faith among those who set the rules for ecumenist dialogues.

⁷¹ As Rösen (2006, 249 note 3) remarks, religious minority groups demanding free social space for development of their cultural differences, while refusing to recognize other such groups as equally justified, repudiate the basis of their demand.

⁷² Cvetković 2021b, 252, 289, 312, cf. Popović 2023d, 109, 114-121.

⁷³ Cf. also Cvetković 2021, 38, 256ff.

⁷⁴ As one participant in the movement describes it: "Accepting the fact of religious pluralism as inescapable, interreligious relationships should concentrate on the survival of the poor and of our planet" (Vigil 2007, 29). Such new ideas were developed in connection with Hans Küng's project of a world ethos, or with liberation theology as developed by Paul F. Knitter.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

preservation of nature.⁷⁵ The next section turns to some of the risks implied in that newer ecumenist project. The goal is to corroborate St. Justin's warnings against the humanist heresy framing even such theologically less ambitious cooperation.⁷⁶

III The case of ecological cooperation

The previous section dealt with theological risks attending some prominent attempts to render St. Justin's critique of Western-style ecumenism less "scandalous" by highlighting a different kind of ecumenism that bears witness to the Venerable's sustained commitment to Christian unity, - even in view of the Christian West. The present section examines similar risks involved in newer attempts at securing some common ground between St. Justin and the West. It first (1.) turns to a proposed such ground in terms of a common social project, and afterwards (2.) explores the deep abyss that separates the (interdenominational, and even more: inter-faith) participants of such envisaged cooperation from one another.

1. Integrity costs of social cooperation

As ecumenical dialogues turned out to run aground on specific hard core (mostly ecclesiological) disagreements, the goal of Christian unification was reconceived in terms of a common witness of Christian love. Social cooperation would present a lived experience of interdenominational togetherness. One might even invoke Christ's parable of the Final Judgement: Here it is not doctrinal integrity but service to the "least of His brethren" that would get people into heaven (Mt. 25,40). Presumably one would only have to agree on certain "values" pursued by such cooperation. The very faith-neutrality of such values might render even more extensive (i.e. inter-faith) cooperation conceivable. An ever more encompassing social peace within the religiously (and even non-religiously) diverse societies of today seemed in sight.

Yet precisely the assumption of agreed upon values, once again, exposes the heretically humanist tendency St. Justin discerns in all ecumenist ventures. Humans' original disobedience of claiming independence in discerning good from evil had implied the claim to know 'value' from 'dis-value.' Outside of cooperation with the Divine grace, even 'values' will not unite. To be sure, while negotiations about the social goods intended by ecumenist

⁷⁵ The WCC had started this movement in Vancouver in 1983. Yet even before that venture, the 1973 *Leuenberg Agreement* through which the different German Protestantisms were unified had been supported by a turn to social service as medium for Christians' common mission (cf. Reicke 1974, 25 ff, Künneth 1974, 111 f, Schöne 1974, 179-85, Asendorf 1974, 353, Birmele' 1982, 55ff).

⁷⁶ As Lubardić (2022) has persuasively shown, St. Justin's view of the relationship between Church and state requires careful scrutiny. Just as "Church" is used for the Orthodox Church exclusively, so her link with politics is evaluated differently, depending on the extent to which a nation (as agent of politics) realizes the ideal of a Christian polity. In the context of ecumenist engagements with the West, Christians' involvement with (a robustly secular, often even aggressively secularist) politics tends to betray their Christian calling.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

cooperation are kept on the level of generalities, consensus seems easy: Projects towards supporting opportunities for a “good life” among “those in need” will surely invite universal assent. But when it gets down to the details, cooperation requires unanimity about the institutional (or communal) missions participants take themselves to represent and, within the framework of such missions, of the competence they claim. Participants must be clear about, and agree on, the anthropological and sociological assumptions that competence implies.⁷⁷ And here, once again, the contrast between the Church pursuing her Divine-human mission in communal fellowship with the risen Christ on the one hand, and the humanism-oriented denominations with their focus on empirically ascertainable effectivity of their social initiatives on the other, is crucial: While the former focuses on ascetic formation towards personal holiness, both among the prospective helpers and their clients, the latter tends to involve (secular) political authorities able to implement relief through general policies. A prominent example of the resulting confusion is offered by the chapter on “The wonder of creation” in the present ecumenical Patriarch’s book *Encountering the Mystery* (2008):

- On the one side, the Patriarch confirms the Orthodox vision of the natural environment as “a place of encounter and communion with the Creator.” (2008, 89). On the other side, one finds a certain sentimentalism⁷⁸ that obfuscates the fallen character of a nature bent on securing the celebrated “balance” through mutual killing and eating. Such “Nature Romanticism” weakens ecologists’ resistance against secular tendencies to idolize nature.
- Similar pronouncements (e.g. “No single tree or animal can be removed without the entire picture being profoundly distorted, if not destroyed,”⁷⁹) obscure fallen mankind’s authorization to use plants and animals for their God-given (life-preserving as well as sanctifying) purpose. While humans’ charge with “serving and preserving the earth” is correctly stated, the earth itself is presented as “sacred” in a way (Bartholomew 2008, 92) that is hard to reconcile with such use, not to speak of fallen Adam’s being charged with having to uproot “thorns and thistles” (Gen. 3, 18).
- On the one side, the Patriarch rightly contextualizes Adam’s sin by referring to his refusal to receive the world as a gift of communion with God and nature

⁷⁷ Such assumptions are, of course, particularly weighty in the kind of inter-faith collaborations recommended by His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, as invoked and confirmed by the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox theological dialogue [IC] 2020, 35).

⁷⁸ For example: “each microorganism tells a story, unfolds a mystery, relates an extraordinary harmony and balance, which are interdependent and complementary.” op.cit. 90)

⁷⁹ Bartholomew 2008, 91, cf also “Cutting them [i.e. trees] almost implies eliminating the presence of the divine from our lives,” op.cit. 113. One finds here a quasi-pagan “spiritualization” of nature, like the one developed by – e.g. - Raimundo Panikkar. Again, the IC’s invoking the “dignity of all life” (2020, 17) is not easy to square with humans’ after-the-flood authorization to eat meat, nor with the exorbitant massacre ordered by Moses for holy sacrifices – at least up to the time of Hebr. 10.



International Annunciation-St. Justin-Conferences

(2008, 98f), on the other side he follows his predecessor (Patriarch Dimitrios, 1989) in interpreting the groaning of creation (after man's fall from grace) as awaiting a revelation by (rather than of) the children of God (Rm. 8, 19-22). This subtle change obfuscates the need for a Divine revelation of who these children will be in favor of expecting such revelation from those children themselves. Even though the object to be revealed in each case is the "sacramental character" of nature,⁸⁰ the human agency substituted here for a Divine agency prepares the Patriarch's subsequent turn to humanistic methods of relief.

- On the one hand, he affirms the Orthodox way of approaching serious problems through prayer, by invoking his predecessor's institution of a yearly "day of prayer for the protection and preservation of the natural environment" (Bartholomew 2008, 95). On the other hand, attending to the interconnection of ecological with economic problems (of poverty, and social justice, op.cit. 108), he expects relief from a "cooperative and collective response from ... scientists, political authorities, and financial corporations" (loc.cit.), and a "radical change in politics and economics".⁸¹ He wants this goal to be served by (op.cit. 99) international and interdisciplinary, "indeed inter-religious" (op.cit. 111) symposia. Instead of placing, "our only hope for the restoration of a broken world," and for the healing of human suffering, in our union with God through Christ by repentance, and thus in the mysteries and the theological virtues St. Justin highlights, this hope is placed in political-economic ways of "making peace."⁸²

⁸⁰ Bartholomew 2008, 92.

⁸¹ Bartholomew 2008, 110f, 152. It accords with such moves that the traditional understanding of Christian charity, as based on a self-sacrificial turn to the neighbor in need, is replaced by a call "not simply to assist the poor but to help wipe out poverty itself" (op.cit. 111). The Patriarch's endorsement of a "world that has no hunger" ironically recalls the promise of both the devil in Christ's post-fast temptation (Mt. 4, 3-4) and of the Grand Inquisitor in the parable by Dostoyevsky (1992) and Soloviev (1990).

In a similar vein, the Anglican-Orthodox joint declaration on ecology (IC 2020, 16), for which Lubardić served as Serbian representative, worries about economic inequality and demands "effective action" against human exploitation," invoking (remarkably) §16 of St. Athanasius' *De Incarnatione* (which deals with knowledge of God through Christ). It is not easy to see the connection between this latter quote with the document's concern with "justice among the nations," the "struggle against poverty, institutionalized greed," and the revision of economic systems (IC 2020, 18, 28, 49).

But even fitting Patristic sources are exposed to risky renderings: Quoting St. Maximus the Confessor about Christ "calling us to heal and restore creation..., working together with God", the document paraphrases: "creation should be preserved and protected by humankind working in cooperation with God the Creator." (op.cit. 29): the Divine primacy in calling humans into cooperation with God's own economy of salvation is insensibly changed into humans' ecological activities getting counted as cooperation with God.

⁸² Bartholomew 2008, 114. The turn to the political level is of course central to Protestant environmentalism (see e.g. Huber's plea for widening the legal instrument of human rights so as to include duties for the preservation of nature, 1993, 171, 174ff). That same turn also characterizes Roman Catholic



International Annunciation-St. Justin-Conferences

- On the one hand, the Patriarch clearly distances the Church from involvement with particular political programs (Bartholomew 2008, 150). He wants her to insist merely on the “sacredness of the human person.” On the other hand, his rendering of 1. Cor. 3,9 adopts the Western displacement of the transcendent by the immanent (cf. Engelhardt 2017, 333). In other words: On the one hand the Patriarch presents the Holy Spirit as “entitling us” to respond in “life-creating ways”, whenever we witness “darkness, suffering, injustice, and evil” (Bartolomew 2008, 131), thus still according with the Apostle Paul’s use of the term. On the other hand, his subsequent claim that it will be us who are thus to “realize the divine plan of healing and reconciliation throughout the world” deviates from Paul's meaning. While the Apostle uses the term “reconciliation” (as in 2. Cor.5:18) for God’s reconciling us to Himself through Christ, the Patriarch's rendering suggests that we ourselves are to overcome darkness, suffering, injustice and evil throughout the world, thus functioning as agents of reconciliation on our own. This is how he can transform that salvational reconciliation into an ecological and social task. Reconciliation thus has come to address a profoundly different darkness, suffering, injustice, and evil than the one to which Paul and Apollo responded as God’s co- workers, and which had resulted from heathen unbelief.⁸³
- On the one hand, the Patriarch invokes St. Gregor the Theologian declaring “the purpose and end of the human mystery of creation is deification” (2008, 96), on the other hand he adopts the language of “deep ecology” claiming that “the desire to preserve and to protect the natural resources of the world” should be “**the priority** of all human beings.”⁸⁴

accounts (e.g. United States Catholic Conference 1996, 646ff). While in 1996, at least the Patriarch still had been much more reticent in this regard, now even the acquisition of an “eucharistic spirit” and an “ascetic ethos” gets linked not with progress on the path to human sanctification but with the goal of securing “ a physical environment where life for the coming generations .. will be healthy and happy” (op.cit., 118). He endorses such ethos not in view of man's Divine vocation, but relates its development to “our children”, with regard to whose opportunities “we must perceive our every action in the world.”

⁸³ This accords with the way in which ecumenist Christians have developed a new sense of “sin” in terms of alienation from the cosmos, suggested as an “update of theological truth” (Haught 1996, 274). See also Kessler, who bypasses the origin of nature’s groaning (Rm. 8:22) in Adam's disobedience (as what exposed that nature to corruption), focusing exclusively on reckless exploitation (Kessler 1990, 103). Kessler therefore expects relief not from Christ's restoration of human nature (enabling man, once again, to sanctify nature) but from human ecological efforts and from a reconstruction of Christian love of the neighbor as love of nature (1990, 57). In a similar spirit, the late Metropolitan John of Pergamon, at the *Revelation und the environment symposium*, Aegean Sea, September 1995, is quoted as having introduced a new sense of sin. Once “polluting the environment” is thus declared “a sin against nature” (Belopopski, 1996), the traditional understanding of sin as, revealed by “to thee alone have I sinned” (Ps. 50), is obfuscated.

⁸⁴ (Bartholomew 2008, 97) This changed way of looking at nature also surfaces when “God's purpose and intent for creation” is summarized under “peace and justice”, and when the achievement of these political goals is to “inherit... the kingdom of heaven” (op.cit. 114f). Here the hierarch comes very close to Irrgang's



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

The problem is the resulting confusion. As mentioned above: the task of witnessing to the Orthodox faith is not fulfilled by offering many properly Orthodox statements, but only by also avoiding any non-Orthodox (or misleading) statements.⁸⁵

As these examples illustrate, even the more modest ecumenist project of social cooperation, and even when pursued with the theological expertise and watchfulness one might expect of a Patriarch, depends on a common language. Coming from, as it were, different religious planets, participants begin by introducing quite diverse sets of concepts.⁸⁶ The desired agreement on goals imposes the need to agree on meanings. To be sure, in political agreements on common goals, the variety of meanings attached to agreed-upon concepts leaves space for different interpretations. Thus, St. Justin's followers could define his own "ecumenism" in a Divine-human sense that radically differs from the Western humanist understanding of that term. But in the political arena, commentators back home will recapture those meanings which serve their respectively own national or party interest, keeping those meanings on record for the next round of negotiations (and for legal disputes).⁸⁷ In ecumenist meetings, by contrast, no such corrective is institutionalized. Instead, the magic of human togetherness, socially and intellectually, which tends to unfold its charm during (usually quite nicely hosted) ecumenist encounters, tends to undermine such watchfulness, even in the shepherds of the Church.⁸⁸

conclusion (1992, 298): "Man, as acting, constitutes the meaning and goal of the world, insofar as he changes the shape of the world" (Translated by CDH), or to Werner's Franciscan reconstruction of co-operation with God as oriented to the improvement of nature ((1986, 37). The purpose of creation, as placed under human authority, is no longer primarily and explicitly related to man's Divine vocation but is narrowed down to man's ecological ministry.

⁸⁵ Belittling the risks a theologian's witness runs by participating in ecumenist cooperation (where doctrinal minority statements are no longer even relevant), the Patriarch turns to monastic resistance against "ecumenical ventures toward unity in the wider Church". He appreciates the "passionate concern for doctrinal integrity" inspiring such resistance (Bartholomew 2008, 71). He values the prayer of monks for "reconciliation of the whole world in Christ." But then he identifies such prayer with "the essential communication and communion through prayer" that frames his own "theological dialogue and ecumenical relations". The "unity" which the shared act of praying together, endorsed by the Patriarch, is taken to produce among those separated by different doctrines (and even by different religions) on the level of human activity thus gets blended with the unity of doctrine (and Eucharistic communion) for which the monks pray. Whereas the first, merely human unity leaves doctrinal disagreement unattended, the second, Divinely mediated unity, seeks to overcome such disagreement.

⁸⁶ As Benga (2021, 99 note 11) has observed: The secularized believers talk of relativism, scepticism, self-determination, needs, claims etc., while genuine Christians talk of creation, creator, being in the image, revelation, gift, love etc.

⁸⁷ For an example of the difficulties attending even such clear-up work in the case of bioethics see Delkeskamp-Hayes 2006, 55f.

⁸⁸ Advocating interdenominational and religious dialogues, Pope John Paul II remarked: "Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an "exchange of gifts" (1995, #28). As the compromised theological vocabulary of His All-Holiness illustrates, such gift can be poisoned.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

2. St. Justin's theological alternative

A very different picture is suggested by St. Justin's ecological approach. Even though he does not discuss that issue as separate theological subject, his diagnosis of idolatrous humanism undergirding humans' initial trespass of the Divine commandment provides a key. It highlights the fact that answers to all questions relevant for a Christian life should be sought in, and are available from, the Divine self-revelation in Holy Scripture.⁸⁹ Here all information about the created essence of things, their Divine purpose, and the resulting orientation for human action in the spirit of renewed obedience can be found. That book, of course, must in turn be approached not in a purely humanistic, scholarly way as a mere text, but, guided by the instruction of saintly teachers and supplemented by examples presented in the vitae of other saints, as a way of life that requires support by prayer (cf. Cvetković 2021, 56).⁹⁰

From the very start of such Bible study, one is struck by the extent to which God reveals Himself in ways that are hard to square with what would earn him any attestation of "greenness" among social cooperation ecumenists today: In caring for the children banned from Paradise (and reminding them of the animal nature they will henceforth be subjected to), He must have killed animals to provide the needed skins. He must also have indicated His welcome for food animal offerings: His acceptance of Abel's sacrifice of a sheep paid no regard to modern ecologists' vision of "animal rights." Even less of such regard surfaces in the planetary flood inflicted on a humanity that refused living up to their Divine vocation (cf. St. John Chrysostom 1990, Homily XXII). Even though God promised that He would not repeat such wholesale destruction (Gen. 9,11), smaller punitive disasters (Gen. 19, 23-25) surely also involved innocent fauna (not to speak of trees!). Among the created animals, some are removed from human use, already before the flood, by being defined as "unclean," (Gen. 7,2)⁹¹ and therefore, so one might conclude, available for destruction by a demonic "legion" (Mt. 8, 30-32), with probably devastating ecological consequences for the Gerasine water supply. But even, regarding the "clean" animals: the amount of blood shed required for liturgical purpose according to the Mosaic law cannot but appear scandalous to modern advocates of animal welfare, just as the forest management damage inflicted by God's condescending permission of temple construction under Salomon probably took ages to heal. Clearly, the Divine creation was not 'about' plants and animals.

But then modern ecumenist approaches to biblical orientation in view of mankind's confrontation with the ecological crisis, and thus with threats to human survival (mostly in view of the poor who lack resources for effective self-help) are not really helpful. This holds

⁸⁹ Popović 1989a, 74.

⁹⁰ Popović, 1989a, 77f. An additional warning, of course, targets any attempt at claiming any merely individual spiritual access, cf. Cvetković's quote (2021b, 59) from St. Justin's *Dogmatics*.

⁹¹ Noah understood why additional specimens of clean animals had to be saved: They would serve another bloody purpose as post-flood sacrifice of gratitude.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

at least while such approaches engage abstract, and thus forever sterile and inconclusive reflections about what man's endowment with "mastery over nature" (and vocation "to fill the earth") might imply for permitted, enjoined or prohibited ways of using and transforming that nature. Since the essence, or Logos-ness of created things can be accessed only by reference to the Logos of God, and thus, in the fallen world, through the Logos incarnate (cf. Cvetković 2021, 349ff), answers about man's relationship to created things are available only through the process of unifying oneself with that Logos incarnate.⁹²

- Only here does it become clear why the divine guidance in that relationship could foundationally change, depending on the spiritual state and corresponding pastoral needs of its addressees, as called to prepare for the eschatological re-appearance of that incarnate Logos.
- Thus, vegetable and animal sacrifices might have been encouraged as a training in that gratitude to the Divine creator, which humans in paradise had so carelessly neglected (cf. St. John Chrysostom on human thoughtlessness and forgetfulness, 1986, Hom. VI, VII, IX),
- humans' initial limitation to vegetarian food was lifted after the flood: Their struggle for survival was condescendingly eased by the additional protein intake and by fear of man getting instilled for keeping predators away.⁹³
- The rite of circumcision that was introduced only with Abraham got lifted during the Apostles' mission to the gentiles.
- The separation of clean from unclean animals was lifted when Peter experienced the vision encouraging the baptism of gentiles.⁹⁴
- The Mosaic carnage of animal sacrifice was replaced by Christ shedding His own blood as atonement for the sins of the world.

This Divine ecological focus on human deification is aptly reflected in St. Justin's focus on the God-man's salvational offer of human return into the Divine – human synergy of the Church: If man was created in the image of the Divine Logos and with a view to the Divine grace supporting his receptivity to God's deifying love, then his initially granted "mastery" over nature – as the liturgical confession "thine own of thine own" makes clear – had from the very start imposed some proto-type of eucharistic sanctification and sacrificial restoration (cf. Cvetković 2021, 66ff, 209). But then man's primary obligation vis à vis the created

⁹² Accordingly, St. Justin's approach to ecology could be called 'confessional,' as illustrated by "A Deer in a Lost Paradise" (1989e) and by his commentary on Matthew 27, 45-54 (2020, 594-598).

⁹³ This fact is hard to reconcile with the Anglican-Orthodox declaration claiming an after-flood change of dominion to diaconal responsibility (IC 2020, 16f.).

⁹⁴ Of course, already before that revelation, Philip had been urged by the Holy Spirit to baptize the servant of Queen Kandake.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

cosmos lies in the acquisition of ascetically theological virtues that can support such sanctification. In the context of struggle against the temptation of humanist idolatry, these virtues prominently impose – among other things – a faith that spells out into reliance, surely not exclusively, but first and foremost, on Divine support rather than on human “self-help and mutual aid.”⁹⁵ This holds even in matters of a biological survival, recognized as surely important, but not all-important.⁹⁶

Such a God-man oriented theological approach cannot promise to slow down global climate change or the ongoing dramatic extinction of species. And surely, humans’ political and scientific efforts to preserve the natural (climate- and species-) resources needed for present and future generations are praiseworthy. Still, for Christians their primary concern lies elsewhere.⁹⁷ They recognize that the world was not created for eternity but as an exercise field for human deification. As to eternal survival, - God will take eschatological care of that.⁹⁸ Still, the cultural changes such a theological approach encourages within the life of the Church world-wide, by presenting an attractive example to others, can be hoped to reduce at least some portion of the human greed, inconsiderate cruelty, and recklessness at the root of man-made ecological damage.

Looking back at the disruption of theological clarity with which involvement in ecumenist exchanges has affected the ecological statements of the present ecumenical Patriarch,⁹⁹ a lesson can be drawn for the concern of St. Justin’s disciples about how faithfully to preserve and foster the influence of St. Justin’s theological legacy. While the previous section had looked at their attempts to downplay the force of his warnings against the ecumenist pursuit of man-made Christian unity through doctrinal consensus and compromise, the present section has considered alternative attempts to secure such unity through cooperative involvement in global problems like the ecological crisis, as a supposed common witness of love inspiring social cooperation. In either case, the integrity of the Orthodox faith, as preserved in St. Justin’s (more or less explicit¹⁰⁰) witness is compromised. Such attempts affect the very basis on which St. Justin sees the Divine-human reality of the Church to

⁹⁵ Popović 1989d, 114. Faith itself, after all, is a theological virtue (1994e, 125ff).

⁹⁶ Popović 1989d, 119. Cvetković aptly notes that this is also why St. Justin criticizes Roman Catholic appeals to the youth to “establish the kingdom of God in this world.” (2021, 245, 258). His theological force here becomes clear: It is not only primarily that he advocates turning to Christ when solving social and ecological problems, but exclusively (Popović 1994g, 215f.)

⁹⁷ Popović 1989d, 142.

⁹⁸ Popović 2023c, 158.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the additional integrity-costs imposed by inter-faith dialoguing in the case of Protestant Lutherans, see Delkeskamp-Hayes, 2009, 182.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Popović, 2023c, 97, where social activism itself counts as a heresy. The continued relevance of St. Justin’s critique of such activism in the context of contemporary tendencies to adjust the Christian teaching to the supposed needs of peaceful coexistence under pluralism is well exemplified by Habermas (2004, 13) claiming that “certain religious attitudes” to homosexuality must be deleted from what counts as revealed truth.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

depend. Any attempt to downplay St. Justin's warning against those risks betrays a lacking concern for the spiritual resources framing Orthodoxy's missionary calling. Such attempts even distract from the need for such an invitation. But then the project of rendering St. Justin's theology acceptable to a theologically misguided West defeats that theology's very purpose.

IV Conclusion: Avoiding the humanist trap.

It is a post-traditional Christian prejudice to place the main enemy of the faith in the secular *Leitkultur* of contemporary Western societies. St. Justin himself saw secularism, even atheism, as a merely secondary battlefield. His rigorous opposition against the distortions adopted within the Western Christianities themselves presents a healing reaction against the damage a distorted (i.e. post-Schisma papacy imposed) philosophical rendering had inflicted on that faith. Worrying about the lacking Western welcome of such opposition obfuscates the core concern undergirding that reaction. For St. Justin, the real threat to the Christian faith, arising from both, secularism and a distorted theology, lies in the underlying humanist idolatry,¹⁰¹ as it forever re-enacts humans' ancestral betrayal. That same idolatry¹⁰² permeates not only paganism, secularism, and Christian heresies, but – as the case of ecology illustrates - also presents a temptation for the Church.

The well-intended attempts by St. Justin's followers, as described in Part II of this essay, to mitigate the force of St. Justin's criticism of the West interfere with his offer of therapy. Even though the focus of this presentation was on St. Justin's critique of the West, his own major concern, as an Orthodox pastor, is the Church.¹⁰³ He fought against Western influences in order to protect the Holy Tradition faithfully preserved by that Church. His prophetic 'wakeup call from a monastic desert' – like from a second St. John the Baptist – was to enjoin his own flock to come out and confess their sins. He is quite outspoken in his critique of idolatrous humanism among Orthodox Christians themselves. He discerns such temptations not only in the "clericalist" tendencies of his Serbian clergy, engaged in seeking support from, or offering support to, political power. He discerns similar problems in their pervasive endorsement of nationalism¹⁰⁴ and their tendency to succumb to base materialism. He also castigates the church-political power games (or pseudo-papal ambitions) betrayed by ecumenical Patriarchs of his own lifetime (Cvetković 2021, 255).

St. Justin's Western readers of today should be helped to recognize him fighting against the real enemy of all mankind, the idolatry of humanism that attends not only

¹⁰¹ Sirka 2018, 333 similarly identifies the "problem of Europe" not with atheism but with the polytheism inherent in humanism.

¹⁰² Popović, 1989d, 113.

¹⁰³ Popović, 1989b, 89f.

¹⁰⁴ Popović, 1994a, 24f.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

secularists' confessed this-worldly outlook but also the temptations affecting the Church. The invitation his theology extends to all non-Orthodox believers and unbelievers, just as the invitation his followers seek to convey, can surely not promise access to an already accomplished ideal. Orthodoxy, all over the globe, is as beset by power struggles, acedia, and distraction as the fallen world in general. St. Justin's invitation however offers the needed guidance for overcoming such evils. It offers an effective therapy, a source of spiritual resilience reflecting two millennia of faithful believers' participation in the salvation-history played out by the Divine-human synergy.¹⁰⁵ His invitation into unity and peace in Christ highlights the unavoidability of daily ascetic warfare. But it also promises access to Divine-human support.¹⁰⁶

How, then, should St. Justin's disciples seek to render his teaching accessible to the West of our day? They should focus less on acceptability than fruitfulness. Instead of addressing the scandal St. Justin's struggle for maintained integrity of the Orthodox faith presents to those whom he identifies as bent on compromising that faith, instead of smuggling some consideration of "otherness" into his Divine-human concept of true ecumenism, instead of discretely distancing themselves from his "maximalism," these followers should concentrate on St. Justin's unique 'selling point' (or claim to holiness): his efforts towards awakening a refreshed awareness of Christ's Divine-human promise of an in-dwelling of the Holy Trinity in those whom He has recognized as His own.¹⁰⁷ Their focus should be – as Cvetković himself has recognized in his essay (2017, and especially on p. 398) - on liberating their Western audiences from the "enlightenment-framed religion" they take the world to need,¹⁰⁸ and enabling them to recover the longing for such in-dwelling, a longing which will testify, once again, to their divine vocation.¹⁰⁹

To achieve this, St. Justin's followers cannot but proceed in the way indicated by him. Just as we, as Christians, are reminded to consider ourselves as "being in the world, but not of the world" (Jn. 17, 16), so, as scholars, we must see ourselves as "being in the academia,

¹⁰⁵ Popović, 1989c, 101.

¹⁰⁶ Popović, 1989c, 101.

¹⁰⁷ Popović 2023b, 54f. Again and again, St. Justin emphasizes the need to reject any "dialogue of love" that fails to include, as a necessary precondition, a "dialogue of truth" (see, e.g., 2023e, 152f). A similar emphasis on St. Justin's pastoral orientation, and thus on "East" and "West" in his work as not geographical but "theological categories," is found in Sirka 2018, 341.

¹⁰⁸ Rutishauser 2006, 807.

¹⁰⁹ As Vukić (2021, 78) reminds us: It is a shame that St. Justin is known in the West mostly for his criticism of ecumenism and Western culture, that is for works, which – as Cvetković also emphasizes - cannot be properly understood outside of his positive theology. While the present essay emphasizes the need to disclose the beauty of St. Justin's vision of a "life in Christ" to those living in the geographical West (as well as to de-churched inhabitants of the geographical East), Sirka highlights the warnings against sin directed to either side. For an attempt to render St. Justin's anti-ecumenism comprehensible to a Western audience by exploring similarities and differences in Roman Catholic and Orthodox approaches to the De-Christianization of Europe see Delkeskamp-Hayes 2015a.



International Annunciation-St. Justin- Conferences

but not of the academia.” Even our purely discursive research and teaching must be recognized as both indispensable and deficient. In unavoidable ecumenist encounters, while avoiding common prayer with heretics, we must follow the wisdom of our ecumenical Patriarch and give priority to the prayer of the Church, into the experience of which we can invite dialogue or cooperation partners. And hopefully, so I must add as a non-native speaker of any of the traditionally Orthodox languages, we should invite them into a worship converts and their “dragged-along” guests can understand, so that they, as Paul advises, “know when to say ‘Amen.’”

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