

# The *Philosophia perennis* of Hellenistic Christianity: Theological and Ecumenical Implications of Fr. Georges V. Florovsky's View

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*This article presents the features and meaning of the phrase „Christian Hellenism”, as it has been elaborated in the thinking of the Russian patrologist Georges V. Florovsky. He has based his thesis, namely that of the “radically Christianized” or “Churchified,” “New Hellenism” on three main points: 1) faith is always asserted in a “philosophical system”; 2) Semitic thinking is not radically opposed to Hellenism, because Judaism itself in Jesus’s time was a Hellenised Judaism; 3) Greek philosophy was the fertile, even providential environment in which Christianity could formulate and express its own experience. The result was a philosophia perennis, „something eternal and absolute in the thinking” of the Church. As closure of the study we briefly reflect upon the actuality, and the possibilities and limitations which are implied today in the notion of “Christian Hellenism”. The implications of Florovsky’s vision are thus assessed, both in what concerns the relationship between theology and culture, and in what concerns the ecumenical dialogue.*

**Keywords:** *Christian Hellenism, Patristic Tradition, Church Mission, Georges V. Florovsky*

## Preamble

Touching upon the appointment of John Meyendorff (1926-1992) as rector to the St. Vladimir Institute, Bradley Nassif wrote in the *Introduction* to a volume in his memory that, along with Georges Florovsky and Alexander Schmemmann, a triad has taken shape that could be named the *American Fathers*; he was thus referring directly to the three great Cappadocian fathers of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the three great Orthodox theologians were remarkable examples of the both tragic and extraordinary political, cultural and religious phenomenon which was the formation of the Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Bradley Nassif (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Theology. Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, Grand Rapids – Cambridge, WBE Publishing Company 1996, p. xvi.