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**GEORGES V. FLOROVSKY AND VLADIMIR N. LOSSKY:
AN EXPLORATION, COMPARISON AND DEMONSTRATION OF
THEIR UNIQUE APPROACHES TO THE NEOPATRISTIC
SYNTHESIS**

By

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Submitted for the Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract -- The main purpose of this thesis is to explore and compare the unique approaches to the neopatristic synthesis of Georges V. Florovsky and Vladimir N. Lossky. I will also demonstrate how these differences are manifested in their doctrine of creation. But first, to place their works in context, I consider their respective histories, views of Tradition, and methodologies. As a minor theme, I will show that both men were influenced by the Sophiological controversy: Fr. Sergius Bulgakov and Fr. Pavel Florensky are unseen interlocutors, to very different effects, in both Florovsky and Lossky. One main concern that arises is what truly determines Orthodox theology.

Florovsky's method is very historical, and his view of Tradition follows the neopatristic synthesis quite closely, even programmatically. His premise that God created freely, coupled with the absolute ontological distinction between creature and Creator, leads him to the conclusion that man is absolutely free and undetermined. This is the foundation of his personalist theology. Yet most of his work on creation is in hidden contradistinction to Russian religious philosophy, specifically the Sophiology of Bulgakov.

Lossky's work is also based on the Fathers, but he adds much that is his own creative theological work. He does not follow the neopatristic synthesis as programmatically as Florovsky. The basis of Lossky's entire anthropology is found, by way of analogy, in his Trinitarian theology. But the major difference between his work and Florovsky's is that Lossky is indebted to Russian religious philosophy: he shares much with the work of Florensky, as well as some of the intuitions of Bulgakov. This is particularly apparent in his concepts of the image of God in man and of the person. But he also arrives at his personalism through his apophatic method, applied in a universal manner, and his true synthesis of the Fathers with contemporary thought.

Contents

Introduction.....	5
Chapter 1: Historical Background	
A. Florovsky’s History.....	12
1. Russia, 1893-1920	
2. Europe, 1920-1948	
3. United States of America, 1948-1979	
4. Ecumenism	
a. Historical Context	
b. Ecumenical Encounters	
B. Lossky’s History.....	44
1. Russia, 1903-1922	
2. Prague, 1922 – 1924	
3. Paris, 1924 – 1958	
CHAPTER 2: Tradition	
A. Florovsky’s Tradition.....	61
1. True Tradition	
2. Vincent’s Canon	
3. Basil’s Unwritten Tradition	
4. The Locus of Authority	
5. Tradition’s Existential Character	
6. Neopatristic Synthesis	
B. Lossky’s Tradition.....	86
1. Tradition and Traditions	
2. Basil’s Unwritten Tradition	
3. Tradition As Silence	
4. Tradition in Reality: Christian Epistemology	
5. Vincent’s Canon	
6. The Development of Doctrine	
CHAPTER 3: Methodology	
A. Florovsky’s Methodology.....	111
1. A Turn Toward History	
2. The Neopatristic Synthesis	
a. Revelation, Philosophy and Theology	
b. Patristics and Modern Theology	
c. The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology	
d. The Predicament of the Christian Historian	
e. Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church	
B. Lossky’s Methodology.....	137
1. Dual Methods: Cataphatic and Apophatic	
a. What they are not	
b. What they are	
2. The Apophatic Method	
a. Ecstasy	
b. The Apophatic Goal: Incomprehensibility and Union	
e. Its Correspondence in God	
3. Apophatic Method Applied: Foundation of the Personal	

Chapter 4: The Doctrine of Creation	158
Introduction	
A. Florovsky's Doctrine of Creation.....	162
Introduction	
1. Creation is absolutely contingent.	
2. God is absolutely distinct from creation.	
3. The Creation is absolutely free.	
4. Summary	
B. Lossky's Doctrine of Creation.....	191
Introduction	
1. Preliminary Remarks	
2. The Creative Trinity and Divine Ideas	
3. Creation: Cosmic Order	
4. The Image	
a. Preliminary Remarks	
b. The Whole Man: Body and Soul	
c. Freedom	
d. The Image	
e. The Basis for Lossky's Image Theology	
5. The Person	
a. Preliminary Remarks	
b. The Basis for Lossky's Theology of the Person	
1. Irreducibility	
2. Image	
3. Unity and Diversity	
4. Kenosis: Individual Versus Person.	
c. The Will of the Human Being	
d. Risk and the Two Wills for Deification	
6. Summary	
Conclusions	277
Bibliography	281

Introduction

Fr. Georges V. Florovsky and Vladimir N. Lossky are consistently categorized together as theologians who follow what Florovsky called the neopatristic synthesis. In theory, they are both viewed as sharing ‘an underlying commonality of vision’,¹ but in practice, their theologies were quite different. Their most significant difference is Florovsky’s complete rejection of Russian religious philosophy versus Lossky’s use of it. The main purpose of this thesis is to explore and compare the unique approaches to the neopatristic synthesis of Florovsky and Lossky. Then I will demonstrate how these differences are manifested in their theology, specifically in their doctrine of creation. But first, to place their works in context and to explore the concepts that influence their theology, I will consider their respective histories, views of Tradition, and methodologies.

One of the most important systems of thought that led both Florovsky and Lossky to define what is determinate of Orthodox theology was the Sophiology of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov and Fr. Pavel Florensky. Both Bulgakov and Florensky are unseen interlocutors, to very different effects, throughout both Florovsky and Lossky. We will see how the Sophiological controversy affected their life experiences, views of Tradition, and methodologies. This impact produced two unique approaches to the neopatristic synthesis: Florovsky’s, which adopted empirical tendencies to combat Idealism, was a complete rejection of all Russian religious philosophy, specifically all Sophiology; and Lossky’s, which shared Florensky’s anti-rationalism, was more of a corrective to Russian religious philosophy and its intuitions, but still stood specifically against the metaphysics of Sophiology. In fact, it is Florovsky’s and Lossky’s stance against the metaphysics of Sophiology that is their greatest distinct commonality.

Florovsky was a philosopher, theologian, historian, and Slavist. His store of knowledge on the Fathers, as well as his understanding of them, is incomparable. He had

¹ Anastassy Brandon Gallager, ‘George Florovsky on reading the life of St Seraphim’, *Sobornost* 27:1 (2005), 61.

three major concerns: a complete rejection of Russian religious philosophy and culture (his theology develops specifically as a reaction against Sergius Bulgakov's Sophiology); a return to the Fathers (his neopatristic synthesis); and ecumenism (presenting the Fathers to an ecumenical audience). During the time that Florovsky was emerging as a philosopher, the Western Enlightenment battle between the Rationalist Idealists and the Rationalist Empiricists was raging in the Russian intelligentsia. The secularist consciousness abounded, both inside and outside of the Orthodox Church. This was a result of the adoption of Western philosophical concepts, especially German Idealism. For Florovsky, it was the Western concepts in Russian religious philosophy, specifically demonstrated in Bulgakov's Sophiology, that he believed to be the secular consciousness within the Church, and it was this Westernization, which he called the 'Babylonian captivity', that needed to be eradicated.

It was this 'captivity' and the Sophiological controversy that compelled Florovsky to use history, the historical method, and a 'return to the Fathers' as a tool against them. (Ironically, Bulgakov encouraged him in this.) Florovsky also saw this as a return to what he called the mind of the Church, or what Zenkovsky called the 'ecclesiastical consciousness' or 'ecclesiastical world-view'.² With this return to the Fathers, Florovsky programmatically and rigidly set out to purge all Western influences in Orthodox theology. His theology developed as a rebuttal specifically against the Idealism in Russian religious philosophy as well as what he saw in Bulgakov's Sophiology. The neopatristic synthesis was Florovsky's attempt to define what Orthodoxy was in the context of the Russian Diaspora. And although later in the development of his method, Florovsky would use the Sophiological controversy to define Orthodoxy in contrast to Protestantism, school Thomism, and the Neo-Thomism of Catholicism, it was this controversy that, as it were, drew first blood.

² V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, (hereafter *History*), trans. George L. Kline (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953) 2 vols., vol. I, 53-69, see especially chapters II and VI.

But interestingly, the neopatristic idea itself stems from an empirical Rationalist understanding of history, specifically Hegelian. Florovsky's attempt to eradicate Idealist Rationalism from Orthodox thought was itself Hegelian: Florovsky does not escape his own cultural milieu. While the neopatristic synthesis was a reaction to the speculative thought that was inherent in Idealism as manifested in Russian religious philosophy, its absolutising was itself an innovation and a reconceiving of the Orthodox Tradition influenced by the very Western Rationalism that he criticizes. Florovsky enacts such absolutism with his application of the neopatristic synthesis and the concept of Christian Hellenism. Florovsky's adoption of Hegel's views is not wrong as such, but his making it absolute is.

Also, although I do not believe that demonstrating Florovsky's or Lossky's historical 'genealogies' explains them *per se*; it does show their stark distinctions. And since Florovsky never admits to adopting Hegel's historicism, there is the implication that he was unconscious and unaware of all such borrowing. The question then arises, is it legitimately Orthodox to make the neopatristic synthesis absolute? But the more important question is this: What determines Orthodox theology? This second question will be the guiding question of both theologians' understanding of Tradition.

In his ecumenism Florovsky found himself constantly defending his position as an Orthodox theologian to his Protestant contemporaries. But there seems to be some borrowing of ideas from them as well. Many of the main points of contention for Florovsky grew up over his many years of experience in the ecumenical movement before the founding of the World Council of Churches. One of the main conclusions he gleaned from all his ecumenical encounters was that there were 'deep differences' in divided Christendom. More than this, though, there was no agreement on what reunion and unity really meant. Florovsky's ecumenism will be explored in more detail later.

Florovsky's reaction against Russian religious philosophy, his use of Idealist historical methodology, and his understanding of Tradition as the Holy Spirit leading and

guiding the episcopacy in the truths that are apostolic, patristic, and liturgic defined his methodology. But these factors also framed and limited his theology. We see this in his practice of near absolutising of the patristic methodology (as seen in his Christian Hellenism)—that is, his view that theology must only be based on what is specifically found in the Fathers (the neopatristic synthesis). Because of these factors, his creation theology and anthropology come close to being a mere reiteration of patristic sources.

Lossky was a theologian. Though his knowledge of the Fathers was also great, he was not as consistently committed to the neopatristic synthesis methodology as Florovsky: in practice he does not absolutise it to the exclusion of concepts borrowed from the Russian religious philosophers (though it is not clear how aware he was of this). In fact, his real commitment was to the apophatic method, which he shared with Dionysius the Areopagite, Meister Eckhart, and Florensky. His theological passion was to fully integrate his understanding of the Fathers concerning apophasis and deification into modern thought.

The constant concern of Lossky's life was the Orthodox Church's mystical theology and spirituality. Lossky was adamantly against Bulgakov's Sophiology as well. He was deeply impatient with Slavophil romanticism and Russian sentimentality, but does still succumb to their inheritance. Thus, instead of giving a purely negative critique of Russian religious philosophy or culture *per se*, he stresses the pan-cultural spirit of Christianity, or rather, its catholicity. This acts as a balancing corrective (although he does adopt the French culture almost to a fault). Lossky is in fact sometimes heavily indebted to the Russian religious philosophers. Because of the Sophiological controversy, he too attempted to answer the question of what determines Orthodox theology. But, although Lossky was very critical of Sophiology, his theology was not just a reaction against it; it is more of a corrective. It was an attempt to understand Bulgakov's intuitive religious insights and give them, from his perspective, an Orthodox ecclesial alignment and interpretation.

Lossky was increasingly isolated in his lifetime because of his theological commitment to his understanding of the ‘ecclesial consciousness’ and ecclesial authority. His view of Tradition, like Florovsky’s, was that of the Holy Spirit leading and guiding persons in the Church. But he held a deeper theological understanding, as well as a wider perspective on truth in the Church: not all theology had to be patristic (though, again, how aware he was of this is questionable). Borrowing from Florensky, Lossky conveys the sense that all truth is about the Truth: all truth is God’s truth. These factors, coupled with his apophatic approach, instilled a more theologically spiritual and mystical understanding in his neopatristic synthesis. In his theology, Lossky engaged with contemporary ideas and problems by using patristic texts and, though not expressly, Russian religious philosophy and theology. Ultimately, we will see that it was Lossky who accomplished a fuller neopatristic synthesis by not consistently adhering to a *sola patristica* methodology.

Though Lossky did not follow the neopatristic synthesis as consistently and programmatically as Florovsky, there was much in Florovsky that Lossky shared. As we will see, though Florovsky never explicitly rejected Sophiology, Lossky followed in the consistent rejection of the Sophiological principles—its metaphysics and determinism. He shared Florovsky’s views of creation as contingent and man as absolutely free. Lossky also followed Florovsky’s concept that Tradition and Scripture are not to be divided, and through Tradition all external authorities are to be rejected. Though Florovsky had very little Trinitarian theology, especially as compared to Lossky, Lossky did share the importance of Chalcedonian Christology and the term *hypostasis*. But Florovsky did not stress them as Lossky did in connection with a correct understanding of anthropology. For Lossky, these concepts, linked with Russian religious philosophy and theology, were the foundation of the ruling principle in his works: the person.³

Though Florovsky and Lossky shared many similarities, there were some differences as well. The main significant difference in their doctrine of creation is that for

³ This type of comparison of this paragraph can be found in Rowan Williams, ‘The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky: An Exposition and Critique’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, 1975), 279-281.

Florovsky, what is of the utmost importance is the absolute freedom of man based on the contingent nature of creation; whereas for Lossky, what is most important is the absolute irreducibility of the person. In the final analysis, Florovsky's works are a reiteration of patristic sources. Thus his theology is consistent with Orthodox Tradition. On the other hand, Lossky's works are a reiteration with correction of Russian religious philosophy and theology. And although Lossky attempts to align his theology to patristic sources, at this he sometimes fails. Yet, because Orthodox theology does not necessarily have to be patristic, his theology still remains consistent with Orthodox Tradition.

In Chapter 1, by way of introduction to these theologians, I give the historical and contextual background on both Florovsky and Lossky. Chapter 2 considers their respective views on Tradition. Chapter 3 treats their methodology. The purpose of these chapters is to establish the historical as well as intellectual context and to explore the concepts that affect the two theologians' doctrines of creation.

Chapter 4 is a demonstration of how their different approaches to the neopatristic synthesis are carried out. It also, therefore, demonstrates their unique commitments to their respective views on Tradition and method, focusing specifically on their doctrine of creation. As a minor theme, I will also show some points in contradistinction to Sophiology.

Section A of chapter 4 deals with Florovsky, who did not actually produce much concerning creation, especially as compared to Lossky. But the work he did, which was a rejection of the 'All-unity' metaphysics of Sophiology, laid the foundation of modern Orthodox ecclesial ontology. Florovsky's work was very historical and follows the Fathers quite closely. In these works he offers a veiled criticism of Bulgakov's Sophiology. His theology and anthropology of the freedom of man are foundational to his personalist spirituality.

Section B of chapter 4 considers Lossky's work, which was also based on the Fathers, but adds much that was his own theological work. His universal application of

apophasis in his theology and anthropology causes him to arrive at a personalism in both his Trinitarian theology and the concept of the human person. But, as another minor theme throughout, we will see that he also drew, perhaps quite unconsciously, from Russian religious philosophy and theology; but he did so with an Orthodox corrective. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how both Lossky and Florovsky carried out their unique visions of the theological task in relation to their respective doctrines of creation.

Chapter 1: Historical Background

A. Florovsky's History

1. Russia, 1893-1920

In this brief historical sketch I wish to highlight only those events that were significant in shaping the man and his ideas. For a more exhaustive analysis see Andrew Blane's excellent book entitled *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual, Orthodox Churchman*.⁴

Georges Vasilievich Florovsky was born in Elizavetgrad on 28 August 1893. He was the youngest child of Vasilii and Klavdia Florovsky. At six months old his family moved to Odessa, which he would remember with deep fondness as 'home'. Odessa, a metropolis, whose educated class was in no sense provincial, would serve as the setting of his formative years. His early life was surrounded by serious intellectual activity: both because his parents were well educated (his father, a priest, was rector of the Odessa Theological Seminary and his mother was the daughter of a priest who was professor of Hebrew and Greek at the Odessa Theological Seminary) and because he was separated by nine years from his nearest sibling. Another reason for his early interest in intellectual pursuits was his frail health. This meant that 'I could not go to school very much. I mostly studied at home . . . and, since I so often . . . had to stay in bed or lie on the sofa, I started reading serious books earlier than under normal conditions a boy would do'.⁵

⁴ This 'Historical Background' is derived both from George H. Williams 'Georges Vasilievich Florovsky: His American Career (1948-1965)', (hereafter Florovsky), *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (hereafter *GOTR*), Vol. 11, No. 1 (1965), 7-107 and Andrew Blane, (ed.), *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman* (hereafter *Florovsky*)(Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1993).

⁵ Blane, *Florovsky*, 22.

The Church also played a large part of Florovsky's formative years. He perceived his experience of regular attendance at religious services and reading Church history as wholly positive. Also, Florovsky was very much a polyglot. By the end of his gymnasium years he had acquired knowledge of English, French, German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

In 1911, at the age of seventeen, after completing his gymnasium education, Florovsky enrolled at the University of Odessa for a degree in philosophy. At the university he found philosophy 'was indissolubly linked to history. You had to be a historian to be a philosopher, and vice versa'.⁶ This was much to his liking. He also studied other fields such as science. One of Florovsky's first scholarly works came from his laboratory experiments in psychology, his 'On the Mechanism of Reflex Salivary Secretion'. This was written in English under one of Pavlov's students and published in the February 1917 issue of the *Bulletin de L'Académie Impériale des Sciences*.⁷ In 1916, at the age of 23, he passed his examinations for his degree in philosophy. Three years later he completed his work on his Master's Degree and was admitted as a teacher of philosophy at the University of Odessa.

In 1920, during the unsettled time after the Revolution and after the White Army had left Odessa and the seizure of power was imminent by the Bolsheviks, Georges, his father, his mother and his sister chose to leave the country and moved to Sofia, Bulgaria. On leaving Russia Florovsky said,

My conviction was that I would never return. It was only a feeling of course, because at the beginning of 1920 nobody knew what would happen, not even the Bolsheviks. But I had a conviction that I was leaving forever, and I was quite sure that I would find something to do in this other world.⁸

⁶ Blane, *Florovsky*, 28.

⁷ Blane, *Florovsky*, 29.

⁸ Blane, *Florovsky*, 33.

B. In Europe, 1920-1948

In the two years he was at Sofia, Bulgaria, Florovsky completed a thesis on Herzen and came to public notice as an original thinker in the so-called 'Eurasian movement'. In his brief participation in the movement he came to realize that his goals were not the same as those of others in the movement. They wanted political victories and he wanted cultural revival. His rejection of the movement was absolute; 'There was an intolerant spirit here; you want to be involved in political intrigue and that is not for me'.⁹ During his time in Sofia he also met his future wife Xenia Ivanovna Simonova whom he married on 27 April 1922.

In December 1921, Florovsky moved from Sofia to Prague, Czechoslovakia, which was made possible by a scholarship of the Academic Commission to provide for the education of Russian students in Czechoslovakia. In 1922 Florovsky took up his first teaching assignment in Prague. During this time he also revised and gave his public defence on his thesis 'The Historical Philosophy of Herzen'. Although it gained him the degree of Master of Philosophy, there was a sharp clash of opinions during its defence. His work was accused of being intellectually faulty due to 'his staunch identification with the Orthodox Church and commitment to religious faith as the authentic starting point for all human endeavour, including philosophical enquiry'.¹⁰

In 1926, under the instigation of Professors Bulgakov and Zenkovsky, Florovsky was invited to teach patristics at the newly formed (1925) Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe de Paris (known as St. Sergius). The decision to move to Paris and teach patristics (which was suggested by Professor Bulgakov) proved to be momentous. 'I discovered it was my true vocation'. Blane has well said that this became his

intellectual home - the foundation of his world view, the standard by which he judged and found wanting the course of Russian religious thought, the

⁹ Blane, *Florovsky*, 39.

¹⁰ Blane, *Florovsky*, 44.

entry way to his understanding of the religious cultures of Greece and of England, and the source of his contributions to and the criticisms of the ecumenical movement.¹¹

During his tenure at St. Sergius Florovsky published two of his most notable works on patristics, his *Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century*¹² and *Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth to the Eighth Centuries*.¹³ These were based on his patristic lectures and were considered ‘the hallmarks of Florovskian scholarship’. And, although some saw his works as a ‘disservice’, by reminding them of the struggles and instability of the early Church, others hailed them as originally powerful scholarly works. This was because of his ‘judicial analysis of primary material, richly detailed factual documentation, succinct and penetrating generalizations, all of which was cast in broad historical perspective conveyed in a terse and compelling style, and accompanied by a bibliography “*in extenso*”’.¹⁴ These are the works praised by Jaroslav Pelikan in *The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine*. He states in *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*: ‘These two works are basic to our interpretation of the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas’.¹⁵

In the period in which Florovsky was professor at St. Sergius (1926-1948) a few other events were significant in his life: the beginning of his ecumenical career, his acceptance of the priesthood, the Sophiology controversy, the introduction of his neopatristic synthesis and the publication of his book, *The Ways of Russian Theology*.¹⁶

¹¹ Blane, *Florovsky*, 49.

¹² Florovsky, *Eastern Fathers of the IV Century* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1931), as found in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol. VII, (Belmont, MA: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987). Hereafter *The Collected Works* will be referred to as CW. It must be noted that all quoted material from CW has been reproduced verbatim from the quoted original and is not a transcription error.

¹³ Florovsky, *Eastern Fathers of the V-VIII Centuries* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1933), as found in CW, Vols. VIII, and IX (Belmont, MA: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987).

¹⁴ Blane, *Florovsky*, 51.

¹⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 359.

¹⁶ Florovsky, *The Ways of Russian Theology, Part I* (Belmont, MA: Norland, 1979), CW, vol. 5, *Part II* (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Buchvertriebsanstalt, 1987), CW, vol. 6, (hereafter *Ways*).

His ecumenical career started with the so-called Berdiaev Colloquium. It was a forum started in 1926 by Nikolai Berdiaev, the Russian religious philosopher, for the purpose of ‘ecumenical conversations’, which included representatives from Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. This group included some of the leading theological and philosophical minds of the time: Boegner, Bulgakov, Gilson, Marcel and Maritain. This, Florovsky’s first encounter with ecumenism, was the beginning of a long and influential career.

In 1928 he began discussions between Orthodox and Anglicans: the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius organized these. He became one of the vice presidents of the Fellowship and gave lectures throughout Great Britain and Ireland. He was also a delegate to the Faith and Order Conferences held in Edinburgh in 1937, Lund in 1952, Montreal in 1963, and the local American conference in Oberlin, Ohio, in 1957. He was also an Assembly delegate to the first assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, to Evanston in 1954, to New Delhi in 1961, and to Uppsala in 1968.¹⁷

Florovsky accepted ordination to the priesthood in 1932, to the consternation of Berdiaev, who ‘had never fully shed the notion absorbed in his radical intelligentsia days that all priests were obscurantists and reactionary’.¹⁸ This would be the first element of alienation in their friendship. He was ordained by the Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarch for Western Europe, Metropolitan Evlogii.

One of the most painful experiences in Florovsky’s life was the theological commission that Florovsky was forced, by Metropolitan Evlogii, to participate in. This commission was to evaluate the Sophiology of Father Sergius Bulgakov. Florovsky had met Bulgakov in Prague in 1923. Bulgakov, originally a Marxist political economist, was a thinker of some prominence. Later Bulgakov, after his Christian conversion, gained great renown as an Orthodox philosopher and theologian. And, in the Paris *émigré* community,

¹⁷ Thomas E. Bird, ‘In Memoriam: Georges Florovsky, 1893 – 1979’, *GOTR*, Vol.24, No. 4 (1979), 344.

¹⁸ Blane, *Florovsky*, 183.

he was seen as a revered spiritual father. Although there were differences in many of their intellectual ideas, there was a deep mutual respect and personal warmth between the two men.

While there were many differences that led up to the commission, the main clash was because of a marked difference in religious orientation.¹⁹ Father Alexander Schmemmann described it as

two different types of theological approach. One of these types had its roots in the tradition of Russian religious and philosophical thought of the XIXth Century, itself an offspring of the Western tradition, especially German idealism. One may describe this school of thought as a 'Russian school', because of the importance which all representatives, regardless of their mutual disagreements, attributed to the problems and the ideas which constituted the main bulk of Russian religious thinking. They wanted to move further in the same direction.²⁰

Bulgakov was representative of this approach. In opposition to this type of religious reference was Florovsky, who, Schmemmann says,

had chosen as a cornerstone of the Orthodox Theological revival not any modern traditions of the school, but the sacred Tradition of the Church. He called for a 'return to the Fathers', to the Fathers of the Church Universal - to that 'sacred Hellenism', which in his expression is an eternal and perennial category of historical Orthodoxy. In other words, to the attempt to re-evaluate the ancient Greek tradition in light of the modern Russian experience Father Georges has opposed a vigorous appeal to check and re-evaluate the 'Russian' achievements in the light of that 'Hellenic' inheritance, from which, in Dr. Florovsky's opinion, Russian thought has been torn away for too long by Western influences.²¹

Although both had promoted their respective approaches at St. Sergius, neither sought confrontation. But their intellectual opposition was brought out into the public

¹⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, 'Russian Theology: 1920-1972: An Introductory Survey', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (hereafter *SVTQ*), Vol. 4 (1972), 172-194.

²⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, 'Roll of Honour', *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* (hereafter *SVSQ*), Fall 1953, 6.

²¹ Schmemmann, 'Roll of Honour', 7.

arena when in 1935, both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Karlovci Synod Abroad, acting separately, condemned Bulgakov's Sophiology as heretical. Bulgakov did not belong to either's jurisdiction, so no action was taken. But Metropolitan Evlogii, who was his superior, could in no way ignore the charges. To this end, he set up a theological commission composed of ten persons, in which Florovsky was one. The choice of Florovsky was a necessity, as Blane notes.

Aware that the *prima facie* charge of bias that favoured the revered Bulgakov would make the conclusions of the commission suspect outside the Paris emigration in the wider world of Orthodoxy, Metropolitan Evlogii took pains to include on his commission persons known to disagree with the theological speculations of Father Bulgakov.²²

Florovsky told the Metropolitan that he did not wish to take part in the proceedings; he did not want to be involved at all. The Metropolitan's reply was 'You must be on the Commission; otherwise it will be in vain'.²³ His final assessment was that Bulgakov's Sophiological views were mistaken and erroneous, but not heretical. The final result was that a 'minority report', signed only by Father Chetverikov and Father Florovsky, was given to the Metropolitan, and an assembly of bishops considered the case, and Father Bulgakov was asked for a *retractio*.

Florovsky's rejection of Sophiology along with its entire tradition from Soloviev to Bulgakov can be seen in an early letter from him to Bulgakov.

Putting it bluntly, in Soloviev everything is superfluous; while the main thing is completely absent...I believe that in your case, too, Soloviev long hindered you in your search for the main thing. For the road to discovering it lies through Christology not through Trinitology, since only with Christ Jesus did the worship of the Trinity become a reality. The point here is that only in history, in the realm of historical experience, are we capable of understanding the creature hood of creation.²⁴

²² Blane, *Florovsky*, 66.

²³ Blane, *Florovsky*, 66.

²⁴ Quoted in A.M. Pentkovskii, 'Pis'ma G. Florovskogo S. Bulgakovu i S. Tyshkevichu', *Simvol* [Paris] 29 (1993): 205-6, as quoted in Alexis Klimoff, 'Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy', *SVTQ*,

With such an adamant view held privately, it is interesting to note that Florovsky nowhere in his written works explicitly attacks Sophiology. Alexis Klimoff insightfully notes:

But beyond these rather sparse critical comments dating from a period before his meeting with Bulgakov, Florovsky's writings after the mid-1920s abound in what can be characterized as indirect criticism of Sophiology. These are scholarly studies that aim to expose weaknesses in the theoretical or historical underpinnings of the Sophiological edifice, doing so, however, without referring to Sophiological teaching by name. The overall intent is nevertheless quite unmistakable, and the late Fr John Meyendorff has argued that opposition to Sophiology was in fact the principle motivating factor throughout Florovsky's scholarly career. In support of this view, Meyendorff recalls what had been Florovsky's frequent comment in his lectures on patrology at the Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris (where Meyendorff had been a student). The great theologians of the early Christian centuries, Florovsky had constantly reminded his listeners, were almost invariably moved to theologize by the need to oppose some heretical teaching. In the same way, Meyendorff contends, Florovsky was spurred to produce many of his works in protest against Sophiology and the non-Orthodox influences, which he felt to be its source and inspiration.²⁵

Florovsky viewed Sophiology as being 'extrinsic' to the ecclesial consciousness of the Church. He viewed history, a return to the Fathers, and the historical process, and individual persons making free choices, as the solution to the problem of Western Idealism run rampant in Russian religious philosophy. Implicit in Meyendorff's statement is that Florovsky himself was a heroic figure and theologian to bring about a paradigm shift in Orthodox thought to counteract heresy. Russell, in describing Hegel's 'world-historical individuals', states, 'these are men in whose aims are embodied the dialectical transitions that are due to take place in their time. These men are heroes...'²⁶ It seems that Florovsky saw himself as one such historical individual.

49, n. 1-2, 2005, 75. For this and all following Russian transliterations I have followed the conventions in the books I have used.

²⁵ Alexis Klimoff, 'Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy', *SVTQ*, 49, n. 1-2, 2005, 76.

²⁶ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 709.

An example of demonstrating Meyendorff's point that Florovsky was indirectly criticizing and protesting against Sophiology in his works, Klimoff offers Florovsky's 'Creation and Creature hood'. This article, which will be treated in detail in Chapter 4, is full of patristic references and is, on the surface, a historical theological accounting of the Fathers' views on creation. There is no reference to Sophiology anywhere. But Florovsky's main points of the complete contingency of creation, which was created by a free act of God and the absolute ontological distinction between God and his creation are aimed at Bulgakov's Sophiology: specifically the concepts that God created the world to share His love and that Sophia was the connection between God and creation.

This incident was hurtful for both Bulgakov and Florovsky. Bulgakov had undergone the humiliation of what some considered an official 'heresy trial' and lost his reputation as a major Orthodox theologian outside of Paris. Florovsky, amongst the Russian *émigré* community, was branded as the man who brought this humiliation and became the target of anger and hostility. The only major solace that Florovsky had during the following years was the continued mutual respect and affection that Bulgakov and he had for each other. In the main, it was because of this controversy and its following repercussions that Florovsky had prolonged absences from St. Sergius after the mid 1930's.

In 1936, at the First Congress of Orthodox theologians in Athens, Greece, Florovsky's ideas of 'neopatristic synthesis' and 'Christian Hellenism' started to gain serious attention in the pan-Orthodox world. His insistence on responding to modern challenges of the time by returning to the Fathers and a renewed commitment to the hellenization of Orthodoxy (that is, a commitment fully-based on the language and mind of the original Greek Fathers; incorporation and transfiguration of Hellenized thought into Christianity) made a powerful and lasting impression and contributed to the spread of his theological influence. Professor Draguet noted the originality and contrast of Florovsky's thought to the other current trends at a special seminar given at the University of Louvain

in 1937-1938. In speaking of Florovsky's contribution to the Eastern Church, he states that Florovsky 'who against the current trend to seek out the essence of Orthodoxy followed the historical path to its historic connection with the Patristic tradition and called for a renewed hellenization of Orthodoxy'.²⁷ It is this commitment to the concrete historical emphasis that would be the hallmark of all of Florovsky's theology.

The following year, 1937, proved to be one of the most memorable for Florovsky. He attended and was elected to the so-called Committee of Fourteen at the Second Conference of Faith and Order in Edinburgh, which he called 'My first big ecumenical meeting'. He was also awarded his first of many honorary doctorate degrees from St. Andrew's University, Scotland. And finally, he published what many consider his masterpiece, *The Ways of Russian Theology (Puti russkago bogoslaviia)*.

The Ways of Russian Theology met with open hostility within the Russian émigré community in Paris, mostly because of Florovsky's harsh critique of the Russian religious renaissance movement and the aspects of the past, which they cherished. Outside of Paris the work was considered a milestone for its rich depth of history and its laying bare of the weaknesses inherent in the Russian religious philosophy of the past. Even Berdiaev, the book's harshest critic, saw the work at least as being consistent as addressing issues from the past. After a long biting analysis in his article 'Orthodoxy and Humanness' (*Ortodoksiya i Chelovechnost*) in the journal *The Way (Put')*, which he edited, Berdiaev offers this closing critique, 'The book lays bare the contradiction and weakness of the exclusive care guarding of Orthodoxy, and by a negative path it returns to the themes and problems of Russian religious thought of the XIX and XX Centuries'.²⁸ Although much has been said negatively about the one-sided and idiosyncratic critique of Florovsky's work,²⁹ one must give some credit to what is positive about the book. In short, Florovsky evaluates Russian religious philosophy through the lens of asceticism and contemplation

²⁷ Blane, *Florovsky*, 71.

²⁸ Nikolai Berdiaev, 'Ortodoksiya i Chelovechnost', *Put'*, April - July, No. 53 (1937), 53-65. Translated by Fr. S. Janos in Yakov Krotov's Library website.

²⁹ See Marc Raeff's 'Georges Florovsky as Russian Intellectual Historian' in Blane, *Florovsky*, 219-286.

lived in the context of patristic thought and Scriptures; as he says, ‘bound organically with life, the actual life of the Church’.³⁰ Florovsky’s main concern throughout is that theology must never become disassociated from the spiritual quest (*podvig*) and life of the Church. All of his critique, whether good or bad, stems from this understanding. Berdiaev humorously notes that the book should have been titled *The Waylessness of Russian Theology* (because of its harsh negative critique). Florovsky admits this himself in the preface of the book, he states, ‘I am convinced the intellectual break from patristics and Byzantinism was the chief cause for all the interruptions and failures in Russia’s development. The history of those failures is told in this book’.³¹ The book was a history of failures. Father Alexander Schmemmann is one of the few to give respect to Florovsky’s views. But he also makes sure that a more balanced view be considered by reading Zenkovsky’s *A History of Russian Philosophy*.³² He believed, ‘Both books are absolutely indispensable to every student of Russian Orthodoxy’.³³

When World War II began, the Florovskys were in Switzerland. Since return to Paris was impossible and reaching Britain unlikely, they decided to move to Yugoslavia. Here they spent all of the war years except the last. In 1945, with the help of Paul Anderson, an old friend and director of the YMCA in Paris, they returned to France with much difficulty. Father Florovsky, with much opposition from the new dean, Zenkovsky, and Professor Kartashev, resumed his teaching at St. Sergius in the spring of 1946.

From 1946 to 1948 he found himself travelling again to give lectures in England and elsewhere and attend ecumenical conferences. Most notably of the ecumenical conferences was the Amsterdam Assembly, which brought into being the World Council of Churches. Here his contribution was to offer the Orthodox position in clear and uncompromising terms, and to be the mainstay of Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement.

³⁰ Florovsky, *Ways*, CW, V, 237.

³¹ Florovsky, *Ways*, in CW, V, xvii.

³² Zenkovsky, *History*, 2 Vols.

³³ Schmemmann, ‘Russian Theology: 1920-1972, An Introductory Survey’, *SVTQ*, No. 4(1972), 172-194,188.

Ten days after his return from the Amsterdam assembly, the Florovskys were on a boat to America, where Father Florovsky would take up the post of Professor of Dogmatic Theology and Patristics at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York City. This was the beginning of his American career.

C. In United States of America, 1948-1979

During his tenure at St. Vladimir's (1948 to 1955), Florovsky, who became Dean in 1950, instituted many changes. His vision of the seminary was that it should be pan-Orthodox and ecumenical in orientation. He saw being a part of the true Church as a high prerogative as well as a heavy responsibility. It was a necessary obligation of the seminary to indigenize Orthodoxy to American civilization. With this vision in mind, Florovsky started out by requiring all lectures to be in English and then the liturgy as well. On the academic front, he raised standards to make the seminary a noteworthy graduate school of theology. He required that a college degree be a prerequisite for all students. He also broadened the curriculum and strengthened the faculty. To this end, he recruited from St. Sergius, Father Alexander Schmemmann in 1951, to teach Church history and liturgics, and Serge Verkhovskoi in 1952, to teach comparative theology. Florovsky also mandated that all students learn Greek.

Also during his time at St. Vladimir's, Florovsky created the *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* in 1952, with the purpose of influencing local churches and society. This would be the first Orthodox theological journal to regularly appear in English.

While teaching at St. Vladimir's he also taught religion at Columbia University from 1951 to 1955 and served as Adjunct Professor of Eastern Orthodox History and Theology at Union Theological Seminary from 1951 to 1956. He also taught a course at Boston University's School of Theology during the academic year of 1954 to 1955. Amazingly, during this same period, he was still heavily involved in the ecumenical movement.

In 1954 Florovsky was asked to step down from the deanship of St. Vladimir's. Many differences had arisen over the direction of the school and concerning Florovsky's personality, and these had become acute in the academic year of 1954 to 1955. This was his last year there.

In the fall of 1955, Florovsky was appointed, although not to a full teaching post, Associate Professor of Patristics and Dogmatic Theology at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological Seminary in Brookline, Massachusetts (which he held until 1965).

The following year, 1956, Florovsky, through the instrumental help of Henry S. Leper, Douglas C. Horton and George H. Williams, was appointed Lecturer in Eastern Church History at Harvard University Divinity School. Following this appointment, the Florovskys moved from New York to Cambridge.

While at Harvard Divinity School, Florovsky's renown as an erudite Russian scholar and Slavist gained him the appointment as Associate Professor in the Slavic Department at Harvard University in 1961. Here he influenced the formation of a generation of American specialists in Russian intellectual thought and cultural history. This arose not so much from his institutional teaching but from his informal discussion 'circles'. Florovsky held these posts until his mandatory retirement at the age of seventy in 1964.

In the autumn of 1964 the Florovskys moved to Princeton where Father Georges was to teach advanced seminars in the history of Slavic Literature, Russian Religious Thought and Patristics at Princeton University. This appointment was on an annual basis and would come to an end in 1972. This same year, with no job prospects in sight and Father Georges at the age of seventy-nine, the Florovskys considered moving from Princeton to help stretch their finances. But the President of Princeton Theological Seminary, James I. McCord, stepped in to provide support by arranging a stipend for Florovsky. Florovsky would enrich the theological environment at the school and take the title Visiting Lecturer in Church History. He held this position until his death in 1979.

In the course of his career Florovsky was awarded seven honorary doctorates. They were from St. Andrews University, Boston University, Notre Dame, Princeton University, the University of Thessalonica, St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary, and Yale. He was also a member or honorary member of several societies, such as the Academy of Athens, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the British Academy and the Fellowship of St. Albans and St. Sergius.

Father Florovsky's influence throughout his long career can be seen in many areas of contemporary thought. His literary contribution was in the fields of theology, church history, ecumenism, scholarly patristics, philosophy, and Slavic literature. His life is summed up succinctly in the words of George H. Williams, Hollis Professor *Emeritus* of Harvard Divinity School.

Faithful priestly son of the Russian Orthodox Church . . . Fr. Georges Florovsky - with a career-long involvement in the ecumenical dialogue - is today the most articulate, trenchant and winsome exponent of Orthodox theology and piety in the scholarly world. He is innovative and creative in the sense wholly of being ever prepared to restate the saving truth of Scripture and Tradition in the idiom of our contemporary yearning for the transcendent.³⁴

Before we consider Lossky's history, I would like to first look more closely at Florovsky ecumenical career. This will put his theology in a more specific context as he engages with the west in an ecumenical setting.

4. Florovsky's Ecumenism

There are six distinct emphases that Florovsky made in his contribution to the ecumenical movement. Most of these, if not all, were formulated before his involvement in the World Council of Churches. The first emphasis was that there were 'deep theological

³⁴ George H. Williams, 'Father Georges Florovsky 1893-1979: Preeminent Orthodox Christian Theologian, Ecumenical Spokesman, And Authority on Russian Letters', *Harvard Gazette*, October 1, 1982, as quoted in the beginning of CW, IV.

differences'. Second, the Ecumenical Movement should never give in to the temptation of seeking unity by co-operation on 'practical matters'. Third, the real root of disunity in Christianity is both doctrinal and religious. Fourth, all must recover the perspective of the historical Christian tradition that has always resided in the Orthodox Church. Fifth, the only real way to proceed in ecumenical endeavour is by 'the way of theological study, dialogue, and confrontation'. Sixth, and final, ecumenical work was an obligation and a responsibility of the Orthodox to witness to the Truth that was the Church herself. This section will attempt to cull from his ecumenical encounters, both written and in person; just how these points were formulated. It will also try to understand the context in which they arose and to determine their specific meanings.

a. Historical Background

In considering the ecumenical career and contribution of Florovsky, it is first necessary to understand the historical context and the ecumenical perspective of the Orthodox Church in general. The main concerns for the early ecumenists before Florovsky were how the Orthodox Church stands in relationship to other Christian bodies and whether or not reunion should be sought and, if so, how is it to be achieved.

One of the first official Orthodox statements on ecumenism is given by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Joachim III: Calling for a 'League of Churches' in 1920, he writes 'Unto the Churches of Christ everywhere':

Our own church holds that rapprochement between the various Christian Churches and fellowship between them is not excluded by the doctrinal differences, which exist between them. In our opinion such a rapprochement is highly desirable and necessary... Even in this case, owing to antiquated prejudices, practices or pretensions, the difficulties which have so often jeopardized attempts at reunion in the past may arise or be brought up, nevertheless, in our view, since we are concerned at this initial stage only with contacts and rapprochement, these difficulties are of less importance. If there is good will and intention, they cannot and should not create an invincible and inseparable obstacle . . . For if the different churches are inspired by love, and place it before everything else in their

judgments of others and their relationship with them, instead of increasing and widening the existing dissensions, they should be enabled to reduce and diminish themIt is the duty of the churches which bear the sacred name of Christ not to forget or neglect any longer his new and great commandment of love For all these reasons, being ourselves convinced of the necessity for establishing a contact and league between the churches and believing that the other churches share our conviction as stated above . . . we may proceed together to its realization.³⁵

It is clear from the Patriarch's Encyclical that doctrinal differences were to be turned 'a blind eye', as he said in his 1902 encyclical. The purpose of this was solely, at this 'initial stage', for contact and the *rapprochement* of all churches 'which bear the sacred name of Christ'. The way the word *rapprochement* is used here needs to be clarified. The Patriarch uses it as in the building of a bridge, as the reconciliation of relations in their 'initial stages' and not as 'reunion' in its fullest sense. And this *rapprochement* could only be accomplished by placing mutual love 'before everything else'. It is this bold Encyclical that W.A. Visser t' Hooft, the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, described as 'an initiative which was without precedent in church history'.³⁶

But how was the reunion of the churches to be understood by the Orthodox Church and how was it to be accomplished? Metropolitan Germanos of Thyateira, who is generally considered as the drafter of much of the 1920 Encyclical, made this very clear in his address to the First World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne, 1927.

Although the Orthodox Church considers unity in faith a primary condition of reunion of the Churches, yet it rejects that exclusive theory according to which one Church, regarding itself as the one true Church, insists that those who seek reunion with it shall enter its own realm. Such a conception of reunion, amounting to the absorption of the other churches, is in every way opposed to the spirit existing in the Orthodox Church, which has always distinguished between unity on the one hand and uniformity on the other As a consequence, only those things that have a direct reference to the Faith and which are by general consent accepted should be considered

³⁵ Constantin G. Patelos, *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement* (London: SCM, 1978), 7-8.

³⁶ W.A. Visser T'Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 1.

obligatory and as making for unity. Hence, the Orthodox Church, following the advice of Augustine *in dubiis libertas*, concedes to theologians' freedom of thought as regards things which are not essential and which have no connection with the faith of the heart. But whilst it does not forbid such freedom, and willingly recognizes that the nature of these questions is of such a kind that the solutions given to them are necessarily in the realms of doubt and probability, yet it stands by the principle that it is necessary to have agreement in essential things. *In necessariis unitas*.

Here Germanos, wisely anticipating the question begged, asked it himself.

But what are the elements of Christian teaching, which are to be regarded as essential? The Orthodox Church holds the view that it is not necessarily that these should be discussed and determined at this present time, since they have been already determined in the old symbols and decisions of the seven Ecumenical Synods. Consequently, the teaching of the ancient undivided church of the first eight centuries, free from every question which did not have a direct relation to these things which were to be believed, must today also constitute the basis of the reunion of the Churches.³⁷

These texts are important in understanding the Orthodox perspective of the reunion of the churches. They reveal that, for the Orthodox Church, reunion is not simply converting to Orthodoxy, but reunion is commitment to the essential truths of Christianity. And although Germanos believed that they should not be discussed at that time, he does elaborate what truths have already been determined. These truths are seen in the Symbol of Faith, the Nicene-Constantinople Creed (without the *filioque*), and the decisions of the seven Ecumenical Councils. It was a commitment to an understanding of the truths of Christianity, as they were understood in the undivided Church of the first eight centuries. In other words, and this is very much implied, 'the basis for reunion' was a call to return to the truths of Christianity as the Orthodox Church had always understood them. There was no need to discuss what the essential elements of Christianity were, for they had already been determined. It was imperative at these initial meetings to be very sensitive in language and action. It was the same sensitivity that one might expect in the initial contact

³⁷ Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope (eds.), *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 14-15.

of two quarrelling brothers. Therefore, these truths, which were already known by the Orthodox, had to be, at these early stages as well as later, spoken in love. This is exactly how Patriarch Joachim III closes his Encyclical, quoting Ephesians 4:15, 16 he concludes.

Speaking the truth in love, that we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; for whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.³⁸

These texts demonstrate the groundbreaking-work laid by those Orthodox who believed that dialogue was necessary between ‘all those who claim the name of Christ’. They also provided direction and understanding to the Orthodox Church’s members who were to follow and be involved in ecumenical encounters, and more specifically, to Florovsky himself.

b. Florovsky’s Ecumenical Encounters

Florovsky’s ecumenical encounters can be divided into four distinct periods: the so-called Berdiaev Colloquium, the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, the Faith and Order membership, which in turn led to his involvement in the formation and participation in the World Council of Churches (WCC). Because most of his interesting work is done before the WCC was formed, only the first three periods will be considered.

1. The Berdiaev Colloquium

As was noted above, the first of many ecumenical dialogues for Florovsky was experienced in the so-called Berdiaev colloquium. This was an informal gathering of scholarly theologians from Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism. The Russian religious philosopher Nicholas Berdiaev initiated these meetings. The Catholic

³⁸ Patelos, *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, 43.

representatives included Jacques Maritain, Charles du Bos, Gabriel Marcel, Lucien Labretonnière and occasionally Etienne Gilson and Jules Lebreton. The Orthodox theologians consisted of Nicholas Berdiaev (the convener), Florovsky, Madam Myrrha Lot-Borodine, Basil Zenkovsky, Sergius Bulgakov and Boris P. Vyacheslavtsev. Among the Protestants were Marc Boegner, Winrid Monod, Auguste Lecerf and Pierre Maury.³⁹

The article ‘The Father’s House’ (1925), which was published during this period, is of some importance, for in it there is the genesis of his ecclesiology (though not written from the perspective of the ecumenical dialogue, it did have bearing). Although this article reads more like an exegesis of patristic thought, it does contain a few of the major themes that Florovsky would expound and elucidate in his later article ‘Sobornost: The Catholicity of the Church’. What is also of significance in the ‘Father’s House’ is the attitude of guardedness and protection that Florovsky maintains in attempting to understand the teachings about the Church. He believed it was necessary to understand the Church from the perspective of experiencing the life of grace from *within* the Church itself. He insists:

Any harm to the teachings about the Church, any destruction of the fullness of Church self-consciousness inevitably drags behind it dogmatic and theological imprecision, error and distortion. That is why, in essence, there cannot be particular, individual, complete dogmatic teachings about the Church, set forth in general accessible dogmatic formulations. For the Church is the focus of all Christianity and is known only from within, through experience and the accomplishment of a life of grace – not in individual dogmatic definitions but in the entire fullness of the doctrine of the faith.⁴⁰

It was this attitude of only truly understanding the Church from ‘within’ and not from strict individual dogmatic formulations that would be the background in further ecumenical dialogues concerning the doctrine of the Church.

³⁹ Williams, Florovsky, 30.

⁴⁰ Florovsky, ‘The Father’s House’, Reprinted in *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach*, CW, XIII, 58.

2. The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius

In Moscow, 1917-1918, the ecumenical mandate of the All Russian *Sobor*, the first council of the Russian Church since the one of 1681-1682, passed a resolution to authorize further study of union between the Orthodox Church and the Western Churches of Episcopal polity, that is, with the Anglicans and Old Catholics. This was due in part to the already existing contacts made during the later nineteenth century and up to the First World War. This is one of the reasons why Florovsky, in 1929, joined the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (hereafter Fellowship or FSASS). The Fellowship grew out of the joint meeting of the British and Russian Student Christian Movements in 1927 and then was officially formed in 1928.

As Nicolas Zernov understood it, the initial meetings would illuminate the differences in mentality and theology between the Russians and the English. But there was also a realization of the ‘brotherhood in Christ’ due to the gathering together in common worship of the same saviour.⁴¹

In this Anglican-Russian Fellowship, the main Anglicans were Bishop Charles Gore and Bishop Walter Frere and the main Orthodox figures were Fr. Bulgakov and Florovsky. Florovsky, due to his involvement, became one of the assistant editors of the Fellowship’s *Journal*, and also became known outside the Orthodox world.

During this period there are three articles that are worth considering more closely. First, ‘The Eucharist and Catholicity’ (1929), is full of quotations from the Fathers’ understanding of the relationship of the Eucharist and the Church’s Catholicity. Here, it is clear, that believers become the Body of Christ only by participating in the Eucharist. This union is not merely symbolic but ‘it is a real and ontological unity, the realization of a single organic life in Christ’.⁴² It is this understanding that foreshadows Florovsky’s fuller discernment concerning the catholicity of the Church as a ‘unity in community’ in his article ‘Sobornost: The Catholicity of the Church’. What is more interesting is the way

⁴¹ Nicolas and Militza Zernov, ‘The History of the Fellowship’, Sobornost.org, 1979.

⁴² Florovsky, *Ecumenism I*, CW XIII, 48.

Florovsky closes the article. Because of the ‘Divine light of love’ experienced in the Eucharistic liturgy one does not want to return to the ‘cares’ of the world.

In addition, love does not tolerate inactivity. And the pathos of unity and union, gathered together in liturgical vigil, cannot help entering into actions. Acts of love are a continuation of divine service, of service and praise to God – Love. Therefore, from the Eucharist the way opens to every day action, to the searching of the world for the world . . . We should go in peace into the world, with the will that the entire world would become God’s world, the shining fulfilment of the all-blessed will of the all-powerful God. And serving the world becomes the task of the partakers of the Cup of Peace. The discord of the world cannot but alarm and break the Christian heart – and especially the discord of the world over Christ, the decay of the Christian world, and division in the Eucharistic supper. In this discord and division there is a grievous mystery, a mystery of human betrayal and opposition. This is a frightful mystery, for it tears asunder nothing other than the tunic of the Lord, his Body. Only love will conquer this dissention, the love of Christ, and acting in us through the spirit of peace. It is true that no matter how much we do for the ‘union of all’, it always turns out to be too little. And the way to the Church is scattered in many paths, and it ends beyond the boundaries of the historical horizon, in the vespers of the Kingdom of the future age. The wandering will end when the King will come and initiate celebration.⁴³

It is here that we first see Florovsky revealing the anguish of disunity. For this discord breaks the ‘Christian heart’ and is a ‘grievous mystery’ of ‘human betrayal’ for it is nothing less than the tearing apart of Christ’s Body. In this passage there appears to be no longer merely the academic theologian expositing theology but a very personal suffering that comes from a contemplative reality. The truth of disunity is revealed in all its painful existence. Here Florovsky also offers the remedy, which is our responsibility: acts of love. Or rather, ‘the love of Christ’ will conquer ‘acting in us through the spirit of peace’. But this ‘union of all’ will only fully be accomplished in the Eschaton, where ‘the King will come and initiate celebration’. Florovsky saw clearly that the hope of the ecumenical dialogues, although wrought with the human obligation to live in the pursuit of unity, lay ultimately with the return of the King.

⁴³ Florovsky, *Ecumenism I*, CW XIII, 57.

Another important article written during this same period was ‘The Limits of the Church’ (1933). It is here that Florovsky works out, as the title suggests, where the limits of the Church reside and whether or not the sacraments are valid in schismatic and heretical groups. Borrowing heavily from Augustine, Florovsky explains that the limits of the Church are not to be understood strictly in the canonical extent, but in her charismatic extent. It is not where the Church is, there are the sacraments, but where the sacraments are there is the Church. Following Augustine, the sacraments performed by schismatics are their continuing ‘links with the Church’. But the unity of the Church is twofold: the ‘unity of the Spirit’ and the ‘bond of peace’.

In sects and schisms the ‘bond of peace’ is broken and torn, but the ‘unity of the Spirit in the sacraments is not brought to an end. This is the unique paradox of sectarian existence: the sect remains united with the Church in the grace of the sacraments, and this becomes a condemnation once love and communal mutuality have withered and died . . . The sacraments of schismatics are valid: that is, they genuinely are sacraments, but they are not efficacious by virtue of schism and division.⁴⁴

Here, the Church’s unity residing in communality, or using the Russian word *sobornost*, starts to move to the forefront of his ecclesiology.

The Church continues to work in the schisms in expectation of that mysterious hour when the stubborn heart will be melted in the warmth of God’s prevention grace, when the will and thirst for communality and unity will finally burst into flame.⁴⁵

And again, he comments on Augustine’s views.

St. Augustine in no way relaxed or removed the boundary dividing sect and communality. This is not so much a canonical as a spiritual boundary: communal love in the Church and separatism and alienation in the schism.

⁴⁴ Florovsky, ‘The Limits of the Church’, Website of the Holy Protection Russian Orthodox Church, Missionary Leaflet E95b, 5-6.

⁴⁵ Florovsky, ‘Limits’, Leaflet E95b, 7.

For Augustine this was the boundary of salvation, since grace operates outside communality but does not save.⁴⁶

Hence, the Church does exist charismatically beyond its canonical boundaries, but it was never allowed to transgress the canonical limit. This was because unity only existed inherently within the canonical limit and beyond the limit only an absence of unity.

It is with these concepts in view that he briefly attacks as unacceptable the ‘branch’ theory of the Church. He views the cleavages in Christianity not as branches but for what they really are: schisms. Separation from the unity of the Church is not a branch but a ‘will for schism’.

It is the mysterious and even enigmatic sphere beyond the canonical limits of the Church, where the sacraments are still celebrated and where hearts often still burn in faith, in love and in works. We must admit this, but we must remember that the limit is real, that unity does not exist.⁴⁷

After putting such a fine point on his argument that the unity of the Church is based on communality, he hastens back to what should be the proper attitude toward those excluded from this unity. The Church is not to pass judgment, for this is not her prerogative, but God’s. Nor is she, here Florovsky quotes Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, ‘to call false any Church which believes that Jesus is the Christ’. Philaret viewed the Church as ‘purely true’ or ‘not purely true’. And in the expectation of some to pass judgment, he simply states.

I see how the Head and Lord of the Church heals the many deep wounds of the old serpent in all the parts and limbs of his body . . . In this way I attest my faith that, in the end, the power of God will triumph over human weakness, good over evil, unity over division, life over death.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Florovsky, ‘Limits’, Leaflet E95b, 7.

⁴⁷ Florovsky, ‘Limits’, Leaflet E95b, 8.

⁴⁸ Florovsky, ‘Limits’, Leaflet E95b, 9.

For Florovsky, the bonds that exist and are still not broken reveals, in some sense, that the schisms still have a certain connection with the Church. It is this understanding that causes Florovsky to call for an increased commitment to ‘removing the stubbornness of dissension’.⁴⁹ He closes with a quote by St. Gregory Nazianzen. ‘We seek not conquest but the return of our brethren, whose separation from us is tearing us apart’.

The final article of this period was of primary importance in all further development of his ecclesiology, his ‘Sobornost: The Catholicity of the Church’.⁵⁰ In this foundational work Florovsky gathers together and displays almost all related themes on Orthodox ecclesiology: In ‘Sobornost’ Florovsky brings all his powers to bear on explaining what and how the Orthodox Church considers to be the essential elements of Christian truth. Pulling from the resources of the Fathers and from previous articles he had written, Florovsky explicates with both richness and clarity the Church’s understanding of the Eucharist and *Sobornost* and how they relate to the Church as One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. His conception of the Church, which is found in this article, would be the centre of doctrinal concern in all further ecumenical dialogues.

In comparing this last article with the first two considered here, there is one noticeable difference. In all three he develops theology based on patristic texts, but only in the first two does he consider love and non-judgment to be the proper attitude to those outside the unity of the Church. He does mention in ‘Sobornost’ the necessity of reunion, but there is more the spirit of humility and love in the first two articles concerning the existing disunity. The first two articles are more consistent with the 1920 Encyclical statement concerning overlooking differences for the purpose of rapprochement in the spirit of love and unity. And as Germanos clarified there was no need to elaborate what the essentials to be believed were, for they had already been determined. Whether or not

⁴⁹ Florovsky, ‘Limits’, Leaflet E95b, 8.

⁵⁰ Florovsky, ‘Sobornost: The Catholicity of the Church’, E.L. Mascall (ed.), *The Church of God* (London: SPCK, 1934), 51-74.

the sentiments of Florovsky's first two articles considered here become precepts that are always remembered, or precepts that are dimly forgotten, one cannot be sure. But one thing is certain for Florovsky; the attitude of rapprochement is replaced by an emphasis on differences of dogma and in elaborating the Orthodox understanding of the essential truths of Christianity. We might explain this change of emphasis by saying that Florovsky believed that rapprochement had already been achieved. Now, the actual need for real unity was the task; and this task could only be accomplished by constantly reiterating the differences of doctrine and by stressing the essentials of Christianity, which indeed were the hallmarks of Florovskian ecumenism.

During this period Florovsky's trips to England multiplied, due to his relationships with the FSASS and the British Student Christian Movement. Nicolas Zernov, who was later lecturer in Eastern Christianity at Oxford University, initiated a program of visiting lectures to augment the limited interchange of the Anglican-Orthodox conferences. Florovsky was a regular participant in this program. This program took Florovsky to four different theological Universities in Scotland: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and St. Andrews. In giving lectures for the first time to Calvinist-Reformed Protestant schools, as compared to the more compatible Anglican, Florovsky's ecumenical horizon was enlarged.

This dialogue has helped me to discover both the common ground of the universal Christian commitment and the depth of the actual estrangement and tension. It was at this point that I became inwardly compelled to develop a sense of 'ecumenical patience'.⁵¹

It was during these travels that the real existential differences between the churches and the real challenge confronting ecumenical work was truly realized. And it was also

⁵¹ Florovsky, 'My Personal Participation in the Ecumenical Movement' (CW, XIV) 170.

during these travels that Florovsky's reputation as a 'profound Orthodox theologian' spread.⁵²

3. Faith and Order

In 1927 the first Faith and Order World Conference had gathered in Lausanne.⁵³ The main Orthodox representatives at the conference were Metropolitan Germanos of Thyateira and Fr. Sergius Bulgakov. At the opening session Germanos spoke of the urgent need for Christian unity. This is where his lengthy quote above was first spoken. He emphasized that from the Orthodox perspective 'unity in faith constitutes a primary condition of reunion of the Churches'.⁵⁴ This was also the focus of all other Orthodox contributions throughout the Conference. At this conference there were many clashes between the Orthodox themselves. Some favoured a more scholastic approach, while others a mystical one. Some believed that dogmatic agreement was not to be pursued with the Protestant contingent, while others believed it should and that agreement was possible.⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that one of the greatest conflicts of the conference was raised by one of the most avid supporters of dogmatic understanding of the West: Fr. Sergius Bulgakov. Nicolas Zernov reports; 'Bulgakov... caused the greatest stir at the Conference by introducing into its discussions the question of the significance of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the reunion of Christians'.⁵⁶ For Bulgakov this was a very important doctrinal issue, for 'it arises directly out of the acceptance of the Nicene

⁵² Blane, *Florovsky*, 70.

⁵³ Ruth Rouse and Stephan C. Neill (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517-1948* (hereafter, *History*), (London: SPCK, 1967), see especially Tatlow, 'The World Conference on Faith and Order', 405-441.

⁵⁴ Rouse, *History*, 654.

⁵⁵ Rouse, *History*, 656.

⁵⁶ Rouse, *History*, 656.

Creed'.⁵⁷ This both shocked and provoked a sharp opposition from the Protestant representatives of the Conference.

These matters are significant because they demonstrate just how divergent the differences were between the delegates of the ecumenical movement on just what type of unity was to be achieved, especially at the early stages. They are also significant because they give a historical context into which Florovsky would soon enter.

The second Faith and Order World Conference gathered in 1937 at Edinburgh, 3-18 August. Florovsky remembered that 'before going to Edinburgh, I had followed from a distance'.⁵⁸ The Conference was divided into five sections, which met simultaneously to discuss the reports submitted by the preparatory Commissions. Before the sections were released to do their work and after Archbishop Temple's presidential address there was general discussion on the floor. At that time Florovsky gave one of the most memorable addresses of his ecumenical career, quoted here at length.

We are now put in a very awkward position, between theory and practice. On the one hand, practical people have told us that there is an urgent need of reunion, because the Church is compromised in new lands and countries by these differences whose meanings are not quite comprehensible. On the other hand, theologians of all churches would tell us that it is quite impossible to jump over all doctrinal differences and that any attempt to achieve recognition by jumping over what, for centuries, has separated different churches and denominations, would mean to substitute for reunion of churches a confusion of churches. We must have union because otherwise we compromise our church's name by arguing and quarrelling with one another and pretending that the truth is only given to some. On the other hand, it would be foolish to declare that all these differences were only misunderstandings, because it would be a heresy about Church history. Some say that Christian understanding was lost at Nicea with the first creation of a creed. I have no solution to suggest now, but we have to realize that we are in this very difficult and dangerous position between two extremes, theory and practice, both of which are unacceptable.

⁵⁷ Rouse, *History*, 656, see especially footnote 2. See here also for a full list of what Bulgakov believed to be the main doctrinal problems.

⁵⁸ Blane, *Florovsky*, 72.

But what is theory and what is practice? What is theory? Only speculation about a thing? But theory is certainly the search for truth. Theologians are after divine truth and not mere human opinions. There is a danger and a difficulty about this point. We are in danger of modern disregard for theology. When two theologians meet one another there is always controversy. The danger nowadays is over-emphasis on non-intellectual elements. This means a kind of treachery to the truth. It used to be assumed that man is a reasonable animal. The modern idea seems to be that man is first and foremost a creature with a heart. I am not prepared, however, to give up my reason in connection with the things of God.

I do not myself follow Father Boulgakoff in believing that one can separate dogma and doctrine absolutely. Certainly there is dogma implied in definitions, but words imply conceptions and conceptions imply systems; definitions must be understood in some terms of philosophical meaning. It is simply futile to say that we can take dogma as something, which can only be interpreted in one sense, but we must avoid the danger of substituting something new for the traditional and venerable doctrine of the past.⁵⁹

It is necessary to view the full passage, for it sheds better light on Florovsky's meaning in its context. The real problem that Florovsky addresses is the division at the Conference on how reunion is to be viewed and finally achieved. Already at the Conference there had been those who pushed for reunion on social and practical issues, believing that dogmatic and doctrinal differences were irrelevant to making the Gospel known to the world as 'unified' Christianity. This attitude desired to hurry the reunion for the good of the world: practice. Yet, there were other theologians (Florovsky was not the only one with this attitude; but he was one of the most tenacious adherents) who believed it was 'impossible to jump over all the doctrinal differences'. This group understood the dangers of disregarding theology for the sake of reunion. For it was not just a disregarding of theology, but a disregard for very personally held conceptions of truth. This overlooking of the differences of doctrine as just 'misunderstandings' for Florovsky was tantamount to a 'heresy about church history'. For Florovsky, reunion was of a necessity based on intellectual and reasonable matters. The understanding of reunion as purely a 'spiritual' and social matter would, for Florovsky, only lead to a 'confusion of churches'. For him, truth was not subject to opinion.

⁵⁹ Leonard Hodgson (ed.), *The Second World Conference on Faith and Order* (London: SCM, 1938), 74-75.

This commitment to avoiding confusion by speaking the truth about doctrinal differences is perhaps why Florovsky disagreed with Father Bulgakov.⁶⁰ For Florovsky, presuppositions about dogma lead to further doctrinal distinctions as these are worked out into a further system. Those doctrinal differences that might not appear as obligatory and essential items actually grew up from the root of their understanding of essential dogmas. Thus, for Florovsky, those ‘implied definitions’ are characteristic of an entire system of dogmatic differences that needed to be addressed. He reiterated this again later in the Conference after the first revision of the section reports. ‘I think we should be careful to insist as strongly as possible on all that unites us, but never attempt to cover up what separates us’.

Because of Florovsky’s role in championing this position throughout the Conference, he was seen as what W.A. Visser T’ Hooft describes as, ‘one of the most effective interpreters of the position of the Orthodox Churches’.⁶¹ This can be seen concerning Florovsky’s work as chairman of one of the sub-sections on the Ministry and Sacraments: he became one of the drafters of the report. In his subsection little agreement was reached, for which they were reprimanded. Florovsky, who wrote the rejoinder, took to task those who would just settle for ‘verbal agreement’.⁶² Here, again, he applied his commitment to the belief that the only real way to genuine ecumenical advancement was to ‘acknowledge areas where differences in thought were irreconcilable’.⁶³

⁶⁰ Here, I think there is a bit of a misunderstanding on Florovsky’s part about Bulgakov’s meaning. It seems clear to me from the quote by Bulgakov (see page 67 of Hodgson’s work) that he did indeed understand that the problems of reunion laid in the field of dogmatics. And as to the differences between dogmatic definitions that are obligatory and those that are not, Bulgakov states, ‘We must remember the difference between dogmatic definitions which are obligatory and definitions concerning doctrinal differences on other points which are often too exaggerated . . . We must not sacrifice truth, but in all matters where we are not bound by obligatory definitions we must look for possibilities of reconciliation’. Here, I believe he is merely echoing Metropolitan Germanos’ statement from Lausanne concerning that there should be in non-essentials liberty. Nonetheless, Florovsky’s point is still a valid one.

⁶¹ W.A. Visser T’Hooft, ‘Fr. Georges Florovsky’s Role in the Formation of the WCC’ (*SVSQ*, 1979, 23, 3/4) 135-8.

⁶² Blane, *Florovsky*, 73.

⁶³ Blane, *Florovsky*, 73.

One of the final acts of the Faith and Order Conference at Edinburgh was to elect the Committee of Fourteen, who would prepare for the formation of the World Council of Churches.⁶⁴ Among the representatives chosen were two Orthodox delegates: Metropolitan Germanos of Thyateira and Fr. Florovsky.⁶⁵ In 1938, with the other members of the Fourteen, Florovsky became a member of the enlarged Provisional Committee of the World Council, which was in process of formation.

With his commitment and contribution at Edinburgh and his election to the Committee of the Fourteen, Florovsky had, as Blane concludes, ‘come to the very pinnacle of the Ecumenical Movement, a place he would retain for the next quarter of a century’.⁶⁶

Conclusions

Throughout his career Florovsky was adamant about his view of the Orthodox position. And although this quote comes from a later period, his attitude can be seen as representative of his entire career:

I believe that the church in which I was baptized and brought up ‘is’ in very truth ‘the Church’, i.e. ‘the true’ Church and the ‘only’ true Church . . . I am therefore compelled to regard all other Christian churches as deficient, and in many cases can identify these deficiencies accurately enough. Therefore, for me, Christian reunion is simply universal conversion to Orthodoxy. I have no confessional loyalty; my loyalty belongs solely to the ‘Una Sancta’.⁶⁷

Although his commitment only to the ‘Una Sancta’ is admirable, one wonders if his view of reunion as ‘universal conversion to Orthodoxy’ is somewhat narrow. Yet this is the attitude that had guided him throughout his encounters. Perhaps in the ‘trenches’ of

⁶⁴ Williams, *Florovsky*, 38.

⁶⁵ Visser T’Hooft, *Florovsky*, 135.

⁶⁶ Blane, *Florovsky*, 74.

⁶⁷ Florovsky, ‘Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement’, *The Student World*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 59-70.

battle few options reveal themselves. But is there no other possible way that reunion could come about? Must all Christian churches 'be' Eastern Orthodox? The real danger of Florovsky's position is one of uniformity over unity: his position raises some serious questions. Say, for example, that the Roman Catholic Church understood the Creed in the same manner as the Orthodox, and the ministry of the Pope was agreed upon as one of collegial love, would the Roman Church have to convert to Orthodoxy? This is not immediately obvious. His point about the 'universal conversion' does not seem right, unless he means by 'conversion' repentance, which then works. But then this repentance, which is a necessary prerequisite to reunion, can also be applied to the Orthodox Church as well. As St. Basil's prayer before Holy Communion attests, 'Thou, O Lord, hast ever awaited my conversion'. But Florovsky means what is generally meant by 'conversion', and this understanding is a bit too narrow and most would strenuously object.

Florovsky's perspective throughout his career seems to contradict Metropolitan Germanos' understanding of reunion when the Metropolitan said that Orthodoxy

rejects that exclusive theory according to which one Church . . . insists that those who seek reunion with it shall enter its own realm. Such a conception of reunion, amounting to the absorption of the other churches, is in every way opposed to the spirit existing in the Orthodox Church.⁶⁸

What Florovsky should have stressed, as did Germanos, is complete doctrinal identification with the Creed, the Seven Ecumenical Councils, and the dogma of the undivided Church. Reunion need not be that all churches 'look' identical to the Orthodox Church, but it is paramount that they fully identify with her spirit in faith and order. So, possibly, there is a more gracious understanding of Florovsky's earlier meaning. For further in the same article he gives three very specific criteria for 'intercommunion'. First, common belief concerning sacramental doctrine itself; second, agreement in doctrine in

⁶⁸ Kinnamon, *Ecumenical*, 14.

general, for communion presupposes ‘one mind;’ and third, doctrinal agreement concerning Christian ministry.⁶⁹ There is no need here to be ‘uniformly’ Eastern Orthodox. So, although it is very clear from these criteria that what is of utmost importance to Florovsky for ‘reunion’ is agreement on integral Christian Faith and dogma, his earlier statement contradicts any clear identification of his ecumenism with that of Metropolitan Germanos.

Florovsky was committed to the Ecumenical Movement until the last of his days. Many of the main points of contention for Florovsky grew up over his many years of experience in the Ecumenical Movement before the WCC. But it was not until his final ecumenical article, ‘The Ecumenical Dialogue’, that he finally consolidated them. These were the main issues he had gleaned from all his ecumenical encounters throughout the years. His first point was, and always had been, that there were ‘deep differences’ in divided Christendom. More than this though, there was no agreement on the very character of what reunion and unity really meant. His second point was that the Ecumenical Movement should never give in to the temptation of seeking unity by co-operation on ‘practical matters’. Giving in to such a temptation would not only not help but would actually become an impediment to real reunion. His third was that the real root of disunity in Christianity is both doctrinal and religious. Or, as he had said elsewhere, it is because of schism. Fourth, the only way to heal such disunity is to participate not only in an ‘Ecumenism in space’, but an ‘Ecumenism in time’. That is, all must recover the perspective of the historical Christian tradition that has always resided in the church. Fifth, the only real way to proceed in ecumenical endeavour is by ‘the way of theological study, dialogue, and confrontation’. His sixth and final point was that ecumenical work was an obligation and a responsibility of the Orthodox to witness to the Truth that was the Church herself. This obligation must always be done humbly and with love.⁷⁰

For Florovsky, there was always much work to be done in the ecumenical field.

⁶⁹ Florovsky, ‘Confessional Loyalty’, 62.

⁷⁰ Florovsky, ‘The Ecumenical Dialogue’, 44.

But, although the work was hard and the way narrow, he never lost hope that there was also great promise. And though the work was accomplished by human effort, he trusted that the advance was always in the hands of the Lord of the harvest. Yet it was only by being tenaciously committed to his principles that Florovsky earned this final accolade, ‘Father Florovsky exercised a profound influence, ... presenting the eternal truths of the Catholic Faith so effectively, so winsomely, and so clearly that they commended themselves to men of the most diverse nationalities and religious backgrounds’.⁷¹

B. Lossky’s History

1. Russia, 1903-1922

Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky was born on the 8th of June 1903,⁷² the Monday of Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Spirit, in Göttingen, Germany. His father, Nikolai Onufrievich Lossky, a philosopher who taught at the University of St. Petersburg, was temporarily in Göttingen with his wife Lyudmila Vladimirovna (born Stoyunin)⁷³, on university business.⁷⁴ Both sides of his family had associations with the Russian intelligentsia and thus Vladimir was raised in a dynamic intellectual environment. He spent his infancy and adolescence in Petersburg being impacted ‘par la présence « socratique » de son père’.⁷⁵ But Vladimir did not follow his father into philosophy and would even later adamantly deny his father’s assertion that ‘Vladimir was the heir who continued his philosophical thinking’.⁷⁶ Instead, after the revolution, from 1920 to 1922, he concentrated on historical studies at the University of St. Petersburg. There, he came

⁷¹ As cited in Williams, Florovsky, 38.

⁷² Vladimir Lossky, *Sept Jours Sur Les Routes De France: Juin 1940*, (hereafter *Sept Jours*) Notice Biographique (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1998), 85. This short ‘biographical notice’ is often referenced by Rowan Williams and was written by Olivier Clément.

⁷³ Rowan Williams, ‘The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky: An Exposition and Critique’, (hereafter Lossky) (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, 1975), 1.

⁷⁴ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 85.

⁷⁵ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 85.

⁷⁶ Nicholas Lossky, ‘Theology and Spirituality in the Work of Vladimir Lossky’, (hereafter *Theology and Spirituality*) *The Ecumenical Review*, July 1999, 1.

under the influence of the ideas and philosophies of both L.P. Karsavin,⁷⁷ who directed Vladimir's attention on the Eastern Church Fathers, and I.M. Grevs,⁷⁸ an expert in the Western Church Fathers, who directed him to Medieval European history, particularly Eckhart, a significant fact that determined his later thought.

This openness to 'the West' was, in general, a more characteristic trait of the Petersburg intellectual circles (to which Vladimir was exposed), than was the academic world of Moscow, which maintained a more Slavophil tendency.⁷⁹ Vladimir disassociated himself with this tendency to view nostalgically the Russian Christianity of the past. Williams views this as one of the main reasons for his alienation from much in Russian culture. 'He never sympathized with, or in any way countenanced, the tendency to treat the Christian culture of pre-Petrine Russian as somehow transcending cultural and historical relativities'.⁸⁰ But, more significantly, this lack of nostalgia demonstrates his lack of romanticizing the Russian past, and that he already viewed Christianity as meta-cultural.

Another decisive moment that impacted Vladimir was that as a young student he witnessed the trial of one of the first martyrs of the Revolution, Metropolitan Benjamin of St. Petersburg. He was deeply moved by the sight of the crowd of the faithful prostrating themselves on the ground as their bishop was led to his death. As Vladimir's daughter notes, 'This image of the Church, the bishop and his people, united by the blood of the martyr, profoundly moved the future theologian'.⁸¹ Throughout his life it was this image that firmly rooted Vladimir's faithfulness to the persecuted Russian Church.

In 1922 Lenin ordered the expulsion of many non-Marxist intellectuals. The Losskys had chosen not to leave, as did other of the aristocratic and intelligentsia families

⁷⁷ As N.O. Lossky notes in his *History of Religious Philosophy* (New York: IUP, 1972), Karsavin was a prolific writer of religious philosophy, 299.

⁷⁸ Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 205.

⁷⁹ Williams, Lossky, 2. Olivier Clément pointed out this fact to Williams.

⁸⁰ Williams, Lossky, 2.

⁸¹ Catherine Aslanoff, 'La Prière du Théologien', in Vladimir Lossky, *Sept Jours*, 79.

after the failure of the White Army. Instead, they had chosen to suffer the fate of their people. There was never any intention of emigrating after the Revolution. In November of 1922, with many other intellectuals, they were expelled.⁸² They were exiles in the truest sense of the word.

2. Prague, 1922 - 1924

From the end of the 1922 to October 1924 Vladimir and his family lived in Prague, Czechoslovakia, a major centre of the Russian Diaspora. There, Vladimir continued his studies at the Czech division of the Charles University, where he worked with N.P. Kondakov, an archaeological and Byzantine art specialist.⁸³ While at Prague he continued to develop his interest in the Medieval Europe. But, as Williams notes, ‘he rapidly became convinced that Prague could not provide a satisfactory intellectual stimulus, and, in November of 1924, he moved to Paris, and began to study at the Sorbonne’.⁸⁴ There, he fully encountered Western Christianity and developed many of his most important themes of theology, as well as a never ending love affair with France.⁸⁵

3. Paris, 1924 – 1958

Vladimir Lossky arrived in Paris in October 1924. At the Sorbonne he studied under the medieval historian Ferdinand Lot and Etienne Gilson, one of the greatest exponents in the last century of the philosophy of the High Middle Ages. Both became friends with Lossky, but under the apprenticeship of Gilson, Lossky discovered a passionate interest in medieval philosophy. Gilson, through his friendship, teaching and works, provided for Lossky ‘the combination of scholarly rigour with creative personal

⁸² Lossky, ‘Theology and Spirituality’, 1.

⁸³ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 85.

⁸⁴ Williams, Lossky, 5.

⁸⁵ Olivier Clément, ‘Vladimir Lossky: Un théologien de la Personne et du Saint-Esprit’, (hereafter Lossky), *Messenger de l’Exarchat du Patriarche en Europe Occidentale*, 30-1, 137-206.

interpretation and thorough involvement in his material which was to characterize the best of Lossky's own work'.⁸⁶

In 1927 he received his first degree in the history of the Middle Ages. Immediately after, he researched and gathered together material on the mystical theology of Eckhart for his doctoral degree, which he worked on until days before his death.⁸⁷ Also that same year, thanks to the friendship with Lot, Lossky began working on *Bulletin Du Cange*, a 'publication devoted to the philological study of Medieval Latin'.⁸⁸ His passionate concern for the precise use of words, which is in the best of his theology, grew out of this period of apprenticeship and his appreciation for the profound.⁸⁹

In 1926 Lossky became friends with Father Eugraphe Kovalevsky, who would later be the priest officiating for the Western rite confession, and together started the Brotherhood of Saint Photius. This Brotherhood was for the express purpose of witnessing to the West, specifically France, of the universality of Orthodoxy: to witness to the truth that Orthodoxy was meta-cultural,⁹⁰ that is, not coterminous with the 'religious dimensions' of any culture, be it Russian or Greek. They believed that Orthodoxy could revivify the true traditions of French Christianity.⁹¹ Lossky felt that it was his vocation to call attention, not only to the areas of divergence, but also to the areas of convergence between East and West. For example, throughout his life he admired such figures as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Geneviève and Joan of Arc. He revered these *persons* (for Lossky, as we will see in the section on the person, this means to be in communion) because they turned toward God.⁹²

Around this same time Lossky started delving deeper into Eastern Christian thought. During his research of Eckhart Lossky encountered the German mystic's

⁸⁶ Williams, Lossky, 6.

⁸⁷ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 86.

⁸⁸ Williams, Lossky, 6. See footnote 4.

⁸⁹ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 85.

⁹⁰ I am using the word here to denote the 'beyondness' or 'aboveness' of Orthodoxy in contradistinction to any culture, or, in a sense, culture as a subservient to Orthodoxy, which is a platform to analyze and critique culture.

⁹¹ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 85.

⁹² Lossky, *Sept Jours*, 10.

continual stress on the incomprehensibility of God. This led Lossky to the very roots of negative theology in writings of the Alexandrian theologians, in the Cappadocian Fathers, and supremely, in the *Corpus Areopagiticum*.⁹³ In fact his first publication in 1929, ‘Negative Theology in the Teaching of Dionysius the Areopagite’,⁹⁴ was a detailed analysis on pseudo-Denys’ understanding of apophatic, or negative theology, and his second, in 1931, ‘The Notion of *Analogies* according to Denys the pseudo-Areopagite’,⁹⁵ was a nuanced analysis of the concept of *analogia* in the *Corpus*.⁹⁶ Also in his first publications one can see an interest in the theology of St. Gregory Palamas and the 14th-century controversies concerning the distinction between *ousia* and *energeia*.

Palamas’ writings were little known, and therefore there had been very little critical work done. Lossky himself admitted later that he first became aware of Palamas during a lecture of Charles Diehl, the leading French Byzantinist, at the Sorbonne.⁹⁷ Diehl’s attitude, like most Byzantinists of his tradition, was disparaging. His attitude was, as Williams notes, ‘one of contempt and derision for what seemed merely a fantastic intellectual aberration generated by monastic fanaticism’.⁹⁸

But Lossky did not settle for such negative judgment. He was determined to investigate the matter fully. It was in his research for his first published articles that he clearly saw the hermeneutical importance for patristic studies of what he would later call ‘the Palamite synthesis’.⁹⁹ It is important to note that Lossky’s work predates the extended Palamite studies of Krivoshein (1936) and Stăniloae (1938).¹⁰⁰ Lossky earned the distinction of being one of the first theologians to do critical work on Palamas.

⁹³ Williams, Lossky, 7.

⁹⁴ Vladimir Lossky, ‘Otritsatel’noe bogoslovie v uchenii Dionisiya Areopagita’, *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 3 (1929), 133-144.

⁹⁵ Vladimir Lossky, ‘La Notion des ‘Analogies’ chez Denys le pseudo-Aréopagite’, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen-Age* 5 (1931), 279-301.

⁹⁶ Williams, Lossky, 7.

⁹⁷ Williams, Lossky, 7.

⁹⁸ Williams, Lossky, 7.

⁹⁹ Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983), 153.

¹⁰⁰ B. Krivoshein, ‘Asketicheskoe i bogoslovskoe uchinie sv. Grigoriya Palamy’.[The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of St. Gregory Palamas], *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, VIII, Prague, 1936 (E.T. in

On the 4th of June 1928, Vladimir Lossky married Madeleine Shapiro, the daughter of a Russian Jewish family. She too was an ardent student of the Eastern Fathers and converted to Christianity during her studies.¹⁰¹ She would be a steadfast companion in service and faith for the next 30 years. They had four children. Later, Lossky said of his family, ‘il ne m’est rein venu que de positif’.¹⁰²

On 29 July 1927, after four months in a Soviet prison, Metropolitan Sergius (Stragordsky [who was ‘Deputy to the *locum tenens*’ of the Patriarchal throne]) issued a declaration demanding all clergy in Russia and abroad to give ‘their complete loyalty to the Soviet government’.¹⁰³ A majority of the Russian *émigrés* living in Paris felt that the attitude of Metropolitan Sergius was far too compromising toward the Soviet State.¹⁰⁴

Metropolitan Evlogy, who was the Patriarchal Exarch for Western Europe in Paris, at first tried to conform to the declaration, but in 1930 found it impossible to continue.

Following this, the tensions between Metropolitan Sergius and the *émigrés* came to fruition when Sergius repudiated Metropolitan Evlogy. Thus, in 1931 Metropolitan Evlogy and many of the Parisian *émigrés*, which included the influential group at the Theological Institute of Saint Sergius, along with French parishes, submitted to the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch.

Lossky (along with the Brotherhood of St. Photius) resolved not to surrender his fidelity to the Moscow Patriarchate. He made his theological reasons clear in the article, ‘Écueils ecclésiologiques’.¹⁰⁵ By this time Lossky had a firm understanding of what the Catholicity of the Church implied. He could not believe that the Church was coterminous with either cultural or national identities. And he refused to accept the idea that the Church could not function authentically under the Soviet persecution.

E.C.Q. Jan-Oct 1938). Dimitru Stăniloae, ‘Viata si invatatura sfantului Grigorie Palama: cu trei tratate traduse’ [‘The Life and Teaching of Gregory Palamas: with three Tractates translated’], Sibiu, 1938.

¹⁰¹ Williams, Lossky, 8.

¹⁰² Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 86.

¹⁰³ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 152. In pages 145-155 Bishop Kallistos gives the historical context surrounding the event.

¹⁰⁴ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 153.

¹⁰⁵ Vladimir Lossky, ‘Écueils ecclésiologiques’, *Messenger*, 1, 1950, 21-28. Reprinted in *La Vie Spirituelle*, 19, 625-632.

Lossky could not identify with many of his fellow Russian *émigrés* who emphasized the ‘Russianness’ of their Orthodoxy and thus, to him, negated the catholicity of the Church. Williams puts it well: ‘His faithfulness to the jurisdiction of Moscow was bound to his faithfulness to the historical Church and its strict canonical ordering, and his faith in the capacity of this Church to transcend the tragedies and ambiguities of any particular historical or canonical situation by virtue of its catholicity’.¹⁰⁶ His experience of the martyrdom of Metropolitan Benjamin and the understanding that the Church had before existed authentically under persecution, and his firm belief that the external cultural and social workings do not effect the Church’s internal life, armed him with spiritual and theological certitude. For Lossky this was the beginning of a lifelong struggle of alienation from many of the Russian *émigrés*.

One of the most painful events in Lossky’s life, as with Florovsky, was the controversy that arose over the Sophiological teachings of Father Sergius Bulgakov, which came to pass in 1935 and 1936. This was compounded by the alienation between the adherents to the Moscow Patriarchate and the followers of Metropolitan Evlogy.

As we have seen above, Bulgakov was also among the Russian intelligentsia who were exiled by Lenin’s order at the end of 1922. He first came to prominence as a Marxist political economist and then, after his conversion to Christianity, as an Orthodox philosopher and theologian. He also gained reputation as a lay churchman due to the critical role he played in the All-Russian Sobor of 1917-1918 and in the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council, which continued the work of the Sobor.¹⁰⁷ Bulgakov was of the previous generation, the generation that was responsible for the so-called ‘religious renaissance’. He saw his vocation, as did others of his generation, ‘in terms of perpetuating and expanding the Russian religious renaissance’.¹⁰⁸ The Russian *émigrés* in

¹⁰⁶ Williams, Lossky, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Blane, *Florovsky*, 60-61.

¹⁰⁸ Blane, *Florovsky*, 61.

Paris saw Bulgakov as a wise and spiritual counsellor and loved and supported him greatly.

Lossky and Bulgakov approached theology very differently. Bulgakov was of the ‘Russian school’ tradition, which had its roots in the Russian religious philosophy of the 19th century. Lossky approached his theological thought based on and aligned with his understanding of the Tradition of the Church.

In 1933 Bulgakov published *Agnets Bozhii* (The Lamb of God), a major Christological study in which his theories about the Wisdom of God, Sophia, were considered as a concrete cosmic principle and were applied to the Incarnation.¹⁰⁹ His work caused discussion amongst the Paris *émigrés* and suspicion within the more theologically conservative. At the request of the Metropolitan Sergius, the guardian of the Moscow Patriarchate, Lossky sent a lengthy account of the debate. Metropolitan Sergius responded immediately by condemning the Sophiology of Fr. Bulgakov in his *Ukaz*.¹¹⁰ ‘Bulgakov was accused of ‘Gnosticism’ and of confusing natural attributes with hypostatic existence in the divine life ...his anthropology was also condemned, and the ambiguous language about an ‘uncreated human spirit was, predictably, brought in evidence’.¹¹¹

Following on this Bulgakov and Evlogy responded with a pamphlet to what they felt were misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Bulgakov, as well as to the procedure that was followed.¹¹² They accused Metropolitan Sergius of a type of papal authoritarianism for his making absolute pronouncements on doctrinal matters without the consensus of the Church, and it is by this consensus, according to them, how Orthodoxy operates. To them it was a matter of intellectual freedom in the Church. But Alexis

¹⁰⁹ Williams, Lossky, 11.

¹¹⁰ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 86.

¹¹¹ Rowan Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology* (Scotland: T&T Clark, 1999), 173. Sergius’ text is found in *O Sofii, premudrosti bozheit: Ukaz moskovskoi patriarkhii I dokladnaya zapiski prof. prot. S. Bulgakova i Mitropolita Evlogiya (On Sophia, the Wisdom of God: The Decree of Moscow Patriarchate and the Statements of Professor the Archpriest S. Bulgakov and Metropolitan Evlogii)* (Paris, 1935).

¹¹² This was *O Sofii* above.

Klimoff rightly notes, ‘that the purely theological arguments had become inseparately linked to issues of political orientation and disputes over jurisdictional matters’.¹¹³

The jurisdictional conflicts between Metropolitan Evlogy and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and the Moscow Patriarchate had become, by this time, a ‘passionate public debate, with the 1935 accusations [by Lossky] against Bulgakov immediately interpreted as a thinly disguised attack on the legitimacy of Metropolitan Evlogii and the Theological Institute he had co-founded with Bulgakov’. But, besides this, there also was the debate of the nature of the Church. Vera Shevzov, in her excellent work *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*, remarkably analyzes the debate over the two distinct views of the nature of the Church. One, which followed the teachings of Makarii Bulgakov, placed importance on the episcopacy and clergy as the teaching ‘class’ with ‘authority of teaching’, and who were also the ‘source of the Church’s unity’.¹¹⁴ The other view of the Church followed the concept of *sobornost* (community, conciliarity), of the lay theologian Aleksei Khomiakov, who

refocused attention away from institutional indicators of unity, such as the episcopacy and formal canons, to interior principles, especially to the Spirit of God, in whom all members were called equally to participate. The Church’s essence accordingly, lay ‘in the agreement and unity of spirit and life of all the members who acknowledge it’.¹¹⁵

Thus we see in Lossky, following the first view, his dislike for the word *sobornost*¹¹⁶ as well as a fierce commitment to the Episcopal authority. And thus, in Bulgakov, *et al.*, following the second view, an equally fierce commitment to the freedom of individual members united by their common faith. Florovsky, in this matter, is a bit of an oddity. He does use the word *sobornost* in his ecclesiology, and was ordained under

¹¹³ Alexis Klimoff, ‘Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy’, *SVTQ*, 49, n. 1-2, 2005, 83.

¹¹⁴ Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*, (hereafter *Revolution*)(New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28.

¹¹⁵ Shevzov, *Revolution*, 29.

¹¹⁶ Lossky, ‘Concerning the Third Mark of the Church’, in *Image and Likeness*, 170.

Metropolitan Evlogy. But Florovsky is also expressly against the pure intellectual freedom of his fellow theologians at St. Sergius. Florovsky's commitment falls on both sides.

Because of Lossky's report, tensions ran high throughout the Paris *émigré* community. Lossky and the Brotherhood of St. Photius were together vilified as both obscurantist and 'bolshevist'.¹¹⁷ The Brotherhood was attacked by the *émigré* journal *Vozrozhdeni* (Renaissance), which also refused to publish a letter of explanation by Lossky. Another letter addressed directly to Bulgakov was unanswered. Also, an attempt to have the Brotherhood's defence published in *Put'* (the leading theological and philosophical journal of the immigration) was met with a harsh response from Berdyaev. Lossky, in a letter to his father, describes a meeting between Bulgakov supporters (which included Berdyaev, G. P. Fedotov and Konstantin Mochlsky) and the Brotherhood. The former group's attitude was not conciliatory and was to blame for impeding any reconciliation between the Brotherhood and Bulgakov.¹¹⁸

In 1936, Lossky wrote *Spor o Sofii* (The Controversy on Sophia),¹¹⁹ which was more than just a reply to Bulgakov, it was 'something of a theological manifesto in its own right'.¹²⁰ In it he accused Bulgakov of detaching theology from the canonically regulated life of the Church and of subordinating theology to speculative metaphysics. Lossky felt that Bulgakov, as well as most of the Russian intelligentsia, did not experience the Church's tradition as a 'living reality', but was only interested in it as 'a monument to ecclesiastical culture'.¹²¹

Lossky was deeply impatient with Slavophil romanticism and Russian sentimentality, with their veneration of literary and philosophical giants and the mystique of the Russian soul. Lossky was not against Russian culture *per se*, just the equating of it

¹¹⁷ N. O. Lossky, *Vospominaniya: Zhizn' i filosofskii put'* (Reminiscences: Life and Philosophical Development, Munich, 1968), 267, as found in Williams dissertation, 12.

¹¹⁸ Williams, Lossky, 12.

¹¹⁹ Vladimir Lossky, *Spor o Sofii* (Paris: The Brotherhood of St. Photius, 1936).

¹²⁰ Williams, Lossky, 12.

¹²¹ Lossky, *Spor o Sofii*, 18-19, as found in Williams' dissertation, 13.

with Christianity itself. He pleaded for a truly universal vision of Christianity in Orthodoxy. It is only with hierarchical controls that theology is safeguarded from falling into national or cultural captivity.¹²² Needless to say, Lossky's pamphlet did not improve matters. Lossky and the Brotherhood were even further ostracized as being oppressive. Berdyaev in his article 'The Spirit of the Grand Inquisitor', made negative allusions toward the group.¹²³ Inherent in the Russian religious philosopher's response is the belief that no one had the right to censure anyone.

It would be a while before Lossky could personally contact Bulgakov, mostly because of Bulgakov's supporters. But when the two finally re-established correspondence Bulgakov was 'characteristically generous' and Bulgakov 'encouraged him to turn his attention to constructive rather than controversial theological writing'.¹²⁴ The two's mutual affection continued and Lossky's was demonstrated in 1944 in his attendance of Bulgakov's funeral at some risk to his own personal safety.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, Lossky, even though he was recognized as one of the foremost Orthodox theologians, was alienated for the rest of his life from most of the Russian intelligentsia living in Paris.

We must remember two consequences of these painful events. Firstly, Lossky's whole theological reflection from then on focused on the uncreated grace, on the Palamite concept of the divine energy. This he would attempt to express in a rigorously traditional and Orthodox way using some of the positive intuitions of Fr. Bulgakov (as opposed to the religious philosophical method of Bulgakov). And, secondly, there was now a deep and abiding friendship between Lossky and the future patriarch of Moscow, Sergius: a close correspondence had existed between the two men. Lossky was a disciple of Patriarch Sergius, especially concerning the theology of the Church: which the latter had often

¹²² Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov*, 174-176.

¹²³ For Berdyaev's article see 'Orient und Occident' 1, March 1936, 30-38, translated as 'Der Geist des Grossinquisitors'.

¹²⁴ Williams, Lossky, 13.

¹²⁵ Williams, Lossky, 13.

stressed does not belong to any particular nation, nor is it related to any particular place, but should reflect the fullness of the Truth everywhere.¹²⁶

On the 16th of June 1936, the Patriarch of Moscow issued a decree and received into Orthodoxy the Parisian community using the Western rite liturgy. Lossky, with the Saint Irenaeus section of the Brotherhood of St. Photius, played a decisive role in this event, and, although the group started under the leadership of Monsignor Louis Charles Winnaert, it soon after came under the headship of Fr. Kovalevsky.¹²⁷

At the time of the French defeat in 1940, Lossky, a French citizen since 1938, tried - vainly - to engage the enemy. Seeking to fight, he traveled through France, upset by the exodus and the invasion. It was for him a true awakening of the profound reality that was France, of its spiritual destiny, and the necessary role of Orthodoxy in this destiny. This experience was reported in the account *Sept Jours sur les Routes de France*.¹²⁸

Sept Jours is an insight into Lossky's theological thinking of the time. It conveys his response to the contemporary historical situation and especially, as with most French intelligentsia of the time, the German Occupation. His favouritism of France is bold, to the point where it was the same type of bias as the Slavophil's, except the French substitutes Russian culture.¹²⁹

But the pan-cultural spirit of Christianity, or rather, its catholicity, acts as a balancing corrective for Lossky. As Williams observes, 'the insistence upon the importance of each national tradition in its integrity and distinctness acts as a corrective to unbalanced Francophilia'.¹³⁰ Lossky's views of catholicity are reflected throughout the work, and that balance of the free human consent of persons and the collective are seen as the middle way between 'authoritarian Latinism' and the subjective 'German individualism' of the Reform. Although *Sept Jours* has tendencies toward extremes, it

¹²⁶ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 86.

¹²⁷ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 185 and Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 86.

¹²⁸ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 87.

¹²⁹ Williams, Lossky, 18.

¹³⁰ Williams, Lossky, 18.

marks for Lossky the first positive work of the insights he gleaned from the Sophiology controversy.

During the war of Occupation, 1940 to 1944, Lossky took part in the French Resistance. But the war was, especially for him, a crucible for deep personal growth and witness. Part of this growth was cultivated at meetings held at Marcel Moré's house. Here, Lossky takes part in seminars with theologians of all confessions and philosophies. They meet in a common concern for transcendence and eschatology.

During 1941-1942, he gave a series of lectures on Orthodox mystical theology. He wrote and published them in 1944 under the title *Essai sur théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient* (translated into English as *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*).¹³¹ This was to become his most widely read and influential book. This is not the place for a full treatment of the *Essai*, but a few things need to be said.

Mystical Theology was 'the first book on Orthodox theology published in Western Europe to attempt a strict and scholarly presentation of its subject as a unified whole, both rationally and historically coherent'.¹³² The book is a response of three converging factors: Florovsky's call to a neopatristic synthesis, that is, a return to the Fathers; the need for a clear presentation of Orthodox spirituality to the Roman Catholic neo-Thomism¹³³ that surrounded Lossky; and a needed representation of the Orthodox world-view in response to the popular secular philosophy of existentialism. The purpose of the book itself is 'to study certain aspects of eastern spirituality in relation to the fundamental themes of the Orthodox dogmatic tradition'.¹³⁴ He accomplishes this by relating all the major doctrines of the Orthodox Church to the goal of spiritual life, that is, union with God.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (New York: SVS Press, 1998). Translated into English by the members of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius and first published in English in 1957.

¹³² Williams, Lossky, 21.

¹³³ Most others at the Moré meetings were Catholics, such as Maurice de Gandillac, Louis Massignon and Gabriel Marcel. One must also consider the popularizing of neo-Thomism by Gilson and Maritain.

¹³⁴ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 7.

¹³⁵ In *Mystical Theology* Lossky brings a considerable amount of source material from both east and west, from early Christianity, such as Irenaeus, to contemporary, such as Congar. One of the other major themes is the distinction between nature and person. Williams notes in his dissertation that this seems to be the

In 1945, immediately after the war, the Institute of Saint Denis was founded. The school taught Orthodox theology entirely in French and trained priests for French Orthodoxy. Lossky was dean of the Institute where he taught dogmatic theology and the history of the Church.¹³⁶ The symposia at Marcel Moré's led to the founding of the journal *Dieu vivant: perspectives religieuses et philosophiques*, in which Lossky, as well as Pierre Burgelin, Jean Hyppolite and Gabriel Marcel, shared responsibility on the *Comité de Lecture*. The *Directeur du Comité* consisted of Moré, Louis Massignon and Maurice de Gandillac. The first issue contained a list of their intentions and what they felt were theological priorities. Their main emphasis, as in their meetings, was on the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith. But this was not an eschatology divorced from the historical world, for they were open and engaging with contemporary thought.¹³⁷ '*Dieu Vivant* proposes to look to the Fathers for its spiritual, theological and exegetical roots, in an attempt to recover "une culture chrétienne à la fois centrée sur l'Écriture et ouverte aux courants contemporains."¹³⁸

One of the important aspects of the intentions of *Dieu Vivant* was its understanding of secular philosophy as 'présupposant une expérience spirituelle susceptible d'enrichir un jour les expressions humains de la vraie foi'.¹³⁹ Lossky shared this attitude, which is clearly evident from his willingness to engage in the intellectual life and culture of which he was part: specifically, the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, the Collège philosophique, and the École pratique des hautes études. It was for the École that Lossky created a series of conferences on *La Vision de Dieu* (The Vision of God) as found in patristic and Byzantine theology. At the College, while under Jean Wahl, one of the professors of contemporary and existential philosophy at the Sorbonne, (whom Lossky had met in 1939), Lossky diligently participated in conferences and there produced some of his

influence of Catholic theologians Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar, (Williams, Lossky, 23.) But I disagree with Williams, as we shall see in a later section.

¹³⁶ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 85.

¹³⁷ Williams, Lossky, 25.

¹³⁸ Williams, Lossky, 26.

¹³⁹ Statement of Intentions, 3, as found in Williams, Lossky, 27.

most creative works: ‘Darkness and Light in the Knowledge of God’, ‘Apophysis and Trinitarian Theology’, ‘The Theological Concept of the Person’, ‘The Rose and the Abyss’ (the notion of created being according to Master Eckhart), and ‘The Theology of the Image’.¹⁴⁰ An ever-present part of Lossky’s theological witness is what Olivier Clément, a friend and collaborator with Lossky, called the ‘creative presence of a theologian at the heart of the movement of ideas’.¹⁴¹

Another form of Lossky’s willingness to engage with and witness to contemporary thought was his ecumenical involvement with the Anglican-Orthodox ‘Fellowship of Saint Alban and Sergius’. Lossky was invited for the first time in the summer of 1947, and would continue to attend the meetings until his death. During his involvement he became the leading proponent of the Orthodox position, much to the same effect that Bulgakov had before the war. During these meetings, as well as at Oxford, in an inter-confessional meeting, Lossky brought into sharp relief the *Filioque* as the major reason for the differences between East and West. To him it was the essential problem: ‘a view which, despite its intransigence, won a good deal of respect from his opponents’.¹⁴² Among the Anglicans, young theologians became not only his friends, but also his disciples, and they translated into English *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*.¹⁴³

Though his reputation as an Orthodox theologian was growing in England, his personal isolation in Paris was increasing. In 1948, in celebration of 500 years of being autocephalous, the Patriarch of Moscow held a council, where strong anti-Catholic statements were made. This caused Lossky considerable embarrassment. Some of his Catholic friends, including Daniélou and de Lubac urged him to publicly disassociate himself with these statements. But, because of his loyalty to the Patriarch, he felt unable to do so. As a result, his friendships with his Catholic friends became very strained. And it

¹⁴⁰ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 88.

¹⁴¹ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 88.

¹⁴² Williams, *Lossky*, 28.

¹⁴³ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 88.

must be noted that after 1948 Lossky no longer contributed to *Dieu Vivant*.¹⁴⁴ Another personal and more serious rupture occurred in 1953 when Father Eugraphe Kovalevsky broke with the patriarchate of Moscow. Although Kovalevsky's reasons for leaving are not clear, for Lossky his act compromised, by removing himself from the Moscow canonical base, an important aspect of Orthodox testimony in France. It dismantled much for what Lossky had worked for. It was also the end of a long-standing friendship and was for Lossky an infinitely painful trial. Because of this event he left the Institute of Saint Denys.¹⁴⁵ And although Lossky would lecture informally to small groups of the Moscow Patriarch jurisdiction, he was very much alone in his last years:¹⁴⁶ in the words of Clément, 'il parlait en désert'.¹⁴⁷

Despite these setbacks it was at the heart of Western thought and knowledge that he would continue to establish a witness. His scholarly activity unfolded simultaneously in several areas. His thesis on Meister Eckhart was slowly nearing its completion, exploring the interior of the Western Middle Ages, in a light where intellectual rigor and the secret illumination of the Holy Spirit coincided.¹⁴⁸ In 1952, he published, in collaboration with Leonid Ouspensky, an important work on icons, *Der Sinn der Ikonen*, where in the introduction he masterfully handles the problem of Tradition. In September 1954, he participated, at Paris, in the International Augustinian Congress¹⁴⁹ and, in September 1955, at Oxford, in the second International Conference on Patristic Studies.¹⁵⁰

In August 1956, Lossky was invited by the patriarchal Church and visited Moscow, Vladimir, Leningrad and Kiev:¹⁵¹ it was his first visit back since 1923. While there, he

¹⁴⁴ Williams, Lossky, 28.

¹⁴⁵ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 87.

¹⁴⁶ Williams, Lossky, 29.

¹⁴⁷ As quoted in Williams, Lossky, 29

¹⁴⁸ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 88.

¹⁴⁹ From this Congress he published 'Les éléments de 'Théologie négative' dans la pensée de saint Augustin,' *Augustinus Magister* I, Paris: Editions des Etudes Augustiniennes, 1954, 575-581.

¹⁵⁰ From this Conference he published 'Le Problème de la 'Vision face a face' et la Tradition patristique de Byzance,' *Studia Patristica*, ed. Kurt Aland and F.L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957) 2, Band 64, 512-537. English translation by T.E. Bird in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 2 (Fall 1972), 231-254.

¹⁵¹ Clément, *Sept Jours*, Biographique, 88.

was recognized for his service to the Moscow Patriarchate. This, perhaps, mitigated some of his sense of isolation.

Lossky, in his last years, according to Clément,¹⁵² was thinking of writing ‘une grande dogmatique orthodoxe’. This was to be a more systematic development of the themes he had already started in *The Mystical Theology* with more attention given to methodology and presuppositions. He was also considering two other projects: a comparative study on Rhineland mysticism (especially Eckhart) and Palamism (both phenomena were developmentally close contemporaries and had profound convergences), which would demonstrate how the mystical theology in the West was distorted and frustrated by the ‘*filioquiste*’ theology,¹⁵³ and a new study on the Sophiology of Father Bulgakov. Lossky was constantly aware of Bulgakov as an interlocutor. But he was also very sensitive to the unique insights and intuitions that Bulgakov had. Lossky wanted, as has been said above, to convey those insights from a traditional Orthodox perspective.

On the 7th of February 1958, Lossky’s tragic and sudden death cut short these projects: Olivier Clément completed Lossky’s doctoral thesis on Eckhart and the Sorbonne awarded Lossky the ‘doctorat ès lettres’ posthumously.¹⁵⁴ Although Clément spent considerable time gathering, editing and publishing many of Lossky’s unpublished papers and lectures, it is always tragic to think what Lossky might have further accomplished if he had lived for many more years. But we can be thankful for the work that we do have, which, as we shall see, is always interesting and engages with contemporary problems. Now, we must consider both Florovsky’s and Lossky’s views of the Tradition of the Orthodox Church, which in turn will help explain how they saw their work in relationship to that Tradition.

¹⁵² Clément, Lossky, 204.

¹⁵³ Clément, Lossky, 204.

¹⁵⁴ Williams, Lossky, 30.

CHAPTER 2: Tradition

A. Florovsky's Tradition

Here, I would like to look at Florovsky's views on Tradition, and then at the related topics of his neopatristic synthesis and 'Christian Hellenism'. It is important to understand how Florovsky saw Tradition, for it will help us understand what were the forming and limiting factors in his theology, and thus, his place in the flow of that Tradition. This limiting of theology because of Tradition will apply to Lossky as well, but because Lossky's view is broader, Tradition will be less limiting.

The issue of Tradition is dual-natured. It concerns on the surface 'authority', but under that, or foundationally, 'truth'. For all Christians, these are the significant questions: What is *the* authority for each and all; where does it reside? And yet more fundamentally, where and how does truth reside in the Church, on which authority rests? If we find where truth resides, we will find where authority resides. And as Pavel Florensky put it, 'this question inevitably leads us into the domain of abstract knowledge. For theoretical thought "the Pillar of Truth" is certitude. Certitude assures me that the Truth, if I have attained it, is in fact what I sought'.¹⁵⁵ Ultimately, the search for Tradition is the search for certitude, but here we will only consider, as do Florovsky and Lossky, the search for the Church's authority.

Historically in the West, the argument tended to be defined in legal and canonical terms. The Roman Catholic Church defended its view of authority in legal terms and, on the opposite side, Protestantism rejected it. Thus there developed a rift in thought between

¹⁵⁵ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (hereafter *Pillar*), trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 14.

the Church and the experience of the individual.¹⁵⁶ Historically, the authority of the Roman Papacy and *magisterium* has been viewed as exercised from the top down, sometimes restricting freedom of thought and creativity. In Protestantism, authority resides in *sola scriptura*, which has given all-too-free rein to thought and action without limitation or boundaries. As we shall see, Florovsky, in offering the Eastern Orthodox view of Tradition, provides an alternate view (one might say a middle way) to both of these opposing views of the same tendency. After this critique, I must immediately add that Orthodoxy itself has not always followed the understanding of Tradition that Florovsky sets down; yet, from his perspective, his understanding of Tradition has always been there.

The Eastern view of authority ‘is not primarily a canonical authority, in the formal and specific sense of the term, although canonical strictures or sanctions may be appended to conciliar decisions on matters of faith’.¹⁵⁷ Florovsky also notes in the same essay, ‘It is significant that no attempt to develop a legal or canonical theory of “General Councils,” as a seat of ultimate authority, with specific competence and modes of procedure, had been made at the time, in the fourth century or later’.¹⁵⁸ So what then is Florovsky’s understanding of the criterion of truth, the criterion of certitude? For the ‘problem of the certitude of truth is reducible to the problem of finding a criterion. The entire demonstrative force of a system is focused, as it were, in the answer to this problem of finding a criterion’.¹⁵⁹ The following is Florovsky’s answer.

1. True Tradition

What exactly is Florovsky’s understanding of truth and authority in relationship to Tradition? First we must identify truth in relationship to Tradition, and then we will find

¹⁵⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, ‘Puti Russkogo Bogoslavia’, in David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin, eds. *The Heritage of the Early Church*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 195 (Roma: Pontifical Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 13-14.

¹⁵⁷ Florovsky, ‘The Authority of the Ancient Councils and the Traditions of the Fathers’, (hereafter Authority) in CW, I, 103.

¹⁵⁸ Florovsky, Authority, CW, I, 96.

¹⁵⁹ Florensky, *Pillar*, 20.

his understanding of authority. Logically, or theologically, if truth does not reside in the office of a person or in Scriptures alone, then it must reside elsewhere, and therefore so must authority. Allow me to quote Florovsky at length.

The true tradition is only the tradition of truth, *traditio veritatis*. This tradition according to St. Irenaeus is grounded in and secured by that *charisma veritatis certum* [Secure charisma of truth], which has been deposited in the Church from the very beginning and has been preserved by the uninterrupted succession of Episcopal ministry. ‘Tradition’ in the Church is not a continuity of human memory, or a performance of rites and habits. It is a living tradition - *depositum juvenescens*, in the phrase of St. Irenaeus. Accordingly, it cannot be counted *inter mortuas regulas* [among dead rules]. Ultimately, tradition is the continuity of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, a continuity of Divine guidance and illumination. The Church is not bound by the ‘letter’. Rather, she is constantly moved forth by the ‘Spirit’. The same Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, which ‘spoke through the Prophets’, which guided the Apostles, is still continuously guiding the Church into the fuller comprehension and understanding of the Divine truth, from glory to glory.¹⁶⁰

Tradition, for Florovsky, is ultimately the Holy Spirit in the Church (a very personalist perspective): first in the Holy Spirit’s initial ‘deposit’ of the truth to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, in their *kérygma* and their witness in the Scripture; but then, and equally important, by the Holy Spirit’s guiding the Fathers in the correct interpretation and preservation of the apostolic witness as found in their formulation of *dógma*. Clearly, as we can see from this quote, Tradition at its essence is Truth and Truth in its essence is charismatic. Therefore, for Florovsky, this Tradition is a living tradition, which is preserved throughout the ages in the episcopacy: faithful pastors who entrust the truth to other faithful men.

But what is the ultimate ‘criterion’ of the Christian truth according to Florovsky? The early Church accepted a very simple answer: Christ is the Truth. It is the divine revelation that Christ is the Incarnate God, in its twofold structure of the Person Himself and Scripture, the Word, which is the source and criterion of Christian Truth. Thus, we see

¹⁶⁰ Florovsky, ‘St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers’, (hereafter Palamas) CW, I, 106.

a dual aspect of truth: ‘Truth’ itself, which is the person of Christ, and the ‘truth’ about the ‘Truth,’ which is the Scriptural revelation. But this does not resolve any problems; it only pushes the problem to the next question. How was this revelation to be understood? What was to be the guiding hermeneutical principle? How was the truth to be arrived at?

There was no doubt in the early Church about the sufficiency of Scripture. Yet even within apostolic times the problem of interpretation arose. For Florovsky there was only one answer: ‘There was no other answer than the appeal to the “faith of the Church,” the faith and *kérygma* of the Apostles, the Apostolic *parádosis*. The Scripture could be understood only within the Church’.¹⁶¹ This appeal to the Apostles’ understanding of the truth, their ‘handing down’, their Tradition (*parádosis*), is seen as an appeal to the very mind of the Church, to the *ekklesiastikòn phrónema*.

2. Vincent of Lerins’ Canon

The above was the method to discover and ascertain the true faith in its permanence, without innovations, as always held from the very beginning of the Church. This was the characteristic attitude of the early Church in matters of faith. But antiquity was not the sole safeguard of the Tradition. It was antiquity within the context of the ‘mind of the Church’. As St. Vincent of Lerins put it:

Here, perhaps, someone may ask: Since the canon of the Scripture is complete and more than sufficient in itself, why is it necessary to add to it the authority of ecclesiastical interpretation? As a matter of fact, [we must answer], Holy Scripture, because of its depth, is not universally accepted in one and the same sense. The same text is interpreted differently by different people, so that one may almost gain the impression that it can yield as many different meanings as there are men.

Thus it is because of the great many distortions caused by various errors, it is, indeed, necessary that the trend of the interpretation of the prophetic and apostolic writings be directed in accordance with the rule of ecclesiastical and Catholic meaning.

In the Catholic Church itself, every care should be taken to hold fast to what has been delivered everywhere, always, and by all. This is truly,

¹⁶¹ Florovsky, ‘The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Councils’, (hereafter Function) CW, I, 98.

and properly ‘Catholic’, as indicated by the force and etymology of the name itself, which comprises everything universal.

This general rule will be truly applied if we follow the principles of universality, antiquity, and consent. We do so in regard to universality if we confess that faith alone to be true which the entire Church confesses all over the world. [We do so] in regard to antiquity if we in no way deviate from those interpretations, which our ancestors and Fathers have manifestly, proclaimed inviolable. [We do so] in regard to consent if, in this very antiquity, we adopt the definitions and propositions of all, or almost all, of the Bishops.¹⁶²

Using St. Vincent, Florovsky makes clear that antiquity alone is not an adequate proof of the true faith. True tradition is the tradition of truth. It was an appeal to the Apostolic *kérygma* as handed down in the Church and witnessed by the *dógma* of the Fathers. This is what it means to confess what the ‘entire Church confesses’, and not to deviate from the Fathers’ interpretations. For him, the Church is both apostolic and patristic. The Church is only truly ‘apostolic’ by being ‘patristic’. Florovsky views the proclamation of the Christian faith in these two stages. He comments after quoting the hymn from the office of the Three Hierarchs:

‘Our simple faith had to acquire composition’. There was an inner urge, an inner logic, an internal necessity, in the transition from *kérygma* to *dógma*. Indeed, the teaching of the Fathers, and the dogma of the Church are still the same ‘simple message’, which has been once delivered and deposited, once forever, by the Apostles. But now is it, as it were, properly and fully articulated.¹⁶³

For Florovsky, the Fathers are interpreters and holy witnesses to the apostolic *kérygma*. They are witnesses not only of the old faith, but also of the true faith. The apostolic truth is kept alive, not merely preserved, by the Fathers. The Fathers are viewed as those who had received what the Apostles had handed down, the living tradition of true faith.

¹⁶² St. Vincent of Lerins, trans. Rudolph Morris, *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, press, 1949), 269-371. As quoted in Father John Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura*, (CA: Conciliar Press, 1996), 38-39.

¹⁶³ Florovsky, Palamas, CW, I, 108.

The Fathers are a perennial reference in Orthodox theology, no less than the Scriptures themselves, but indeed never separated from them. According to Florovsky, the Fathers are all in agreement concerning this: The Scripture had to be understood as a whole. Florovsky demonstrates this by using three synonyms from three different Fathers: Scripture had to be understood according to a *hypothesis* or *corpus* or *canon* of truth (St. Irenaeus), or the *regula fidei* (Tertullian), or *skopos* or ‘ecclesiastical sense’ (St. Athanasius). The true faith could only be determined in the double recourse to Scripture and Tradition. These two dimensions could never be separated. And the ‘mind of the Fathers’ could never add anything to Scripture. Yet, the Fathers’ interpretation of Scripture was the only means to find and understand the true meaning of Scripture. ‘Tradition was, in fact, the authentic interpretation of Scripture’.¹⁶⁴

3. Basil’s Unwritten Tradition

But truth, and therefore authority, was not only seen as residing in the Tradition of the Fathers’ understanding of Scripture, but also (and with equal value) Orthodoxy locates the authority of the Church in the liturgical Tradition, in ‘the whole structure of liturgical and sacramental life’.¹⁶⁵ Here Florovsky considers the principle that ‘the rule of worship should establish the rule of faith’. As he states, “‘Faith’ found its first expression precisely in the liturgical-sacramental rites and formulas’.¹⁶⁶

It is this appeal to liturgical tradition that Florovsky turns to the analysis of St. Basil’s ‘unwritten tradition’, which in fact is the liturgical practice of the Church. Basil differentiates between the Apostles’ written teachings and their unwritten teachings, ‘which had been handed down by the way of mysteries’.¹⁶⁷ He considered both equally *paradosis*. But these ‘unwritten habits’ were the very usage and rites of the sacraments. Therefore, the appeal to the liturgical tradition was again an appeal to her *ekklesiastikòn*

¹⁶⁴ Florovsky, *Function*, CW, I, 75.

¹⁶⁵ Florovsky, *Function*, CW, I, 86.

¹⁶⁶ Florovsky, *Function*, CW, I, 84.

¹⁶⁷ St. Basil, *de Spir.Sant.*, 66, as quoted in Florovsky, *Function*, CW, I, 86.

phrónema, to her *sensus catholicus*.

St. Basil used this method to ‘break the deadlock created by the obstinate and narrow-minded *pseudo-biblicism*’ of his heretical opponents. For St. Basil it was impossible to truly understand Scripture apart from this ‘unwritten’ rule of faith. The supreme criterion of theology for him was the Scriptures. But the Tradition itself was the indispensable guide in interpreting them.¹⁶⁸

4. The Locus of Authority

Tradition, therefore, is the understanding of the Truth of the Revelation as first given to the Apostles and then handed down to the Fathers, all the while confirmed and guided by the Holy Spirit. Scripture itself is seen as belonging to this Tradition, but only in the context of the community of right faith and right liturgical practice (i.e., the Church) could the Scripture be rightly understood and correctly interpreted. But ‘the Church was not an external authority which had to judge over Scripture, but rather the keeper and guardian of that Divine truth which was stored and deposited in the Holy Writ’.¹⁶⁹ ‘This’, as Pelikan says, ‘transcends the dichotomy between Scripture and Church as it has been debated in the controversies between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism’.¹⁷⁰

In the Orthodox Church the truth, and therefore authority, resides in the Tradition. The Holy Spirit guides the living tradition of the Truth in the Church, kept alive by the faithful episcopacy. But this raises questions concerning the ‘existential’ character and location of this authority.

In Roman Catholicism, when appealing to authority, one appeals to the Roman See and the *magisterium*. In Protestantism, one appeals to the Bible. Both need an authority to authenticate truth when disputes arise. In Orthodoxy the location appears to be more subjective and therefore less structured.

¹⁶⁸ Florovsky, *Function*, CW, I, 89.

¹⁶⁹ Florovsky, *Function*, CW, I, 77.

¹⁷⁰ Pelikan, ‘Put’’, *The Heritage*, 14.

The Orthodox conception of authority as internal, that is an ‘internal’ knowledge of the Truth, must be understood within the context of Greek patristic thought concerning God and Man. Father John Meyendorff makes this context clear.

The Greek Fathers’ knowledge of God is based on the idea of communion, transfiguration, and deification of man. It implies the theory of the ‘spiritual senses’, i.e., an utterly personal experience of the living God, made accessible through the sacramental, communal life in the Body of Christ. This gnosiology does not suppress ‘authorities’ and ‘criteria,’ but it conceives them as clearly ‘internal’ to the Christian experience. They furnish an authentication, which is incomprehensible to anyone who has not first personally accepted the validity and tasted to the reality of the experience.

The experience is that of Truth itself, not simply of a means for attaining the Truth. It involves the ‘uncreated’ and divine presence of God in man through the Holy Spirit. It is the Truth therefore that authenticates authority, and not vice versa.¹⁷¹

This is indeed a type of subjectivism. How can an experience of this nature be otherwise? Yet this subjectivism is held within the context of an ancestry of other witnesses who testify to the internal concrete experience and knowledge of the Truth. It is only within this community that one knows whether or not one is experiencing true Christianity. It is this that is called Tradition. This avoids, from the Orthodox perspective, both extremes of the *locus* of external authority: one in which authority is in the Roman See and *magisterium*, which historically tended to deny individual experience and creativity; and the other in which authority resides in Scripture alone, which gives no boundaries to independent individual experiences and ignores the ontology of the community.

5. Tradition’s Existential Character

The ‘existential’ character of patristic thought is what Florovsky sees as the main

¹⁷¹ John Meyendorff, ‘Rome and Orthodoxy: Is “Authority” Still the Issue?’ in *Living Tradition: Orthodox Witness in the Contemporary World* (Crestwood; NY: SVS Press, 1978), 77.

distinctive mark of the Fathers' theology. Even though their works were logically arranged and used intellectual arguments, their final reference and appeal was always to the vision of faith, to spiritual comprehension. It is only in encounter with the Living Christ that theology actually had meaning; this is its whole reason for being.

Without this fundamental presupposition all theology in Orthodoxy becomes spiritually irrelevant. 'Apart from the life of Christ theology carries no conviction, and, if separated from the life of faith, theology may easily degenerate into empty dialectics, a vain *polylogia*, without any spiritual consequence'.¹⁷² Patristic theology, the mind of the Fathers, is not understood merely intellectually but within the whole context of Christian life. It is not self-explanatory but only discerned after spiritual engagement, after a commitment of faith. This type of theology can never be divorced from the life of prayer and the practice of virtue.

Florovsky's admonition to 'follow the Fathers' does not mean just to quote their words (especially out of their context), but 'to acquire their mind', their *phrónema*. The Orthodox Church claims to have preserved this 'mind' and to have theologized '*ad mentem Patrum*'.¹⁷³ This recovery of the 'mind' of the Fathers—a recovery not only of their theology but also of their existential attitude, their spiritual orientation, their piety and holiness—is behind his concept of the *neopatristic synthesis*.

6. Florovsky's Neopatristic Synthesis

Florovsky viewed Orthodoxy as having been influenced by Western theological habits and schemes since the seventeenth century. To him this was a deviation from the true traditional patristic pattern. Although the style of theology had changed, it did not necessarily imply a change in doctrine. This he called the '*Pseudomorphosis* of Eastern

¹⁷² Florovsky, 'Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church', (hereafter Ethos) CW, IV, 17.

¹⁷³ Florovsky, Ethos, CW, IV, 18.

theology',¹⁷⁴ which he also considered 'the Babylonian captivity' of Orthodoxy.¹⁷⁵ This view was clearly demonstrated in his work, *The Ways of Russian Theology*. His whole acerbic critique of Russian religious philosophy was based on this understanding. He felt the only way to overcome this *pseudomorphosis* and regain the integrity of Orthodox existence was to return to the 'tradition of the Fathers'. Since as worshipers the Orthodox had always remained in this tradition, so also should Orthodox theologians.

Florovsky believed this to be the 'task and aim' of Orthodox theology in the contemporary world. But this neopatristic synthesis must be a *creative return*, not a mere parroting of the texts. This implied that there be a measure of self-criticism. 'One has to reassess both the problems and the answers of the Fathers. In this study the vitality of patristic thought, and its perennial timeliness will come to the fore'.¹⁷⁶ It is clear, at least in Florovsky's theory that referencing the Fathers was not to be taken by itself as authoritative. In a letter to Dobbie Bateman in Florovsky's later years, dated December 12, 1963, Florovsky makes this quite clear:

Just yesterday the question was put to me, in my Patristic seminar, by one of the participants: we enjoy immensely, he said, the reading of the Fathers, but what is their 'authority'? Are we supposed to accept from them even that in which they obviously were 'situation-conditioned' and probably inaccurate, inadequate, and even wrong? My answer was obviously, No. Not only because, as it is persistently urged, only the *consensus patrum* is binding—and, as to myself, I do not like this phrase. The 'authority' of the Fathers is not a *dictatus papae*. They are guides and witnesses, no more. Their *vision* is 'of authority', not necessarily their words.¹⁷⁷

Florovsky clearly does not, especially in theory, subscribe to the necessity of patristic sources, but in practice, he was very adamant about it. We must also remember

¹⁷⁴ This term is first used in Florovsky, *Ways*, CW Vol. 5, 37, 72, 84, and 121. In his article, 'The Authority of the Fathers in the Western Orthodox Diaspora in the Twentieth Century', Andrew Louth notes that Florovsky borrowed the phrase from Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. Florovsky uses it for both the Roman Catholic impact, CW Vol. 5, 72, and the Protestant impact, CW Vol. 5, 121.

¹⁷⁵ Florovsky, *Ways*, CW Vol. 5, 121, which Florovsky believed began with Peter the Great's Reforms.

¹⁷⁶ Florovsky, *Ethos*, CW, IV, 23.

¹⁷⁷ Anastass Brandon Gallaher, 'Georges Florovsky on reading the life of St Seraphim', *Sobornost*, 27:1, 2005, 62.

that it was the very modern Western influences he was trying to purge out of Orthodoxy that gave him the method he was using. Because of this, in practice he made the method absolute, which was innovative for Orthodox theology. This is obvious as we observe the French Roman Catholic theologians of the same period.

Florovsky was not the only theologian in Paris at the time that was interested in a return to the Fathers. In the Roman Catholic Church there was also a renewed interest in studying patristics, as can be seen in the Ressourcement movement, or the Nouvelle Théologie movement associated with Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, and others.

The theologians who participated in this important trend believed, with de Lubac, that the key to the revitalization of Christian thought and life lay in a critical appropriation of the great sources of Catholic life and thought--the liturgy, the sacred scriptures, the writings of the early Church Fathers, and the writings of other great doctors and mystics, notably St. Thomas Aquinas.¹⁷⁸

The theologians of the Nouvelle Théologie in the Roman Catholic Church were doing the same type of return to the Fathers. My only point here is that this type of historicism, of absolutising a return to the Fathers for determining and revitalizing theology, was an innovation for both Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians. To demonstrate this fact, I cite *Humani Generis*, an Encyclical written by Pope Pius XII.

There is a certain historicism, which attributing value to the events of man's life, overthrows the foundation of all truth...[They want] to bring about a return in the explanation of Catholic doctrine to the way of speaking used in the Holy Scripture and by the Fathers of the Church...What is expounded in the Encyclical Letters of the Roman Pontiffs concerning the nature and constitution of the Church, is deliberately and habitually neglected by some with the idea of giving force to a certain vague notion which they profess to have found in the ancient Fathers, especially the Greeks...Let no Christian therefore, whether philosopher or theologian, embrace eagerly and lightly whatever novelty happens to be thought up from day to day...¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Marcellino D'Ambrosio, 'Henri Cardinal de Lubac: Biography and Online Writings', http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_author/131/Henri_de_Lubac.html

¹⁷⁹ Richard Gaillardetz, Jan Kerkofs, Gerard Mannion and Kenneth Wilson (eds.), *Readings in Church Authority* (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2003), 373-378.

Again, not to be misunderstood, I am only referring to the type of historicism that makes the method absolute. This return to the Fathers can be seen in nineteenth-century Russia, where there was much work done in translating the Fathers and making them available. This was the inheritance of all Russian Orthodox and was a beneficial endeavour. But it is not the return that is the concern, but the making the method absolute—what Fr. Schmemmann called the ‘transformation of history into History with a capital H’.¹⁸⁰ So, if this absolutising was an innovation, then these concepts were foreign to existing traditions.

Where then did Florovsky get these concepts of making absolute the method of returning to history for the solution of the problem of Western Idealist influences? As was said above, the influence was mostly from Hegel. Florovsky’s historiosophical¹⁸¹ influences were many. I will not go into these influences in detail. My purpose here is to point out a little-documented fact:¹⁸² Florovsky’s philosophy of history was Hegelian. Although it is true that he also adopts concepts from the Slavophiles and Nouvelle Théologie, his historical analysis is mostly Hegelian. Lewis Shaw also notes the influences of the Russian anti-liberalism of Danilevsky and Leontiev, Harnack’s centrality of the gospel for continuity, and Kattenbusch’s historical Christology. But to link Florovsky with Hegel, Shaw, who does not develop this, quotes Emil Brunner: ‘I for my part would conjecture a certain Hegelianism in him [Florovsky]’.¹⁸³ This was of course because of Florovsky’s idealistic view of the Church and his view of history, which is justified below.

It is important to note that Hegel’s historicism was a direct attack against the pure

¹⁸⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1990), 92.

¹⁸¹ The word is appropriate in this context. Zenkovsky, in his *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1, 6, fn. 1, gives this meaning: ‘This word (which translates the Russian *istoriosofiya*, modelled on the German *Historiosophie*) is somewhat awkward in English, although it has been current in German philosophic literature since Hegel. It means ‘philosophy of history’, and connotes a Hegelian view of the historical process as organic and rational’.

¹⁸² See Lewis Shaw, ‘An Introduction to the Study of Georges Florovsky’, Chapter VII: Critique and Reflection II; Florovsky, *Theology, and History* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1990), 212-233.

¹⁸³ Lewis Shaw, ‘An Introduction to the Study of Georges Florovsky’, (hereafter Introduction) (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1990), 216.

abstract Idealism of his predecessors.

For Hegel, thought fails when it is only given as an abstraction and is not united with considerations of historical reality. In his major work *The Phenomenology of Spirit* he went on to trace the formation of self-consciousness through history and the importance of other people in the awakening of self-consciousness. Thus Hegel introduces two important ideas to metaphysics and philosophy: the integral importance of history and of the other person.¹⁸⁴

Hegel attacked the pure abstract Idealism by using empirical historicism; it is this that Florovsky adopts. Here I wish to point out the obvious similarities between Florovsky's and Hegel's views of history. In examining a description of Hegel's historicism by Frederick C. Beiser, who is one of the leading scholars of German Idealism, we will see a description of Florovsky's as well. Only instead of applying these theories to philosophy, as Hegel does, Florovsky applies them to theology. Florovsky uses the following Hegelian principles applied to theology: that theology needs to be self-critical; that theology needs to be rooted and explained by history; that reason alone is insufficient for theology; that each society is an organic whole and as such has a 'spirit' (this Florovsky uses for the concept of catholicity); that the theologian's task is to make each society aware of its values and beliefs; that tradition is used to make the past alive in the present, and to take what has been handed down from previous generations and transform it into one's own; and finally (although they would disagree on their understanding of freedom), that a culture is evaluated as good or bad based on 'whether they contribute to the self-consciousness of freedom'.¹⁸⁵ I quote Beiser at length.

History cannot be consigned to a corner in Hegel's system, relegated to a few paragraphs near the end of the *Encyclopaedia* or confined to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. For, as many scholars have long since recognized, history is central to Hegel's conception

¹⁸⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_idealism#Hegel

¹⁸⁵ Frederick C. Beiser, 'Hegel's Historicism', (hereafter Hegel) in Frederick C. Beiser (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 270-277.

of philosophy. One of the most striking and characteristic features of Hegel's thought is that it *historicizes philosophy, explaining its purpose, principles, and problems in historical terms*. Rather than seeing philosophy as a timeless *a priori* reflection upon eternal forms, Hegel regards it as the *self-consciousness of a specific culture, the articulation, defense, and criticism of its essential values and beliefs*.

Hegel's historicism amounted to nothing less than a revolution in the history of philosophy. *It implied that philosophy is possible only if it is historical, only if the philosopher is aware of the origins, context, and development of his doctrines...*

If Hegel's historicism amounted to a revolution, it still was not a radical break with the past. For historicism, understood in a broad sense as the doctrine that emphasizes the importance of history for the understanding of human institutions and activities, must by definition also be the product of history. It was indeed anything but new in Hegel's day.¹⁸⁶

As with Hegel in philosophy, history is a central concept in Florovsky's theology. Florovsky historicizes theology in the same way Hegel did philosophy: 'explaining its purpose, principles, and problems in historical terms'. Florovsky also believes that theology is the 'self-consciousness of a specific culture, the articulation, defence, and criticism of its essential values and beliefs'. This we see in his criticism of the Russian culture's religious philosophy, but also in his praise of the Christian Hellenic culture. In both cases he ties their respective theologies to a specific culture. More specifically, as we see in Beiser's description of Hegel, Florovsky uses history as a 'weapon wielded against' what he saw and presumed as the Russian religious philosophers' and Bulgakov's 'pretences and illusions'. This was Florovsky's attack against the specific ethos of a culture. He believed their works to be the natural product of the activity of their own reason and culture. To oppose their religious philosophy, Florovsky utilizes Hegel's method and historicizes theology.

If historicism does not begin with Hegel, what, if anything, is new and distinctive about his historicism? With Hegel, *historicism be-*

¹⁸⁶Beiser, Hegel, 270-271, italics mine.

comes the self-conscious and general method of philosophy, the weapon to be wielded against its own pretences and illusions. This self-reflective, self-critical element is not found in the historicism of Hegel's predecessors or contemporaries. Hegel made historicism the self-critical method of philosophy because he believed that philosophy stood in the same need of historical explanation as politics, religion, or literature. In adopting a timeless and a-historical view of their discipline, philosophers had made the same kind of mistake as theologians, jurists, and aestheticians.... They too had failed to learn the simple lesson of history: that what appears to be given, eternal, or natural is in fact the product of human activity, and indeed of that activity in a specific cultural context. To expose this illusion, Hegel believed that he had no choice but to historicize philosophy itself.

This self-critical dimension of Hegel's historicism was his completion of Kant's project for a critique of pure reason. Like Kant, Hegel believed that *philosophy should become self-critical, aware of its own methods, presuppositions, and limits*. He too saw the source of 'transcendental illusion' in the self-hypostasis of reason, in its supposing that there are some eternal entities corresponding to its laws. But, unlike Kant, *Hegel held that such self-critical reflection demands that philosophy be aware of the genesis, context, and development of its own doctrines*. Rather than claiming that they were the product of pure reason, as Kant had done, *the philosopher should see them as the result of history. The problem of transcendental illusion would become fully eradicated, Hegel thought, only when philosophy became fully historicized, for only then would the philosopher see how his belief in supernatural or eternal entities arose from his culture. The real source of transcendental illusion thus lay in amnesia, forgetting the origin, context, and development of our ideas.*

*What all these philosophers have in common, in Hegel's view, is a tendency to forget the past, to ignore the social, political, and historical origins and context of their own doctrines.*¹⁸⁷

Florovsky, in actuality, is borrowing Hegel's criticism of pure abstract Idealism. Hegel applies his historical Rational empiricism to the all too often non-historical and purely rational side of Idealism. Florovsky, in kind, applies his historical theological empiricism to the more rational Idealism that was found in the Russian religious philosophy of his own time. As with Hegel, Florovsky saw the Russian religious philosophy as a unique and organic whole, which cannot be separated from its way of

¹⁸⁷ Beiser, Hegel, 272-274, italics mine.

thinking and acting. This is Florovsky's understanding of the spirit of the Russian nation, or the Russian soul. These concepts are Hegel's.

What drove Hegel into his historical conception of philosophy? Why did he think that philosophy is only its own time comprehended in thought? One basic premise of Hegel's historicism is his doctrine that *each society is a unique whole, all of whose parts are inseparable from one another*. The art, religion, constitution, traditions, manners, and language of a people form a systematic unity. We cannot separate one of these factors from the whole without changing its nature and that of the whole. *This organic whole is what Hegel, following Montesquieu, calls 'the spirit' of a nation, its characteristic manner of thinking and acting*. Now philosophy, Hegel maintains, is simply one part of the social whole. The philosopher cannot leap beyond his own age any more than he can jump outside his own skin. *His task is simply to make each nation self-conscious of its underlying spirit, of its characteristic values and beliefs. The organic nature of the social whole, and the role of philosophy within it, then means that philosophy cannot be separated from its social context. If the factors composing the social whole were to change, then philosophy would be bound to change with them. It would simply have a new spirit to express.*¹⁸⁸

Florovsky viewed it as part of his task to make the Russian religious philosophers aware of their underlying spirit, their values and beliefs. He points out that their philosophy had changed in its consistency from the culture of the Church. Their tradition was a different tradition from the ecclesial consciousness of the Church. The Church's culture itself was Christianized Hellenism. His critique is that Russian religious philosophy was not part of the 'sacred tradition' of the Church. But this critique is also Hegel's methodology applied.

Another central premise behind Hegel's historicism is his general Herderian view of the role of tradition in the development of the arts and sciences. Citing Herder, *Hegel refers to tradition as 'the sacred chain' that links the present with the past. It is tradition that shows us that the past continues to live in the present*. What we are now, Hegel says, is what we have become, and the process of our becoming is our history. The power of reason that mankind now possesses, he argues, is not given to it at birth, but has been acquired through

¹⁸⁸ Beiser, Hegel, 274, italics mine.

centuries of effort. The arts and sciences have not been created immediately - shot from the pistol of absolute knowledge - but *they are the product of all past achievements*. Philosophy, Hegel reminds us, is no exception to this rule. *The material or subject matter of philosophy is not given to the philosopher or created a priori by his individual reason. Rather, it is a legacy handed down to him from the past. Hegel does not mean, of course, that it is the role of the philosopher simply to transmit this tradition. He insists that it is his task to transform it, to assimilate it in his own individual and original manner. Only in this way, he says, does the tradition remain vital.* Nevertheless, without a material handed down to him, the philosopher will have nothing to work upon or produce.

The epitome of Hegel's doctrine of the historicity of thought is his claim that we cannot separate philosophy from the history of philosophy. The discovery of the nature of thought in philosophy becomes the history of philosophy itself.¹⁸⁹

Here, we can see in Beiser's description even Florovsky's concept of sacred tradition and the responsibility of theologians not merely to 'transmit this tradition'. For Florovsky, as for Hegel, it was the task of the theologian to 'assimilate it in his own individual and original manner. Only in this way, he says, does the tradition remain vital'. This is indeed Florovsky's neopatristic synthesis.

Horuzhy notes that Florovsky's thought is similar to Heidegger's notion of *Kehre*. Horuzhy speaking of Heidegger says, 'In his work, *Kehre* is a return which is a condition of an advancement'.¹⁹⁰ But whereas Heidegger's position was an absolutisation of Hellenic origin, Florovsky's was 'an absolutisation of the Christianized-Hellenic or patristic origin'.¹⁹¹ This Hegelian perspective of history is Florovsky's motivating force.

Given that the absolutisation of the method of the neopatristic synthesis and return to the Fathers is of Hegelian origin, is it still legitimately Orthodox? According to Florovsky's strict application of his own principle, no. The problem with Florovsky is that he does not heed his own understanding of Tradition. As was seen above, Florovsky

¹⁸⁹ Beiser, Hegel, 275-277, italics mine.

¹⁹⁰ Sergey S. Horuzhy, 'Neo-Patristic Synthesis and Russian Philosophy', (hereafter Neo-Patristic) *SVTQ*, vol. 44, no. 3-4, 2000, 317.

¹⁹¹ Horuzhy, Neo-Patristic, 319.

believes the Tradition of the Church to be the understanding of the Truth of the revelation as first given to the Apostles and then handed down to the Fathers, all the while confirmed and guided by the Holy Spirit. It is acquiring the existential attitude and life of the mind of the Church, the ecclesial consciousness. Anything consistent and non-contradictory with this understanding of the Truth is part of the Tradition: if any one of these is separated out and absolutised as being the sole rule of truth, it is no longer consistent with Tradition. The neopatristic synthesis and return to the Fathers is not wrong in and of itself. In fact it is an integral part of the Orthodox Tradition. It is only when it is made absolute that problems arise. This is the error that Florovsky falls into.

Florovsky pushed his presupposition of return to ‘the mind of the Fathers’ to the very literal terminology used by them. Because of this he envisioned the concept of ‘Christian Hellenism’. This was not, as Harnack thought, that the original Gospel was transformed by the forces of the surrounding Hellenistic world into the development of dogmatic Christianity, but rather that Christianity ‘transfigured’ philosophical Hellenism to more fully expisit the truths of the faith.¹⁹² In this way Florovsky’s Christian Hellenism was a reaction to Harnack.

It was from this perspective that Florovsky attempted a neopatristic synthesis of engagement with the modern world. George H. Williams said of Florovsky that he restates ‘the saving truth of Scripture and Tradition in the idiom of our contemporary yearning for the transcendent’.¹⁹³ But in actuality, Florovsky addressed the problems of the modern world not by using modern idiom, but in the idiom of the Fathers. In this sense he wished to re-Hellenize Christianity. Florovsky purposed that as Christians ‘we should never believe that dogmatic terminologies of the past are simply temporary formulations without continuing significance’. And continuing, that ‘Greek is the language of the New Testament and everything in early Christianity. We are all Greeks in our thinking as

¹⁹² Lewis Shaw, Introduction, 219.

¹⁹³ George H. Williams, ‘Father Georges Florovsky 1893-1979: Preeminent Orthodox Christian Theologian, Ecumenical Spokesman, And Authority on Russian Letters’, *Harvard Gazette*, October 1, 1982, as quoted in the beginning of CW, IV.

Christians’.¹⁹⁴

Immediately, such statements affront. How can an appeal to a particular culture be relevant to the metacultural truth of Christianity? First, we must try to understand the context of where and when such ideas arose: mainly in the heated context of the polemic against the Russian religious philosophers and the “radical de-Hellenization” of Christianity’.¹⁹⁵

The initial introduction of these ideas was in 1936, in Athens, Greece, at the first pan-Orthodox Conference, which immediately followed the 1935 Sophiology controversy in Paris. Florovsky, as we have seen above, prejudicially used ‘Christian Hellenism’ and the concept of the neopatristic synthesis as tools against the Russian religious philosophy he was encountering, and to undermine the source of it. But Florovsky also used his concept of Christian Hellenism to combat all those who wished to remove all forms of ‘Hellenic motifs’ from Christian doctrine so as to return to a ‘purely biblical’ Christianity. Florovsky specifically mentions Albrecht Ritschl and the dialectical theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. But he also attacks the German Idealists and all those who would follow on their thought. Before we go further, we must understand what Florovsky specifically meant when he used the term ‘Christian Hellenism’.

Hellenism in the Church has been, so to speak, immortalized, having been incorporated into the very fabric of the reality of the Church as an eternal category of Christian existence. This does not mean, of course, ethnic Hellenism or the contemporary Hellas or Levant, nor the recent and wholly unjustified Greek ‘phyletism’. What is meant is ‘Christian antiquity’, the Hellenism of dogmatics, of the liturgy and the icon. The Hellenistic style of ‘mysteriological piety’ has been so eternally established in the liturgy of the Eastern rite that, in a certain sense, it is impossible to enter into the rhythm of the liturgical sacraments without some degree of mystical re-Hellenization.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Florovsky, *GOTR*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1965), 33-34. As quoted in Shaw, Introduction, 222.

¹⁹⁵ Florovsky, *Ways*, CW, VI, Part 2, 297.

¹⁹⁶ Florovsky, *Ways*, CW, VI, Part 2, 297.

Obviously, this is Hegel's understanding that thoughts are tied to a specific culture as an organic whole. Florovsky saw the culture of the Church to be Hellenic, for such were its art, theology, and liturgy. When the definition of Florovsky's Christian Hellenism remains specific, as the above quote demonstrates, then some leeway can be given. But is he not missing the fact that the early Christians worshipped following Jewish liturgical practices? The liturgy was a form of worship modelled on the Jewish service—a reading from Scripture with interpretation, preaching, prayer and praise, which can be seen in the New Testament:¹⁹⁷ the liturgical Hours as well demonstrate this.¹⁹⁸ The Eucharist was the Passover meal. And what of the New Testament itself—although it was written in Greek, were not most of the writers Jews?¹⁹⁹ And so what of the earliest liturgical practices: did they not arise first in the Middle East and then move out from there?

Florovsky's use in the specific context does allow him some latitude, but when he uses the expression in a more general way outside of this context—when he absolutises it to the totality of Christianity—he gets into some problems. If, for Florovsky, Christianity could, by God's providence, transfigure the idiom of a philosophy of a particular culture in a particular time, and if, as he believed, Christianity was still developing in its understanding of the fullness of the truth, why could not Christianity today, still by God's providence, transfigure the idiomatic expression of another philosophy of another particular time and culture? Did not the Church adopt and borrow from different cultures and philosophies, transforming them and baptizing them into the Church? Is this not what Augustine determined: that that which is true and good and in service to the gospel of Christ should be used?

If those who are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said aught that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to

¹⁹⁷ The Gospel of St. Luke 4:16-30.

¹⁹⁸ Acts 3:1, 10:3, 9.

¹⁹⁹ Shaw recognizes an anti-Jewish bias based on the rejection of Christ by the nation of Israel. See Shaw, Introduction, 214-215.

shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it...they contain also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of the truth, and some most excellent precepts of morality...These, therefore, the Christian, when he separates himself in spirit from the miserable fellowship of these men, ought to take away from them, and to devote to their proper use in preaching the gospel.²⁰⁰

Also, how is this consistent with his neopatristic synthesis? When did any of the Fathers ever appeal to a cultural identity for Christianity? There are some inherent contradictions in this thinking. And Shaw rightly notes:

Florovsky's contradictory attitudes emerged plainly at Aarhus [The Unofficial Consultation between Theologians of the Orthodox Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches.] He was at obvious pains to deny any Hellenophilia or cultural triumphalism, stressing elsewhere in the same discussions that 'the Fathers' were also Syrian and Latin. He offered, however, no way of incorporating these non-Greek Fathers into his paradigm of the Greek background beyond the medium of 'the mind of the Church'. How 'the mind of the Church' manifested itself to these Fathers within the respective experiences of their own cultures, Florovsky did not make clear.²⁰¹

It is clear that Florovsky was looking for and found a polemical leverage in Hegel's historical method against the Russian religious philosophers and against those who wanted to do away with all things Greek in Christianity. But it is also clear that he allowed himself to become clouded in his judgment concerning 'Christian Hellenism'. Indeed, Christian theological language is precise, and needs to be, and this precision is due to the particular language in which it was formed. But does this not imply that if all cultures are to use the terminology, then in some sense it transcends culture? One wonders how Florovsky would respond to Archimandrite Sophrony's view:

If, as we confess in the Creed, Christ is very God, the Saviour of the universe, the Creator of the world, 'by whom all things were made', how

²⁰⁰ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 (MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 554.

²⁰¹ Shaw, Introduction, 223.

can we bring our understanding of Him down to a question of nationality, place, epoch...? I do not know a Greek Christ, a Russian Christ, an English Christ, an Arab Christ... Christ, for me, is everything, the supra-cosmic Being.²⁰²

And what would Florovsky say to the scriptural affirmation of Galatians 3:27, 28? If Florovsky wanted to express that Christian terminology was metacultural, why did he not just say that? This, we will see, is exactly what Lossky does.

Florovsky's understanding of what it means to use the Greek language is mistaken, because he somehow equates the use of the language with the adoption of the 'mindset' and/or culture, and thus develops his idea of 'sacred Hellenism'. It is obvious that no such adoption is necessary. For Florovsky himself says that to adopt the mindset of the Fathers is to adopt their very 'existential attitude' towards life, their 'spiritual orientation'. And if the true existential attitude of the Church is silence, as Lossky will demonstrate below, then the reference to Christian Hellenism is unnecessary. Thus the mindset of the Fathers is an adoption of the culture of the Church and the ethos of Christianity; the language and culture are secondary. Also, as Bulgakov rightly enjoins, 'Our Lord said: "Go and teach all people." This gives to [each] nationality its right of existence, its historic originality, joined nevertheless to the unity of life in the Church'.²⁰³ With this said, we must not negate the contribution Florovsky made to theological discourse by emphasizing the importance of using precise terminology. But the question still remains: Cannot precise terminologies serve as the foundation upon which one builds a further structure, different though it may be? As was noted, absolutising the method of the neopatristic approach is of Idealistic origins. Florovsky follows Hegel's view of history quite closely.

Nevertheless, what is most significant about Florovsky's contribution to the understanding of Tradition is his concept of the neopatristic synthesis. Though an innovation in its absolutising, his vision for the advancement of Orthodox thought

²⁰² Sophrony Sakharov, *Words of Life* (Great Britain: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1992), 20.

²⁰³ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 93.

demanded that it be truly ‘radical’ by returning to its roots. For Florovsky the only way to creatively move forward was to return and enter into the very source of the Church’s life, her Tradition. Theology must retain a living connection with its living Tradition; it must be consistent with the *testes Veritatis*, which are the apostolic *kerygma* and the patristic *dogma*. These are witnesses to the Truth, which is Christ Himself. And moreover, it is the Spirit of Truth that guided them into all Truth. Florovsky’s ‘return to the Fathers’ supplied the methodology, the link and the key for the Orthodox Church to recapitulate the living Tradition’s understanding of Christian life and practice—that is, to understand the very mind of the Church.

His methodology of the neopatristic synthesis is not wrong in and of itself. Though he never meant the Fathers to become a fundamentalist authority, Florovsky opens the door to the danger of a fundamentalist treatment of the Fathers by his absolutising of the neopatristic method. In other words, if one holds to the neopatristic synthesis as an absolute methodology for doing theology, without reference to the ecclesial consciousness (as Florovsky instructs us to do), one treats the Fathers the same way that Protestants treat the Scriptures; *sola scriptura* is replaced with *sola patristica*. The Fathers are used as proof-texts, the very danger that Florovsky warned against.

The strict neopatristic methodology also presupposes that only patrologists can do theology. And this is simply not the Orthodox understanding of doing theology. Evagrius Pontikos states, in the much-quoted verse, ‘If you are a theologian, you will pray truly, and if you pray truly, you are a theologian’.²⁰⁴ Prayer is the foundation of all true theology. Thus, theology cannot only be done by a group of academic specialists. As Constantine B. Souteris points out, theology ‘is not the exclusive province of a certain elite enclave of specialists. On the contrary, it is an open *diakonia*, a reality of catholic significance’.²⁰⁵ Florovsky and Lossky are both clear on this matter: in the Orthodox Church theology is a

²⁰⁴ Evagrius Pontikos (AD 345-399), *On Prayer*, 61.

²⁰⁵ Constantine B. Souteris, *Ecclesial Being: Contributions to Theological Dialogue*, ed. Christopher Veniamin (USA: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2006), 50.

result of prayer and contemplation; it is a result of the encounter and participation with the illumination of God Himself. It is an alignment with the ecclesial Tradition throughout the ages. This is the determining factor of Orthodox theology. Rowan Williams captures well the gist of the ecclesial Tradition:

That style of religious thinking in Russia which, on the whole, does not depend upon or regularly utilize the metaphysical vocabulary of Soloviev and his followers, but is developed with closer reference to Scripture, the Fathers and the ascetical tradition...It is fundamentally non-philosophical...It is very much a monastic theology, conscious, to a greater or lesser extent, of its roots in the liturgical and contemplative life.²⁰⁶

In theory, Florovsky is clear in his theology about what Tradition is: it is the Holy Spirit in the Church, leading and guiding the episcopacy to preserve consistency with the apostolic *kérygma* and the patristic *dógma*. It is a living Tradition that is liturgic and contemplative, based on the attitude and spirit of the Fathers. But sometimes, in practice, he gives little concession to anything that is not patristic. Florovsky forgets completely those who are contemporary witnesses of the revelation. In practice he forgets the ever-present reality of the Holy Spirit in all times and cultures. In this sense he makes exclusive the patristic appeal with regards to the other themes that are part of the Tradition as a whole, and then he absolutises the appeal to patristics for Tradition. This is a fundamental error: it is an appeal to historical empirical rationalism in opposition to the idealist rationalism of Sophiology.

Here is, I believe, a more balanced understanding of Tradition. This is Tradition according to St. Silouan the Athonite (here in the words of Archimandrite Sophrony).

For the Staretz the life of the Church meant life in the Holy Spirit, and Sacred Tradition the unceasing action of the Holy Spirit in her. Sacred Tradition, as the eternal and immutable dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church, lies at the very root of her being, and so encompasses her life that

²⁰⁶ Williams, Lossky, 255.

even the very Scriptures come to be but one of its forms. Thus, were the Church to be deprived of Tradition she would cease to be what she is, for the ministry of the New Testament is the ministry of the Spirit ‘written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stones, but in the fleshy tables of the heart’.

Suppose that for some reason the Church were to be bereft of all her books, of the Old and New Testaments, the works of the holy Fathers, of all service books – what would happen? Sacred Tradition would restore the Scriptures, not word for word, perhaps – the verbal form might be different – but in essence the new Scriptures would be the expression of that same ‘faith which was once delivered unto the saints’. They would be the expression of the one and only Holy Spirit continuously active in the Church, her foundation and her very substance.²⁰⁷

If anything is to be made absolute, it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. In the words of Alan Brown, a young Orthodox theologian, ‘it is not appropriate for Orthodox theology to thus absolutise a grammatical and communitarian understanding of theology... *no methodological absolutism is permissible within Orthodox theology*’.²⁰⁸ To the rational mind this lack of methodological absolutism might seem nebulous, but it is nonetheless the Faith of the Orthodox Church. Again, not to be misunderstood, Florovsky’s faith is not in question here, nor is the neopatristic synthesis *per se*, but the absolutising of the appeal to the historical empiricism of his methodology. It is not Florovsky’s theories I reject, but his practice. It is this rationalism in Florovsky that causes him to be so adamantly against antirational works. But it is this very antirational stance that is adopted and used by Lossky in his Tradition, to which we now turn.

²⁰⁷ Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *St. Silouan the Athonite*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Essex, UK: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991), 87-88. Ironically, Florovsky wrote the forward to the original publication of this work, *The Undistorted Image*, and had met St. Silouan.

²⁰⁸ Alan Brown, ‘On the Criticism of *Being as Communion* in the Anglophone Orthodox Theology’, an unpublished copy of the same name in Douglas H. Knight, ed., *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (England/USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited/Company, 2007)35-78.

B. Lossky's Tradition

1. Tradition and Traditions

Lossky's *exposé* on Tradition is found in the introduction to his work (in collaboration with L. Ouspensky), *The Meaning of Icons*.²⁰⁹ It is replete with references to the Fathers, reflecting his commitment to the neopatristic synthesis. But Lossky does not make the method absolute and exclusive with reference to Tradition as a whole. When he does, as we will see later, he encounters problems. There is a tension in Lossky resulting from his use of this rationalist empirical method, because fundamentally he is an anti-rationalist. Ultimately, for Lossky as for Florovsky, Tradition is the Holy Spirit leading and guiding all the members in the Church to the truth. In this context of being 'in the Church' the ecclesial consciousness, the Church's life and thought, resides.

Lossky uses this understanding of Tradition as a safeguard against what he believed to be the Russian religious philosophers', specifically Bulgakov's, unaccountable speculations.²¹⁰ Lossky feels a necessity to be consistent and non-contradictory with the entire body of ecclesial thought. He shares many perspectives on patristic texts with Florovsky. But in the end, he shares his understanding of Truth and its reception with Florensky, whom he tellingly calls a 'modern theologian' and thus somewhat aligns himself with the Russian Religious Renaissance tradition.²¹¹

Essential knowing of the Truth, i.e., communion with the Truth itself, is therefore the real entering into the interior of the Divine Trinity, and not only an ideal touching of the Trinity's outer form. Therefore, true knowledge, knowledge of the Truth, is possible only through the transubstantiation of man, through his deification, through the acquisition of love as the Divine essence: he who is not with God does not know God. In love and only in love is real knowledge of the Truth conceivable.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Vladimir Lossky, 'Tradition and Traditions', originally published as an 'Introduction' in *Der Sinn der Ikonen* (in collaboration with L. Ouspensky) Bern und Olten: Urs Graf-Verlag, 1952. English translation by G. E. H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky: *The Meaning of Icons* (Boston, MA: Boston Book and Art Shop, Inc., 1952). Reprinted in *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 141-168. (hereafter Tradition).

²¹⁰ Williams, Lossky, 47.

²¹¹ Lossky, *MT*, 65.

²¹² Florensky, *Pillar*, 56.

Knowledge of the Truth, i.e., of the consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity, is achieved by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The entire ascetic life, i.e., life in the Truth, is directed by the Holy Spirit.²¹³

Florensky, following the Slavophil concept of consubstantiality, develops a more comprehensive system of Truth to which, as we shall see, Lossky adheres.

Lossky searches for the 'real' meaning of Tradition (*parádosis, traditio*) by examining the usage of the word and by making the distinction between Tradition and traditions. He states that the danger in using the word 'tradition' comes from the fact that the word is so overabundant in meanings that, in the end, it can have none at all. He blames, not the secularization of the word, but the vague usage of it in theological language itself. The word has so many meanings that if one were to try and use the word, embracing all of its meanings, without eliminating some of them (for fear of mutilating the idea), all one is left with are definitions which no longer reveal the true meaning of 'Tradition'.²¹⁴

One way, Lossky states, if precision is desired, is to attempt a breaking-up of the content by creating a group of 'narrow concepts', but for him the sum is 'far from expressing that living reality called the Tradition of the Church'.²¹⁵ Lossky, in reading Fr. A. Deneffe's *Der Traditionsbegriff*, felt that Deneffe raised the question of whether the concept can be defined at all, or merely described. Thus, in the works of some theologians, such as Mohler and Khomiakov, there are pages describing Tradition as the catholic fullness of the Church. The problem, for Lossky, is that these theologians fail to distinguish between Tradition and the concepts of unity, catholicity, apostolicity, and the consciousness of the Church. With these descriptions one can recognize the fullness that is the Tradition of the Church, but, according to Lossky, one can and must recognize the

²¹³ Florensky, *Pillar*, 81.

²¹⁴ Lossky, *Tradition*, 141.

²¹⁵ Lossky, *Tradition*, 141.

necessity of making distinctions, ‘which is imposed on all dogmatic theology’.²¹⁶

Lossky clarifies that to ‘distinguish does not always mean to separate, nor even to oppose’.²¹⁷

He gives, as an example of the opposing of concepts, the theologians of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The theologians of the Counter-Reformation, by acknowledging that Tradition was a reality separate from that of Scripture, and thus opposing Tradition and Scripture as two sources of Revelation, put themselves on the opposite side of the same argument as their Protestant adversaries. Lossky, using an expression of St. Irenaeus, puts it thus:

Instead of being the very *hupóstasis* of the sacred books—their fundamental coherence due to the living breath passing through them, transforming their letter into a ‘unique body of truth’—Tradition would appear as something added, as an external principle in relation to Scripture.²¹⁸

The result of this action, or rather reaction, was that for the Counter-Reformers the patristic texts that attributed to Holy Scripture the character of *pleroma* became incomprehensible; while, for the Protestants, the doctrine of the ‘sufficiency of Scripture’ meant an exclusion of everything that was considered ‘tradition’. ‘The defenders of Tradition saw themselves obliged to prove the necessity of uniting two juxtaposed realities, each of which remained insufficient alone’.²¹⁹

As a consequence, false dichotomies arose, such as the primacy of Scripture versus Tradition and of their respective authority. How was their unity to be regained? One solution posited, Lossky states, in the face of two concepts each simultaneously possessing ‘fullness’, was that ‘there can be no question of two *pleromas* opposed to one another, but

²¹⁶ Lossky, Tradition, 142.

²¹⁷ Lossky, Tradition, 142.

²¹⁸ Lossky, Tradition, 142.

²¹⁹ Lossky, Tradition, 142.

of two modalities of one and the same fullness of Revelation communicated to the Church'.²²⁰

Lossky clarifies his theory of distinction and separation. He believed that a distinction that separates is never perfect or radical enough. Such a distinction 'does not allow one to discern, in its purity, the difference of the unknown term which it opposes to another that is supposed to be known'.²²¹ Separation, it follows, is a type of distinction, but 'it juxtaposes two objects detached from one another, but in order to do this it must first of all lend to one the characteristics of the other'.²²² In separating concepts, damage is inevitably done to the lesser-known idea, which in this case is Tradition.

Thus, the qualities of Scripture are attributed to Tradition, such as 'other writings' or unwritten 'other words', or, from one perspective, things that are extra—added on the horizontal or historical plane by the Church. Since this division is made, it continues dividing Tradition into several different 'sources of Revelation or *loci theologici* of unequal value: acts of ecumenical or local councils, writings of the Fathers, canonical prescriptions, liturgy, iconography, devotional practices, *etc*'.²²³ But is it still proper to call all these by the singular term Tradition?

Lossky concludes that it is perhaps more proper to speak of them, as the theologians of the Council of Trent did, as 'traditions'. But this for Lossky represents exactly the problem of separation versus mere distinguishing. Lossky's argument against 'separation' is against the method that has been incorporated into much of what is considered theology, opposing concepts while leaving vague notions of their real distinctions.

Tradition becomes projected onto Scripture as something added and accompanying it. Tradition, by referring to it in this manner, becomes more obscure rather than clarifying its true meaning. For, Lossky states, 'Tradition is free of all determinations which, in

²²⁰ Lossky, Tradition, 143.

²²¹ Lossky, Tradition, 143.

²²² Lossky, Tradition, 143.

²²³ Lossky, Tradition, 143.

situating it historically, limit it'.²²⁴ For Lossky, as opposed to any other addition, Tradition is something other.

Advancement is made in the search for a 'purer notion' of Tradition, Lossky observes, by using the term solely to designate the 'oral transmission of the truths of the faith'.²²⁵ With this, Revelation is still maintained as a single source, while Scripture and Tradition are separated only as differing modes of transmitting it: oral and written.

This method affirms the primacy of Tradition over Scripture, since temporally the apostles' 'preaching of the faith' preceded its recording in written form in the New Testament. But although the separation between Scripture and Tradition has been maintained, they still have not been radically distinguished. Here their foundation, 'the preaching of the faith', qualifies the opposition of the two and still attributes to Tradition a relationship to Scripture. Here Lossky asks, 'Is it not possible to go further in search of the pure notion of Tradition?'²²⁶

2. Basil's Unwritten Tradition

Lossky, moving from the analysis of the contemporary word usage of Tradition, examines how the term was originally used. Here he shares Florovsky's views closely. One meaning that the Fathers of the first century²²⁷ used was that of a teaching to be kept secret, 'lest the mystery be profaned by the uninitiated'.²²⁸ As with Florovsky, this can be seen in St. Basil's 'unwritten tradition', or his distinction between *dóγμα* and *kérygma*.

Dóγμα in Basil's use is very different from the contemporary usage, meaning a doctrinal definition expressed publicly by the Church. Lossky, quoting St. Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*, cites that it is a 'teaching (*didaskalia*) unpublished and secret, that our fathers kept in silence, free from disquiet and curiosity, well knowing that in being silent one

²²⁴ Lossky, Tradition, 144.

²²⁵ Lossky, Tradition, 144.

²²⁶ Lossky, Tradition, 144.

²²⁷ Referring here specifically to Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* VI, 61.

²²⁸ Lossky, Tradition, 145.

safeguards the sacred character of the mysteries'.²²⁹ *Kérygma* (taken from the language of the New Testament for 'preaching'), on the other hand, has always meant an open proclamation, 'whether it be a doctrinal definition, the official prescription of an observance, a canonical act, or public prayers of the Church'.²³⁰

The understanding of the word *dóigma* as 'secret' might call to mind the Gnostics. But the Church's understanding of the word *dóigma* is far from the *doctrina arcana* of the Gnostics, who claimed to have their own hidden apostolic tradition. St. Basil's expressions concerning the 'mysteries' differ greatly because they were never meant for only a perfect select few. Rather, they were intended for 'the ensemble of the faithful participating in the sacramental life of the Church, who are here opposed to the "uninitiate"—those whom a progressive catechism must prepare for the sacraments of initiation'.²³¹ Another difference from the Gnostic understanding of doctrine is that the secret tradition (*dóigma*) could become public preaching (*kérygma*) if the need arose, such as in a battle against heresy.

For Lossky, in this distinction between Tradition (as something to be kept secret as a safeguard) and Scripture (as something that had been publicly declared and therefore could be written down for all), there no longer existed the opposition between oral preaching (*ágrapha*) and written preaching (*éngrapha*). But this distinction stressed more the secret character of Tradition by opposing the hidden treasure of oral teachings passed down from the apostles to public teachings offered by the Church for the edification of all.

This distinction submerges 'preaching' in the waters of apostolic traditions. Hence, one could not set them aside without doing damage to the Gospel itself. Many of these traditions offered by St. Basil come from the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church: 'the sign of the Cross, baptismal rites, blessing of oil, Eucharistic epiclesis, the custom of turning towards the east during prayer and that of remaining standing on Sunday and

²²⁹ St. Basil, *De spiritu sancto* 27; P.G. 32, cols. 188A-193A, as quoted in Lossky, *Tradition*, 145.

²³⁰ Lossky, *Tradition*, 145.

²³¹ Lossky, *Tradition*, 145.

during the period of Pentecost, *etc.*'²³² These 'unwritten customs' (*tà ágrapha tôn ethôn*), these 'unwritten mysteries of the Church' (*ágrapha tês Ekklesiás mustéria*), are necessary for understanding the truth of Scripture and therefore indicate the true 'mystical character' of Christian knowledge. This knowledge, which is revealed truth, 'is not a dead letter but a living Word: it can be attained only in the Church, through initiation by the "mysteries" or sacraments into the "mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints" (Col. 1:26)'.²³³

These unwritten traditions constitute the boundary with Tradition itself. Through sacramental initiation, which is key, there is participation in the revealed mystery. Thus, there is a new experiential knowledge,

a 'gnosis of God' (*gnôsis theou*) that one receives as grace; and this gift of gnosis is conferred in a 'tradition' which is, for St. Basil, the confession of the Trinity at the time of baptism: a sacred formula which leads us into light.²³⁴

What we find in Lossky, and not in Florovsky, is the basic understanding of truth as knowledge of the Trinity that is a gift: that is, the grace of the Holy Spirit.

This is of the utmost importance to Lossky: the 'traditions' on the horizontal plane, which were received from the Lord and handed down by the apostles and their successors, intersect 'with the vertical, with *Tradition*—the communication of the Holy Spirit, which opens to members of the Church an infinite perspective of mystery in each word of the revealed Truth'.²³⁵ Lossky demonstrates the necessity of going beyond St. Basil's traditions on the horizontal, historical plane by distinguishing Tradition as the vertical, eternal key to understanding them. In this 'convergence of directions'²³⁶ the eternal, the mystical presence of God himself, enters into the historical, the temporal act, by means of

²³² Lossky, *Tradition*, 147.

²³³ Lossky, *Tradition*, 147.

²³⁴ Lossky, *Tradition*, 147.

²³⁵ Lossky, *Tradition*, 147-148.

²³⁶ Sophrony Sakharov, *On Prayer*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1998), 82.

his grace. The ‘traditions’ are invaded by Tradition, properly so called. Here we see Lossky’s theological uniqueness as compared to Florovsky. Lossky is willing and able to move theology beyond the Fathers, but still remain consistent with them, whereas Florovsky absolutises the ‘traditions’ of the horizontal plane.

3. Tradition As Silence

For Lossky, one must recognize this distinction between the horizontal and vertical planes, for without it one is only left with *parádoxis* on the horizontal plane of existence, where it is inevitably ‘projected into the realm of the Scriptures’. This distinction is not made in Florovsky. Without this distinction it would be impossible to separate out Tradition from the Scriptures, but it would still be possible to oppose the words spoken in secret with those proclaimed publicly. However, the final distinction cannot be made as long as the last link between Tradition and Scripture exists. In order to finally arrive at the pure notion of Tradition, in order to remove it from all connection on the horizontal plane, Lossky states that ‘it is necessary to go beyond the opposition of the secret words and the words preached aloud, placing “the traditions” and “preaching” together rather than in opposition’.²³⁷

Lossky, instead of concentrating on how the two are opposed, wishes to focus on what they have in common. ‘The two have this in common, that, secret or not, they are nonetheless expressed by word’.²³⁸ They both always imply a verbal expression, whether spoken or written, or the visual language of icons and ritual gestures that are directed to the understanding. The ‘word’ is primarily meant to convey a content, which is made intelligible by assuming a form, which then can be articulated or expressed in any other external mode. With this being the nature of the word, nothing that can be known and revealed can be estranged from it.

²³⁷ Lossky, Tradition, 148.

²³⁸ Lossky, Tradition, 148.

Thus the term *lógos*, or *lógia*, can equally be applied to all expressions of revealed Truth, whether it be preaching, Scripture, or the traditions safeguarded in silence. Indeed, in patristic literature this term is often used equally to designate the Scripture and the symbols of faith. Because of this equality, St. John Cassian can speak about the creed of Antioch as the *breviatum verbum* of Scriptures: ‘It is the abridged word that the Lord has given...contracting into a few words the faith of His two Testaments, in order for it to contain in a brief way the meaning of all the Scriptures’.²³⁹

Next, if one considers that the nature of Scripture is seen, not as words about God, but as the Word of God (*lógos tou theou*), one can see a desire in the Fathers to identify both of the Testaments with the incarnation of the Word, with the presence of the divine Logos, ‘by which the Scriptures were “accomplished.”’²⁴⁰ Because of the incarnation the Scriptures are not merely historical documents, ‘archives’ of the Truth, but its living body. Lossky quotes St. Ignatius of Antioch: ‘For me, my archives are Jesus Christ; my inviolable archives are His Cross and His Death and His Resurrection, and the Faith which comes from Him’.²⁴¹

If the Scriptures are the living body of Truth, then they can only be possessed within the Church, which is Christ’s ‘unique body’. Here, one can now return to the idea of the sufficiency of Scriptures without a negative connotation that excludes the Church, the sacraments, the institutions and teachings given by the apostles, but rather with a positive connotation that assumes them. In fact, it does not ‘exclude any other expressions of the same Truth which the Church could produce’.²⁴² It is only because of the revelation of God in the incarnation that all expressions of the ‘inexpressible’ have become possible. Whether we speak of icons, dogmatic definitions, exegesis, liturgy, or anything else, all are related to Scriptures by this ‘totalitarian’ quality of the Word of God. But since all expressions of the Truth of the revelation of the incarnation are in some way ‘scripture’ set

²³⁹ St. John Cassian, *De incarnation* VI, 3; P.L. 50, col. 149A, as quoted in Lossky, Tradition, 149.

²⁴⁰ Lossky, Tradition, 149.

²⁴¹ Lossky, Tradition, 149.

²⁴² Lossky, Tradition, 149.

beside Holy Scripture, Lossky asks, ‘where finally is that Tradition which we have sought by detaching progressively its pure notion from all that can relate it to scriptural reality?’²⁴³

As he had just shown, it was not to be found on the horizontal plane of ‘traditions’, which is determined by the Word in the same way as Scripture. Lossky suggests that if one were to again oppose Tradition to the ‘totalitarian’ reality of the Word, ‘it would be necessary to say that the Tradition is Silence’.²⁴⁴ Lossky praises St. Ignatius of Antioch for his far more eloquent description of Tradition without ever using the word. ‘He who possesses in truth the word of Jesus can hear even its silence (*tês hesuchias autoû akoúein*)’.²⁴⁵ The words of revelation have a silence, which cannot be heard by all; they must be spiritually discerned. As Christ said, ‘He who has ears to hear let him hear’. Lossky points out that St. Basil’s thoughts on traditions are along these same lines: ‘There is also a form of silence, namely the obscurity used by the Scripture, which is intended in order to make it difficult to gain understanding of the teachings, for the profit of readers’.²⁴⁶

This silence that accompanies revelation is the very condition of its reception. In order for the revelation to be truly received as fullness, to truly understand its depths, this silence demands a ‘conversion towards the vertical plane’.²⁴⁷ Here, now, we must no longer oppose Tradition from Scripture, but there is a necessity to distinguish them to understand their ‘indivisible unity’. If the Scriptures, and all else the Church has produced in written or verbal form, represent the differing modes of expression of the Truth, then Tradition is (in a phrase often used by Lossky) ‘the *unique mode* of receiving it’. Here then is Lossky’s definition of Tradition:

²⁴³ Lossky, Tradition, 150.

²⁴⁴ Lossky, Tradition, 150.

²⁴⁵ Ephesians 15:2, Lossky, Tradition, 150.

²⁴⁶ *De spiritu sancto* 27; P.G. 32, col. 189BC, as quoted in Lossky, Tradition, 151.

²⁴⁷ Lossky, Tradition, 151.

It is not the content of Revelation, but the light that reveals it; it is not the word, but the living breath which makes the words heard at the same time as the silence from which it came; it is not the Truth, but a communication of the Spirit of Truth, outside which the Truth cannot be received. ‘No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit’ (I Cor. 12:3). The pure notion of Tradition can then be defined as saying that it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church, communicating to each member of the Body of Christ the faculty of hearing, of receiving, of knowing the Truth in the Light which belongs to it, and not according to natural light of human reason.²⁴⁸

Here then is true Christian gnosis, which comes about solely because of the action of the Divine Light. Lossky emphasizes far more than Florovsky this mystical understanding of the Holy Spirit being the ‘accomplisher’ of Tradition. Tradition involves a dynamic interaction of persons. One of the first characteristics inherent in this gnosis given by the Holy Spirit is freedom. Lossky states that Tradition is free, independent of any contingency or condition of nature. This freedom is brought to the children of God by the very Truth that the Holy Spirit enlightens: ‘You will know the Truth and the truth will set you free’. Lossky’s analysis finally takes him where he wanted to go: to the indissoluble unity and the dual economy of the two Persons of the Holy Trinity, the Word and the Holy Spirit. (Even here we can see Lossky’s view of Tradition as personal.) While both are responsible for the foundation of the Church, they are also simultaneously both responsible for ‘the indissoluble and distinct character of Scripture and Tradition’.²⁴⁹

4. Tradition in Reality: Christian Epistemology

One might well ask how this works out in the concrete reality of the Church. This is the very question that Lossky attempts to answer. As we have seen, the fullness of revelation is conditioned on the double economy of the Word and the Holy Spirit. The Word, who is the Truth of God’s revelation to man, is communicated and witnessed to by the Holy Spirit, who is the ‘unique mode’ of its reception. Therefore, true Tradition, as

²⁴⁸ Lossky, *Tradition*, 152.

²⁴⁹ Lossky, *Tradition*, 152.

Philaret of Moscow wrote, ‘does not consist uniquely in visible and verbal transmission of teachings, rules, institutions and rites: it is at the same time an invisible and actual communication of grace and sanctification’.²⁵⁰ It is a personal communication of the Holy Spirit. Here, Lossky’s personalism starts to become clear. Tradition and the Truth of Tradition are both persons, one the Truth given, and the other the giver of Truth, received by a person as the grace of the person of the Holy Spirit. Personalism is Lossky’s answer to all the fundamental questions asked in his theology.

Thus, the distinction is made between the traditions—that which is transmitted, whether oral or written—and the Tradition, the gift of the Spirit of the ability to receive that which is transmitted. This development is not found in Florovsky, mostly because of his Christocentric theology. For Lossky, nevertheless, it is impossible to separate the two, and thus the ambivalence of the word *tradition*. So any transmission of the truth of the faith ‘implies then a communication of the grace of the Holy Spirit’.²⁵¹ For Christianity then, one cannot recognize any truth as being that truth which has been communicated by God without the Holy Spirit. This then is the very basis of all Christian knowledge. The Holy Spirit is the ‘unique Criterion of the Truth revealed by the Incarnate Word’.²⁵² It is only at the descent of the Spirit of Truth on the day of Pentecost that the ‘supreme faculty of the Church: the consciousness of revealed Truth’²⁵³ (that is, the ability to discern and judge between truth and falsehood) is ‘actualized’. In Florovsky’s view, the criterion of truth, based on his historical evaluation of the Fathers, is Christ. Lossky’s view, based equally on the Fathers and Scripture, finds as the actualization of the truth, its criterion, the Holy Spirit.

In this ‘actualization’, which is the faculty of the Holy Spirit, one can see the concrete relation in the Church between Tradition and revealed Truth. Again, Tradition is

²⁵⁰ Lossky, *Tradition*, 154. Lossky takes the quote from Florovsky’s *The Way of Russian Theology* (In Russian; Paris, 1937) 178.

²⁵¹ Lossky, *Tradition*, 154.

²⁵² Lossky, *Tradition*, 154.

²⁵³ Lossky, *Tradition*, 154.

not primarily ‘revealed content’, but the ‘unique mode of receiving’ it. It is the Holy Spirit’s function to express the Truth ‘in intelligible definitions and sensible images and symbols’, and it is by this ‘expression’ that the Holy Spirit enables the Church to know ‘the Incarnate Word in His relationship with the Father’, as well as the ‘mysteries of the divine economy’.²⁵⁴ And it is the ‘reception’ of this communication that is considered the ‘supreme gnosis’ by the fathers of the first century, that is, theology, properly so called. Lossky does not base this expression of intelligible definitions solely on the Fathers but on the ecclesial consciousness of the Church.

Also, it is only in the Church that the unity of the inspiration of the Scriptures is recognized in its ‘full consciousness’, because the Church alone possesses the illumination of the Holy Spirit of the Incarnate Word—the Tradition. As an example that this process of interaction with Tradition is by no means automatic, nor is it mere mechanics, Lossky cites the late formation of the canon of the New Testament. For Lossky, interaction with the Tradition is a condition in the Church, but the discerning of Truth still requires effort, personal effort.

It is the condition of the Church having an infallible consciousness, but it is not a mechanism, which will infallibly make known the Truth outside and above the consciousness of individuals, outside all deliberation and all judgment. In fact, if Tradition is a faculty of judging in the Light of the Holy Spirit, it obliges those who wish to know the Truth in the Tradition to make incessant effort.

It is by this effort that one remains in the Tradition, not by mere ‘historical inertia’ or by just keeping, by force of habit, all those things which are considered as a ‘tradition received from the Fathers’. It is only as the Church works at ‘preserving’ the canon of Scriptures in the Tradition that it does not become ‘static and inert’ but remains ‘dynamic and conscious’. If the Church had not preserved the canon in this manner, it would have

²⁵⁴ Lossky, *Tradition*, 154.

preserved a ‘dead text’ which was only a ‘witness to an ended epoch’, instead of the living and life-giving Word of God, ‘perfect expression of the Revelation which it expresses independently of the existence of old discordant manuscripts or of new “critical editions” of the Bible’.²⁵⁵

Lossky clarifies that Tradition is the ‘critical spirit’ of the Church. But, as opposed to the human ‘critical spirit’, the Holy Spirit guides the critical judgment of the Church with the principle of ‘the undiminished fullness of Revelation’.²⁵⁶ Thus, various discordant texts of Scripture do not diminish the ‘authenticity’ of the revealed Truth. The term ‘authentic’ here takes on a different meaning: that which is consistent with the Revelation of God in the Incarnate Word. Thus any truth that is consistent with this is authentic Orthodox theology.

Therefore, in the myriad of data, any expression that is so consistent, whether it is written (even if the author’s name were a pseudonym) or oral, Scriptures or ‘traditions’, songs or icons, that expression is considered an ‘authentic’ expression of the revealed Truth. Here, more than anywhere else, the ‘negative and exclusive aspect’ of the Church’s responsibility to cull through all the data in the Light of the Holy Spirit is demonstrated. But what if some truth is found in the midst of heterodox writings? ‘The Church knows how to extract from them some elements suitable for completing or for illustrating events on which the Scriptures are silent but which the Tradition recognizes as true’.²⁵⁷ Lossky takes up Augustine’s understanding of utilizing truth of others outside of the Church: all truth is God’s truth. He is aware that this does not limit the ecclesial consciousness to truths only within the Church. As we will see later, Lossky, in his use of the concepts and truths that he found in the Russian religious philosophers, makes use of this principle.

²⁵⁵ Lossky, *Tradition*, 156.

²⁵⁶ Lossky, *Tradition*, 156.

²⁵⁷ Lossky, *Tradition*, 158.

5. St. Vincent's Canon

Much of the written apocryphal material, to be used in the Church, needed to be 'purified and made legitimate'. The Church accepted or rejected these writings, not based on historical authenticity, but based on 'above all their content in the light of Tradition'.²⁵⁸ It is not solely the historical aspect of concepts that are recognized as truth, but their content. Lossky gives as an example St. Maximus's interpretation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Although such works were not considered in the 'apostolic tradition', they were seen as belonging to the 'patristic tradition'. This could be said of some other writings as well. But what can be said of the oral traditions?

The Church judged those oral traditions that claimed apostolic authority based on their meaning and the universal usage. Here, Lossky considers the formal criterion of traditions articulated by St. Vincent of Lerins: *Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*. Lossky states that the formula can only be applied to the oral apostolic traditions that were passed down during the first two or three centuries. The rule cannot be applied to the New Testament, because prior to their canonization these books were 'neither "always", nor "everywhere," nor "received by all."' ²⁵⁹ Unlike Florovsky, Lossky, by completely neglecting Vincent's canon, does away with this limiting factor and opens up his theology for the reception of truth less limited. And what of those who disregarded Tradition for the substitution of a 'rule of faith'?

If Vincent's rule did not apply to the Scriptures, even less so did it apply to the dogmatic definitions of the Church. This is clearly demonstrated by the historical usage of the term *homoousios*. The word was anything but 'traditional'. The Valentinian Gnostics and Paul of Samosata used the term most. But, as Lossky says, 'The Church has transformed it into "words that are pure, silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified

²⁵⁸ Lossky, Tradition, 158.

²⁵⁹ Lossky, Tradition, 159.

seven times” in the crucible of the Holy Spirit and of the free consciousness of those who judge within the Tradition’.²⁶⁰

Thus, Tradition is dynamic: it is not solely based on dead texts, whether Scriptures or the Fathers. Rather, it is the interaction of a person with the constant reception of the revealed Truth. Here the absolutising of the necessity to appeal to patristic texts is abrogated. It is far removed from mere ‘habitual forms of piety’ and mechanically repeated dogmatic formulas like magical incantations proffered by the power of the Church. Preserving the ‘dogmatic tradition’ does not mean a superficial acknowledgement of doctrinal formulas, but ‘to be within the Tradition is to keep the living Truth in the Light of the Holy Spirit; or rather, it is to be kept in the Truth by the vivifying power of Tradition’. It is the power of the Spirit that actively preserves ‘by a ceaseless renewing’.

This is one of Lossky’s arguments against the Russian religious philosophers and Slavophiles. Being an Orthodox Christian did not mean being Russian, nor did it mean attending the liturgy as part and parcel of the Russian culture. To be an Orthodox Christian meant that you were in the Church’s Tradition and that you were guided and renewed by the Truth that was conveyed only by the ecclesial consciousness, and this as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Lossky’s view of Tradition is fundamentally antirationalist. Here is where the tension in Lossky arises. In wanting to ground his ideas in the Fathers, he uses an empirical tool, as Florovsky does. This is a major part of Florovsky’s argument for neopatristic synthesis: all doctrines must follow the Fathers. But, as we will see, Lossky never makes this final commitment, and thus is sometimes in conflict with himself. Lossky, because of his antirationalist stance, also attacked any concept that theology was still developing as man worked it out by his own natural reason.

²⁶⁰ Lossky, *Tradition*, 159. For a more detailed explanation on the usage of the term *ομολοσιολογία* see Lossky’s footnote on this page.

6. The Development of Doctrine

I would like to take this opportunity to discuss Lossky's theory of the development of doctrine, or dogmatic progression. Here again, he follows Florovsky closely in contradistinction to the Russian religious philosophers. He uses the word 'renew' to springboard into exactly what the term does not mean. "To renew" does not mean to replace ancient expressions of the Truth by new ones, more explicit, and theologically better elaborated'.²⁶¹ This would have to bring with it the admission that the 'primitive' faith of the disciples and apostles is obsolete in comparison to the 'progress' made by academic theological professors. Lossky believed that the expression 'theological development' was highly ambiguous and meant for some an evolutionary process in the history of Christian dogma. He cites that some have used the following passage of St. Gregory of Nazianzus to demonstrate such a concept:

The Old Testament manifested clearly the Father and obscurely the Son. The New Testament manifested the Son, but gave only indications of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Nowadays, the Spirit is among us and shows Himself in all His splendour. It would not have been prudent, before recognizing the divinity of the Father, openly to preach the divinity of the Son, and as long as that of the Son had not been accepted, to impose the Holy Spirit, if I dare to express myself'.²⁶²

But Lossky argues that we have had the Holy Spirit since the day of Pentecost, and with his coming, the light of Tradition. That is, not only what has been transmitted, but also the 'very force of transmission conferred on the Church', or, as he writes using his familiar phrase, 'the unique mode of receiving and possessing the Revelation'.²⁶³ To have both the Revelation and the Tradition is to have the Truth in its fullness: if it was not so before the descent of the Holy Spirit, it is now true for the Church after Pentecost. If one

²⁶¹ Lossky, Tradition, 160.

²⁶² *Oration 35 (Theologica 5)*, 26; P.G. 36, col. 161C. As found in Lossky, Tradition, 160.

²⁶³ Lossky, Tradition, 160.

still wishes to speak of development, it must be made clear that it is not the knowledge of Revelation that progresses with the development of each dogmatic definition.

Lossky suggests that even if one were to read Dezingher's *Enchiridion* or Mansi's fifty in-folio volumes, the knowledge one would have of the mystery of the Trinity would be no more than that possessed by any of the Fathers of the fourth century who spoke of *homooúsios*, or by the Ante-Nicene Fathers who did not use the term, or by St. Paul himself, who did not even know the term 'Trinity'. 'At every moment of its history the Church gives to its members the faculty of knowing the Truth in a fullness that the world cannot contain'.²⁶⁴ It is in the creating and developing of doctrines that the Church defends this 'mode of knowing the living Truth in the Tradition'.

Lossky makes a distinction between knowing 'in fullness' and having the 'fullness of knowledge'. The latter belongs only to the Eschaton. The knowledge 'in part' (*ek mérous*) that St. Paul speaks of does not exclude the manner 'in which he knows'. 'It is not later dogmatic development that will suppress the "knowledge in part" of St. Paul, but the eschatological actualization of the fullness in which, confusedly, but surely, Christians here below know the mysteries of Revelation'.²⁶⁵

The role of the 'knowledge in part' is to cause us to cling to the fullness in which the partial knowledge is known and experienced. And it is always on the basis of this manner of fullness that the Church judges whether or not any partial knowledge is considered in doctrines to belong to the Tradition. Any doctrine that claims to be a 'perfect explanation of the revealed truth' ultimately will prove itself to be false, for it is in direct opposition of 'the fullness in which the Truth is known in part'.²⁶⁶

As an example Lossky offers the Gnostics' substitution of this dynamic fullness as a criterion of the truth by their static fullness of a 'revealed doctrine'. For Lossky a

²⁶⁴ Lossky, *Tradition*, 161.

²⁶⁵ Lossky, *Tradition*, 161.

²⁶⁶ Lossky, *Tradition*, 162.

‘doctrine is a traitor to Tradition when it seeks to take its place’.²⁶⁷ This is the safeguard in the Church of the partial knowledge known in fullness, as Lossky states: ‘a dogma defined in the Church, in the form of partial knowledge, each time opens anew an access towards the fullness outside of which the revealed Truth can be neither known nor confessed’.²⁶⁸ A dogma is an expression of truth that belongs to Tradition. It is a means, an instrument that causes adherence to the Tradition. For dogma itself is a ‘witness’ of Tradition, ‘the narrow door which leads to knowledge of Truth in the Tradition’.²⁶⁹

While Lossky admits to an increase in personal knowledge, or personal Christian ‘gnosis’, based in direct proportion to personal sanctification, he in no way admits to a ‘collective progress’ due to a dogmatic development. Lossky mockingly asks: ‘Would this development have started in “gospel infancy” to end today—after a “patristic youth” and a “scholastic maturity”—in a sad senility of the manuals of theology?’ He believes that the vision of the Church, unlike this false metaphor of development, should be like that of the Shepherd of Hermas, ‘where the Church appears in the features of a woman young and old at the same time, bringing together all ages in the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13)’.²⁷⁰

Although one can use the word ‘development’ for dogma in a very limited sense, this does not mean that there is any type of ‘organic evolution’. It is more a constant reiterating of the dogmatic truths already determined and addendums added progressively for clarification. ‘This history of dogma depends above all on the conscious attitude of the Church in the face of historical reality, in which she has to work for the salvation of men’.²⁷¹ Thus, dogmas are imposed out of necessity in the midst of any struggle in which the Church finds herself. The Church, therefore, is obliged in any given moment in history ‘to express her faith in the form of dogmatic definitions, in order to defend it against the

²⁶⁷ Lossky, *Tradition*, 162.

²⁶⁸ Lossky, *Tradition*, 162.

²⁶⁹ Lossky, *Tradition*, 162.

²⁷⁰ Lossky, *Tradition*, 162.

²⁷¹ Lossky, *Tradition*, 163.

thrust of heresies'.²⁷² Once dogmas are formulated, they become the 'rule of faith' for the faithful, and these do not change but remain unalterable forever. Thus set, dogmas determine what is heresy and what is orthodoxy, what is within the Tradition and what is not. Like Florovsky, Lossky believes theology can change its expression for clarification in the face of heresy.

The Church will always be confronted by the 'debater of this age' who will present 'new obstacles of thought to remove', and therefore she will always have to defend her dogmas. To Lossky it is the theologians of the Church who 'will have the constant task of expounding and interpreting them anew according to the intellectual demands of the milieu or of the epoch'.²⁷³ New dogmatic definitions are given at critical moments in the Church's struggle for her integrity of faith, which mark a new stage in the struggle itself.

The Church, having formulated new dogmas against new heresies, 'never abandons her ancient dogmatic positions in order to replace them by new definitions. These stages are never surpassed by an evolution'.²⁷⁴ The new definitions are not historical statements on the road to a future fuller understanding, but 'preserve the quality of an ever actual present in the living light of Tradition'.²⁷⁵ It is the continual illumination of the Holy Spirit of the truths of the revelation of Jesus Christ. This is the method in which the Church continues her rule of faith while maintaining conformity to the dogmas already received, and it is in this sense that one may speak of a 'dogmatic development'. All the dogmas of the Church that have arisen from various Fathers and councils are consistent with this understanding of 'development'. Thus, for Lossky, any such 'development' will be consistent and non-contradictory to the existing dogma.

²⁷² Lossky, *Tradition*, 163.

²⁷³ Lossky, *Tradition*, 164.

²⁷⁴ Lossky, *Tradition*, 164. See also Dumitru Stăniloae, *Theology and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: SVS Press, 1980), 214-215, where he says, 'because it allows the light of the inexhaustible mystery to appear through any of its formulae in any age, Orthodox theology does not make earlier formulations obsolete when it moves forward to new ones, but remains in continuity with them, the former being in fact a new explanation of the latter, a new step forward in the perception of the divine mystery which had also been correctly perceived by the previous formulae'.

²⁷⁵ Lossky, *Tradition*, 164.

As the Church moves through history and her rule of faith develops by additions that are considered dogmatically authoritative, there exists the presupposition of ‘knowledge of Truth in the Tradition’; this development is, therefore, not in any way ‘an augmentation of Tradition’.²⁷⁶ Lossky believes that the whole misunderstanding of the usage of the word ‘development’ as an evolutionary augmentation stems directly from the abuse of the word ‘tradition’. He refers back to the confusion between the term ‘traditions’ (as seen by some theologians as the teachings of the Church on the horizontal plane, designated by them as the ‘Church’s ordinary teaching authority’) and ‘Tradition’ (which is from the Holy Spirit). ‘The theologians of the Seventh Ecumenical Council distinguish clearly between the “tradition of the Holy Spirit” and the divinely inspired “teaching (*didaskalia*) of the Holy Fathers.”’²⁷⁷

Quoting from Denzinger’s *Enchiridion symbolorum*, Lossky feels that the Fathers were ‘justified’ in defining new dogma, for they considered themselves to be in the same Tradition which permitted the Fathers of the past to give new expressions of the Truth in reply to the demands of the moment.

There exists an interdependence between the ‘Tradition of the Catholic Church’ (=the faculty of knowing the Truth in the Holy Spirit) and the ‘teaching of the Fathers’ (=the rule of faith kept by the Church). One cannot belong to the Tradition while contradicting the dogmas, just as one cannot make use of the dogmatic formulas received in order to oppose a formal ‘orthodoxy’ to every new expression of the Truth that the life of the Church may produce.²⁷⁸

Lossky demonstrates that Tradition and dogmatic teachings are distinguished separately yet are still interconnected. With this, Lossky also covers both possible extremes of error. Whether ‘revolutionary innovators’ or ‘conservative formalists’, both risk ‘sinning against the Spirit of Truth’ because both misunderstand the interrelatedness of

²⁷⁶ Lossky, *Tradition*, 164.

²⁷⁷ Lossky, *Tradition*, 165. In his footnote, Lossky quotes the fuller Greek text from Denzinger’s *Enchiridion symbolorum*.

²⁷⁸ Lossky, *Tradition*, 165.

the dogmas and Tradition. But how are Tradition and dogmas interdependent on one another?

Lossky sees the same relationship between dogma and Tradition as between Scripture and Tradition: it is not possible either to confuse them or to separate them without doing damage to the quality of fullness that they possess together. Lossky believes that dogma, like Scripture, ‘*lives in the Tradition*’, but with this characteristic difference:

The scriptural canon forms a determinate body which excludes all possibility of further increase, while the ‘dogmatic tradition,’ though keeping its stability as the ‘rule of faith’ from which nothing can be cut off, can be increased by receiving, to the extent that may be necessary, new expressions of revealed Truth, formulated by the Church.²⁷⁹

With this said, Lossky does not mean to imply that dogma carries with it the quality of incompleteness, that is, doctrine becoming. Although dogma does not possess the ‘once for all’ character of Scripture, it is nevertheless not deprived of the fullness ‘which one adheres to intellectually in the light of Tradition, while never being able to make it definitively explicit’.²⁸⁰ For Lossky, any truth that would proclaim itself to be fully explicit would not have the same type of living fullness that is represented in Revelation: “‘fullness’ and ‘rational explicitness’ mutually exclude one another. However, if the mystery revealed by Christ and known in the Holy Spirit cannot be made explicit, it does not remain inexpressible’.²⁸¹

Since the “‘whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’ in Christ (Col. 2:9)’, the fullness of revealed Truth will be expressed in the dogmas as much as it will in any other communication of revealed reality. And though dogmas are specifically directed to the

²⁷⁹ Lossky, *Tradition*, 166.

²⁸⁰ Lossky, *Tradition*, 166.

²⁸¹ Lossky, *Tradition*, 166.

intellect, 'they are intelligible expressions of the reality which surpasses our mode of understanding'.²⁸²

Although it transcends the intelligence and the senses, Christian Revelation does not exclude them: on the contrary, it assumes them and transforms them by the light of the Holy Spirit, in the Tradition which is the unique mode of receiving the revealed Truth, of recognizing it in its scriptural, dogmatic, iconographic and other expressions and also of expressing it anew.²⁸³

Conclusions

Lossky's conception of Tradition is broader than Florovsky's, mostly because he has a more detailed analysis of how Tradition works in the concrete reality of the Church. For Lossky, as long as any concept or idea is authentically consistent with the revelation of the incarnate Word of God, it is consistent with Tradition. Orthodoxy is the personal interaction with the Holy Spirit leading and guiding into all Truth. This allows him more flexibility than Florovsky.

Florovsky maintains with Lossky that, ultimately, Tradition is the Holy Spirit in the Church, maintaining and guiding the faithful to the truth. But Florovsky is more rigid in his understanding that Tradition is only apostolic, patristic and liturgic; he absolutises tradition on the horizontal, historical plane. This is because of his commitment to the empirical tool of historicism. Even more, he has the tendency to make absolute the need of referring to the Fathers as the means to ensure truth. His posture is much more defensive and protective than Lossky's. Also, Florovsky's practice that theology must be based only on the Fathers renders his conception a bit exclusive. His neopatristic synthesis is correct in wanting to incorporate not only the writings of the Fathers, but their spirit as well. But it is incorrect in the sense that he absolutises the method of the appeal to the Fathers and only wishes to synthesize a very narrow body of material. This he does in exclusion of any

²⁸² Lossky, *Tradition*, 167.

²⁸³ Lossky, *Tradition*, 168.

modern philosophical concepts, even the ones transfigured by the Church. This type of exclusion is seen less in Lossky.

Lossky, as I have said, is more flexible, but still maintains the limits to his conception. His understanding of Tradition is more incorporating of anything and everything that is consistent with the truth of Revelation, which he calls ‘authentic’. For Lossky, Tradition is the faculty, given by the Holy Spirit, of receiving the Truth. Thus he emphasizes the vertical plane. It is not tied to any one culture, but is personal, and thus becomes metacultural. The person is free, within the community of the faith—that is, in the Church and according to the consistency of the Revelation of Christ—to trust in the Truth for existential living. This allows Lossky to be more open to the insights and intuitions of all others.

The pure notion of Tradition can then be defined as saying that it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church, communicating to each member of the Body of Christ the faculty of hearing, of receiving, of knowing the Truth in the Light which belongs to it, and not according to natural light of human reason.²⁸⁴

This is what determines what is truly Orthodox theology. It is each person receiving, not according to human reason but by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Truth, that is Jesus Christ and his revelation. This is far more consistent with St. Silouan’s understanding of Tradition as well as with the scriptural text that proclaims that the Holy Spirit will ‘guide you into all Truth’ (St John 16:13). Most important for Lossky is that all this transpires only ‘in the Church’. For Lossky this eliminates all philosophy and theology done outside the parameters of the ecclesial consciousness. Philosophy is irrelevant as it stands. But this position also allows him the freedom to assimilate the truths that they possess. He does appeal to the Fathers and does use them as proof-texts, but he is inconsistent in always finding patristic sources to support his ideas. However, he never

²⁸⁴ Lossky, *Tradition*, 152.

absolutises the method of the necessity of appealing to the Fathers in writing or in practice (though how aware he was of this is not clear).

The difference between Florovsky and Lossky concerning Tradition can be summed up by saying that it is a matter of emphasis. Florovsky emphasizes the need for patristic sources, while Lossky emphasizes the need for the Holy Spirit.

But just how, in light of their respective understandings of Tradition, does each theologian go about the business of doing theology? What was their respective methodology? The way they viewed their method helps us to better understand how they see their own theology, and, therefore, demonstrates for us the ultimate outcome of their work, which will be seen in their doctrine of creation in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

A. Florovsky's Methodology

1. A Turn Toward History

Although Florovsky studied and taught philosophy in his early years, he became foremost a historian of philosophy, culture and theology and, as has been said, mostly because of the need to contradict Sophiology. His methodology throughout the years clearly reflects this. His major works, *The Eastern Fathers of the 4th Century*, *The Byzantine Fathers of the 5th-8th Centuries* and *The Ways of Russian Theology*, as well as many of his articles, are all historical in nature. Indeed, even the concept of the neopatristic synthesis is, at its root, a historical notion. His ideas of the 'how' of theology were first conceived in the 1920s.

But, as was noted above, what is most characteristic of Florovsky's historicism is his reliance on Hegel's concepts. Florovsky uses Hegel's principles (although Florovsky applies them to theology) that theology needed to be self-critical, that theology needed to be rooted and explained by history, that reason alone was insufficient for theology, that each society is an organic whole and as such has a 'spirit' (this Florovsky uses for the concept of Catholicity), that the theologians' task is to make each society aware of their values and beliefs, that tradition is used to make the past alive in the present, and to take what has been handed down from previous generations and transform it into one's own, and finally (although they would disagree on their understanding of freedom), that cultures are evaluated good or bad based on 'whether they contribute to the self-consciousness of freedom'.²⁸⁵ Florovsky found in Hegel's criticism (which was historical empiricism) of

²⁸⁵ Beiser, Hegel, 270-277.

the pure Rationalists, a weapon that he could use: first against the determinism of the utopists outside of the Church, then against the Idealist rationalism and determinism of Bulgakov's Sophiology and the Russian religious philosophers.

Florovsky use of Hegel's historical criticism was a direct attack against the widespread a-historicity of Idealism in Russian religious philosophy. The points that Hegel attacked in Idealism are the same points that Florovsky attacks in the Idealism of the Russian religious philosophers. The following are Beiser's assessment of the points and reasons for Hegel's attack. These same principles are at the foundation of Florovsky's historical criticism of the a-historicity of Russian Idealism as well.

(a) The belief that certain laws, beliefs, or values are universal, eternal, or natural when they are in fact the product of, and only appropriate to, a specific culture. (b) The doctrine that certain ideas or principles are innate, the inherent elements of a pure *a priori* reason, although they are learned from experience, the product of a cultural tradition. (c) The claim that certain institutions and forms of activity have a supernatural origin (for example language, religion, and the state) when they in fact originate from all-too-human sources. (d) The reification of certain activities and values, as if they were entities existing independent of human consciousness, when they are in fact the product of its subconscious activity. (e) The belief that certain intuitions and feelings are the product of innate genius, although they are the result of education. (f) The attempt to create a presuppositionless philosophy by abstracting from all past philosophy and by relying upon individual reason alone.²⁸⁶

Two of the first overarching principles that Florovsky espoused can be found in his articles he wrote during his Eurasian involvement.²⁸⁷ First, that Russia's future 'reconstruction' lay not in another ideology, but in a religious and spiritual effort (*podvig*) that gives priority to the free creative acts of individuals. Secondly, in the past there had been such efforts in Russia, and they should be looked to for inspiration, guidance and help for understanding the problems of what such a spiritual 'reconstruction' might entail.

²⁸⁶ Beiser, Hegel, 273.

²⁸⁷ Marc Raeff, 'Enticements and Riffs: Georges Florovsky as Russian Intellectual Historian, in Andrew Blane, ed. *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman*, (hereafter Raeff, Florovsky)(New York: SVS Press, 1993), 248.

Here, Florovsky is obligated to make references to the spiritual past of Orthodoxy to validate his method. But it is not to be mere imitation of their examples, for some past efforts had their faults.

These two principles became programmatic for Florovsky's understanding of all of history. Problems of philosophy or ideology with their reliance strictly on reason could only bring crisis and devalue human freedom. The answers that could bring real solutions would only be brought by true spiritual struggle and effort. It was to the past that one should look for examples. Here, he confined it to previous Russian spiritual leaders, but later he would incorporate all of the Fathers of both east and west.

In 1926, Florovsky wrote an article on Michael Gershenson,²⁸⁸ the editor of *Vekhi*, on the occasion of his death. In it Florovsky acknowledges his debt to Gershenson indirectly and notes three methodological steps when doing history.²⁸⁹ First, there is only a single spiritual source for every thinker's intellectual make-up, which provides a basic unity, as well as explanation for their work. It is the historian's task to find and access this source. Secondly, the historian is to accomplish this task through empathy (*Einfühlung*). Rational concepts and thoughts do not come purely in logical forms, but they appear within an emotional context and existential matrix that the historian must try to understand. Lastly, an individual's spiritual and intellectual life must be understood in the larger cultural context as a organic whole, that is, primarily the person's spiritual and aesthetical environment. It is obvious that these tasks focus primarily on the spiritual, metaphysical and religious experiences of significant historical figures.

Earlier that same year Florovsky published an article in *Put'*, critiquing the metaphysical presuppositions of utopianism entitled 'Metaphysical Premises of Utopianism'. The article is worth noting because it also contained statements of his philosophy of history up to that time. For Florovsky 'utopianism is the permanent and inevitable enticement of human thought, its negative pole charged with the greatest, albeit

²⁸⁸ Georges Florovsky, 'Michael Gershenson', *The Slavonic Review*, Vol. 5, No. 14, Dec. 315-331.

²⁸⁹ Raeff, Florovsky, 248. The three principles are paraphrased from Raeff.

poisonous, energy'.²⁹⁰ But what for Florovsky was so 'poisonous' about social utopianism? The utopian view of history is naturalistic, 'History is history of the universe, its goal directed and lawful becoming in man—hence its neat structure and harmony. It is an organic perception of the world'.²⁹¹

Florovsky believed that the problem with utopianism is that it is deterministic. Utopists believed that since its inception the whole universe possessed the elements of its development and is, therefore, preordained by the past and is moving forward toward its predetermined goal. As a result history has no meaning for the present moment, but only in the future as all acts race to their fulfilment in their predetermined end. Thus, the subject of utopian progress cannot be any one individual event or act, but only the 'universal organism' exists as subject progressing to its end.²⁹² As Raeff notes:

The utopist, therefore, has to interpret history teleologically, its development coming to fulfilment—and its aim is the end of progress. Yet, once the goal is reached and progress has stopped, the process of nature goes on, on an endless plateau as it were, without qualitative change, and hence without meaning. It becomes vacuous. But this is not all, warns Florovsky, the utopian view of history deprives man of the necessity to act, to exercise his essentially human qualities of will and freedom: it dehumanizes man.²⁹³

And this is the monstrous conception of the utopian view of history. In a naturalistic deterministic universe that the individual human ability to act freely according to one's own will becomes impossible. Whereas for Florovsky, the creative act of the individual is conclusive; it participates in the freedom that comes from man's spiritual character.

His interest in history was not because he wanted to find some causal chain of events to explain social-historical reality. Instead, his interest was in understanding the spiritual and intellectual ideas and experiences of others in their freedom so as to learn

²⁹⁰ Florovsky, 'Metaphizicheskie predposylki utopizma', (Metaphysical Premises of Utopianism), *Put*, No. 4, June-July, 27-53. As quoted in Raeff, Florovsky, 255.

²⁹¹ 'Utopianism', as quoted in Raeff, Florovsky, 255.

²⁹² Paraphrased from Raeff, Florovsky, 255-256.

²⁹³ Raeff, Florovsky, 256.

from them.²⁹⁴ This is key to understanding Florovsky's view of history and man.

'History is not a simple pulsation of life, it is not a natural striving of life, but an exploit, an ascetic creation (*podvizhnicheskoe delanie*)'.²⁹⁵ Intellectual history is the free individual thought of man as he struggles heroically to overcome his spiritual battles. So, 'history is not a fatalistic development of inborn elements, but an exploit, an infinite series of free miraculous touchings of divine glory, miraculous encounters of man with God'.²⁹⁶

For Florovsky, faith was the only means of escaping the utopian mode of thought. 'The exit from the naturalistic impasse opens up only through a transformation of experience. Only in the experience of faith, in religious experience is the metaphysical split of being, the abyss of alienation, uncovered. And only the experience of faith, the experience of freedom, opens up the royal road to correct insight'.²⁹⁷ For Florovsky history is created from the freedom each person based on faith. It makes sense that from the studying of Russian Orthodox religious history, Florovsky would decide to deepen his understanding of Byzantine history, and then from there the study of the entire corpus of Church Fathers, both east and west. It was in the Fathers that Florovsky would find a rule of certainty to critique against all other thoughts and doctrines. As we have seen, it was in this return to the Fathers that he based his method for doing theology, his Christian Hellenism and his neopatristic synthesis, to which development we now turn.

2. The Neopatristic Methodology

In this section I am going to look at five different articles individually in their chronological order. They are: 'Revelation, Philosophy and Theology', 1931; 'Patristics and Modern Theology', 1936; 'The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology', 1949; 'The Predicament of the Christian Historian', 1959; and finally 'Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church', 1959. The reason for this is that each of these articles

²⁹⁴ Paraphrased from Raeff, Florovsky, 253.

²⁹⁵ Florovsky, 'Utopianism', 47, as quoted in Raeff, Florovsky, 256.

²⁹⁶ Florovsky, 'Utopianism', 47, as quoted in Raeff, Florovsky, 257.

²⁹⁷ Florovsky, 'Utopianism', 46, as quoted in Raeff, Florovsky, 257.

represents Florovsky's methodology, and, as that they are so temporally spread out, we will be able to see how his ideas change and progress: from doing pure history to basing all theology on the historical method. Though it must be said, it is not only this progression I am interested in here, but also his methodology of theology as historical.

a. Revelation, Philosophy and Theology

In 1931 Florovsky wrote 'Revelation, Philosophy and Theology', the first glimmer of his conception of his proposed theological methodology. Here we see his theological assumptions that are necessary precursors to his methodology. First, the Word of God can be expressed in the language of man, both precisely and adequately.²⁹⁸ Second, the Bible is to be understood as history. Although there is allegory in the Bible, it is not to be interpreted in this way: 'there is a danger of destroying the realism of Revelation'.²⁹⁹ Third, Revelation is not only divine words but a system of divine acts, 'and precisely for this reason—it is, above all, history, sacred history or the history of salvation [*Heilsgeschichte*], the history of the covenant of God with man'.³⁰⁰ Fourth, the God of Revelation speaks to 'living persons, empirical subjects'.³⁰¹ God expects man to hear his words, receive them and grow through them and become participants of eternal life. This principle is a necessary prerequisite for 'doing' theology.

The highest objectivity is achieved through the greatest exertion of the creative personality, through spiritual growth, through the transfiguration of the personality, which overcomes in itself 'the wisdom of flesh', ascending to 'the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ' [*eis métron helikías tou plerómatos tou Chistou*—Eph 4:13]. From man it is not self-abnegation, which is, demanded but a victorious forward movement, not a self-destruction but a rebirth or transformation, indeed a *theosis* (*théosis*).³⁰²

²⁹⁸ Florovsky, 'Revelation, Philosophy and Theology', (hereafter Revelation) *Creation and Redemption*, Vol 3 CW, 21.

²⁹⁹ Florovsky, Revelation, 24. For problems with this method see Robert Karl Gnuse, *Heilsgeschichte as a Model for Biblical Theology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989)

³⁰⁰ Florovsky, Revelation, 24.

³⁰¹ Florovsky, Revelation, 25.

³⁰² Florovsky, Revelation, 26.

There is an underlying realism and empiricism that is the foundation of methodological theology. Here he is influenced by the debates that were ongoing in Protestant theology. Florovsky is adamant about the need to make, not only the acts of God but the Word of God as well, an empirical objectifiable event. This in and of itself is not contradictory to Orthodoxy. Problems arise only when this becomes absolutised to the neglect of the experience and encounter with God in the present. But this is exactly what Florovsky describes in his next point.

The fifth principle: the truths of faith are the truths that have been experienced, truths of a fact. This is the foundation of the certainty of faith, and yet, this is precisely why it is indemonstrable, ‘faith is the evidence of experience’.³⁰³ Yet, these very truths, these divine realities that have been experienced can be expressed in various ways: the language of proclamation is *kerygmatic*, and the language of comprehending thought is *dogmatic*.³⁰⁴ But concerning dogma, Florovsky is adamant, it does not develop: they ‘arise’ or are ‘established’ but they do not develop. Florovsky here is opposed to Hegel’s concept of development. This is so, because dogmas are words that express the perennial experience of the Church: ‘The “dogmas of the Fathers” present again the unchanging content of “apostolic preaching” in intellectual categories. The experience of truth does not change and does not even grow; indeed, thought penetrates into the “understanding of truth” and transforms itself through the process’.³⁰⁵

And what language was used by the Church to express Revelation in ‘intellectual categories’? The Church used the language of Greek philosophy. Hellenism was, in a sense, baptized, Christianized. Here, at length, is Florovsky’s reasoning.

That meant in a certain sense, a ‘Hellenization’ of Revelation. In reality, however, it was a ‘Churchification’ of Hellenism. One can speak at length about this theme—indeed, much and often has this theme been taken up and discussed—indeed, it has been discussed too much and too often. It is

³⁰³ Florovsky, *Revelation*, 27.

³⁰⁴ Florovsky, *Revelation*, 29.

³⁰⁵ Florovsky, *Revelation*, 31.

essential here to raise only one issue. The Old Covenant has passed. Israel did not accept the divine Christ, did not recognize Him nor confess Him and 'the promise' passed to the Gentiles. The Church is above all, *ecclesia ex gentibus*. We must acknowledge this basic fact of Christian history in humility before the will of God, which is fulfilled in the destiny of nations. And the 'calling of the Gentiles' meant that Hellenism became blessed by God. In this there was no 'historical accident'—no such accident could lie therein. In the religious destiny of man there can be no 'accidents'. In any case the fact remains that the Gospel is given to us all and for all time in the Greek language. It is in this language that we hear the Gospel in all its entirety and fullness. That does *not* and cannot, of course, mean that it is untranslatable—but we always translate it from the Greek. And there was precisely as little 'chance' or 'accident' in this 'selection' of the Greek language—as the unchanging proto-language of the Christian Gospel—as there was in God's 'selection' of the Jewish people—out of all the people of antiquity—as 'His' People—there was as little 'accident' in the 'selection' of the Greek language as there was in the fact that 'salvation comes from the Jews' [John 4:22]. We received the Revelation of God as it occurred. And it would be pointless to ask if it could have been otherwise. In the selection of 'Hellenes' we must acknowledge the hidden decisions of God's will. In any case, the presentation of Revelation in the language of historical Hellenism in no way restricts Revelation. It rather proves precisely the opposite—that this language possessed certain powers and resources which aided in the expounding and expressing the truth of Revelation... Hellenism, forged in the fire of a new experience and a new faith, is renewed; Hellenic thought is transformed.³⁰⁶

But what does all this have to do with Florovsky's methodology? Simply this, when doing theology, Florovsky presupposed that the Fathers of the Church should be read and understood for the intellectual comprehension, but not as seen through the matrix of philosophical thought, but seen through the existential experience of the Church. If one wishes to enter into the fullness of understanding when doing theology, one must enter into the 'experience of vision and faith'.³⁰⁷ Much had been written about the 'influence' of Greek philosophy upon Christianity, but Florovsky's point is that the intellectual categories of Christianity, whatever terms or philosophical language used, must only be understood from within the experience of Christian faith. When this is accomplished the thoughts of the person entering into this experience are changed, transformed, and understanding can then be expressed. Of course, as argued above, Florovsky pushes the

³⁰⁶ Florovsky, *Revelation*, 32-33.

³⁰⁷ Florovsky, *Revelation*, 35.

concept to its logical extreme and over-emphasizes the Hellenic character of the existential nature of the Church.

This leads to the last presupposition in this article that Florovsky assumes for doing theology. This ‘transformation’ that needs to be experienced is not only of thought, but of consciousness as well. And this can only be accomplished by entering into the Catholicity of the Church.

The ‘Catholic transformation’ of consciousness makes it possible of each person to know—not in fact for himself only but for all; it makes the fullness of experience possible. And this knowledge is free from every restriction. In the catholic nature of the Church there is the possibility of theological *knowledge* and not just founded on theological ‘*opinions*’. I maintain that each person *can* realize the catholic standard in himself.³⁰⁸

It is only by belonging to the life of the Church, the mystical organism of the Body of Christ, in which Revelation is given and is accessible that true knowledge is possible. Only by entering into the ‘unity and continuity of the spiritual experience and the life of grace’,³⁰⁹ can knowledge be genuinely catholic. Only in the Body of Christ can real ‘communal’ growth, knowledge and understanding take place. The exclusion of the individual, which is the antithesis of ‘common life’, is overcome. *Koinonia* is achieved, not only in life but in thought as well. Only in this unity is ‘the catholicity of consciousness realized’.³¹⁰ Florovsky is clear that epistemology in the Church is based on the experience of being in the Church. But this, in and of itself, is not a tangible argument against those speculative philosophers who were in the Church. It is with the concept of catholicity that one can determine whether or not a person is part of the ecclesial consciousness.

This is so because only in the catholicity of the Church does the fullness of unity in the Image of the Trinity reside. Only in this experience are the divisions of the individual

³⁰⁸ Florovsky, *Revelation*, 40.

³⁰⁹ Florovsky, *Revelation*, 36.

³¹⁰ Florovsky, *Revelation*, 38.

overcome and consciousness transformed. Only by entering into the ‘concrete “unity of thoughts” and community of persons’ is true catholicity experienced. But this does not lead to the negation of the individual personality, but rather it is an affirmation and maturation of the person, for the isolation and limitation of the individual is overcome.³¹¹ ‘Unity is realized through participation in the one truth; it is realized in the truth, in Christ. And therefore consciousness is transformed’.³¹²

In Florovsky’s theory, this is not limited to only some individuals but can be had by all, according to the measure of their spiritual maturity. Not all actually realize this level of catholic consciousness, but all are called. Those who invest the creative spiritual exploit to achieve such maturity are called Fathers of the Church. To these we should look to, and enter into their shared experience of the catholicity of the Church.

b. Patristics and Modern Theology

Florovsky’s article five years later, 1936, ‘Patristics and Modern Theology’,³¹³ was his offering to confront the growing trend in modern theology to develop a new theological synthesis to meet the challenges and difficulties of their times. He did this by offering an alternative approach to doing theology and, for the first time, stating clearly his methodology of ‘returning to the Fathers’, or, although he does not yet use the term, his neopatristic synthesis.

The problem was this. Modern Protestant theologians of the time were making distinctions between dogmas and doctrine. They viewed dogmas as the unalterable statements of the true and catholic faith, binding and authoritative for all: but these dogmas were very few. And these dogmas were in need of being explained and developed into a coherent system to be understood and made available for all in a specific age, or for a specific condition. This was considered doctrine. Obviously doctrine could have no

³¹¹ Florovsky, *Revelation*, 39.

³¹² Florovsky, *Revelation*, 39.

³¹³ Florovsky, ‘Patristics and Modern Theology’, *Procès-verbeux du premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes. 29 Novembre-6 Décembre 1936*, (hereafter *Patristics*) ed. Hamilcar S. Alivisatos (Athens: Pyrsos), 238-288. First delivered as a thesis at the First Congress of Orthodox Theologians that met in Athens in 1936.

lasting value, or its value could only be relative or conditional. Thus, it would need to be restated and readapted to the changing time and situation. No doctrine, therefore, could be absolute and obligatory for all times. This, for Florovsky, was a complete disregard for and misunderstanding of the ‘traditional synthesis, the patristic doctrine’.³¹⁴ Although many theologians still quoted patristic texts, there was neglect for the patristic ‘mentality’. For Florovsky, one doing theology must not only ‘go back’ and read and understand the Fathers, and not only understand their ‘mentality’, but one must necessarily ‘adopt’ their mentality.

This call to ‘go back’ to the Fathers can be easily misunderstood. It does not mean a return to the letter of old patristic documents. To follow in the steps of the Fathers does not mean ‘*jurare in verba magistri*’. What is really meant and required is not a blind or servile imitation and repetition, but a further development of this patristic teaching, both homogenous and congenial. We have to rekindle again the creative fire of the Fathers, to restore in ourselves the patristic spirit... What is of real importance is not so much an identity of spoken words, as the real continuity of lives and mind, and inspiration.³¹⁵

As we have seen, this is paralleled to Hegel’s view of tradition as well:

The material or subject matter of philosophy is not given to the philosopher or created a priori by his individual reason. Rather, it is a legacy handed down to him from the past. Hegel does not mean, of course, that it is the role of the philosopher simply to transmit this tradition. He insists that it is his task to transform it, to assimilate it in his own individual and original manner. Only in this way, he says, does the tradition remain vital.³¹⁶

Florovsky’s sharing of Hegel’s view of tradition is not wrong *per se*, but since he never admits to it, it does make him unconscious and unaware of it. Florovsky’s use of Hegel’s views was for the purpose of being critical of the philosophical ideology that did not place much weight on history, even a-historical, as many of the Idealists were. But in

³¹⁴ Florovsky, *Patristics*, 228.

³¹⁵ Florovsky, *Patristics*, 230.

³¹⁶ Beiser, *Hegel*, 275.

succeeding in his critique of others, Florovsky failed in being self-critical and did not identify his own methodological source.

Florovsky further clarifies two points: First, the patristic texts are the fundamental key for understanding dogma. Second, the patristic mentality that one needs to enter into is the ‘catholic mentality’. The Fathers of the Church are not merely theologians, but are the teachers and doctors of the Church. They themselves have entered into the ‘catholic consciousness’ of the Church and their personalities have been transfigured by their creative and heroic efforts, to receive power and strength to express the consciousness of the whole Body of Christ.

According to Florovsky, the task of the theologian is a spiritual task: theologians must regain that ‘sacrificial capacity’ of not developing their own ideas, but of entering into the catholicity of the faith and ‘bear witness solely to the immaculate faith of the Mother Church!’³¹⁷ What is needed is a deeper and fuller spiritual sight to better understand and express the catholic experience. For Florovsky the only really progress forward was in a return to the experience and catholic mentality of the Fathers. ‘This re-discovery of the patristic sight would be the only real step forward’.³¹⁸ This is his neopatristic synthesis.

At the end of the ‘Patristics’ article there is one last point that Florovsky makes, which is a little out of place. After arguing that the Fathers created a new philosophy and that there is no modern philosophy that should be used to ‘check’ Christian doctrine, and that there has never been one particular philosophy ‘canonized’ by the Church, he argues that the Church and her traditional schemes, doctrines, worship, and icons are Greek, or Hellenistic. And after identifying the shortcomings of the modern Orthodox Church with the lack of the Hellenistic spirit, Florovsky closes with this: ‘And the creative postulate for the future would be like this: let us be more Greek to be truly catholic, to be truly

³¹⁷ Florovsky, *Patristics*, 231.

³¹⁸ Florovsky, *Patristics*, 232.

Orthodox’.³¹⁹ This seems to make sense, if one couples these statements with the long quoted text on God’s selection of Hellenism as His means to His ends. And it also seems obvious that as far as the history of Orthodoxy’s liturgical and doctrinal emergence is concerned, Florovsky is correct to a degree. But the statement ‘let us be more Greek to be truly catholic, to be truly Orthodox’ is troubling. It is here, as he absolutises the concept of the need of being rooted in history, as has been said above, that he gets into trouble.

It is not because all these Orthodox traditions are Greek that gives them importance, but because they are Christian. Yes, these Christian practices and traditions arose amidst the Greek culture, but they arose because people were transformed by Christ and followed the Christian way, not because they were Greek. And if Florovsky can say that the Greek Fathers created a new philosophy not to be compared with others, why can we not say that the Orthodox Church’s liturgical and doctrinal practices are a created new culture not to be compared with others. Also, although Florovsky states that one cannot use modern philosophy to critique Christian doctrine, is it not possible to use modern philosophical terms and phrases and redefine them as the Fathers did? Nevertheless, his statement is a bit of an exaggeration.

c. The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology

Florovsky, being caught up in the Second World War, the ecumenical movement and writings on ecclesiology, did not write another article on the tasks and methods of theology until thirteen years later, 1949. It is in this article, ‘The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology’,³²⁰ where we see Florovsky first use the phrase ‘neopatristic synthesis’.

Florovsky first recounts the theological disruption between East and West and how this led to the disintegration of Christian Tradition.³²¹ Here, specifically, he considers the historical Schism of the Church. Then he focuses on the legacy of Orthodox theology.

³¹⁹ Florovsky, *Patristics*, 232.

³²⁰ Florovsky, ‘The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology’, (hereafter *Legacy*) *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. 31. No. 2, April 1949, 65-71.

³²¹ Florovsky, *Legacy*, 66.

This legacy is the use and inspiration of patristic teachings, not only in theology but perhaps more importantly, in her liturgical practices, her daily worship.³²² And although Orthodox theology underwent a ‘pseudomorphosis’,³²³ (that is, theological teaching that deviated from the traditional patristic pattern being influenced by both Roman Catholic Scholasticism and Reformation theology) the worshiping Church clung to the patristic tradition.

Specifically in the Russian Church, Florovsky attributes the carrying on of the legacy of patristic tradition to the Russian religious philosophers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was in their attempt to reinterpret the patristic teachings in modern terms, ‘to restate the teaching of the Church as a complete philosophy of life’.³²⁴ But it was not in their specific philosophical conceptions that the legacy was carried on, but it was in their overarching aim: ‘to show and to prove that a modern man can and must persist in his loyalty to the traditional faith and to the Church of the Fathers without compromising his freedom of thought and without betraying the needs or requests of the contemporary world’.³²⁵ This is the most credit that Florovsky gives to the Russian religious philosophers, who he believed failed in their fidelity to the traditional faith. Nevertheless, Florovsky recognizes three important elements of their theology, and of all theology, if it is really to be a synthesis: loyalty to the tradition of the faith of the Church (which includes the Fathers), a person’s own freedom of creative thought, and the needs of the modern world. But Florovsky observes an obvious tension, for this loyalty to the Church must be without compromising freedom of thought, nor betraying the contemporary world.

This indeed is the very legacy that theologians must come to understand and carry on. And it is in the accomplishing of this legacy in one’s own theology that is the task of the Orthodox theologian. This task is carried out by first recognizing there is much to

³²² Florovsky, *Legacy* 67.

³²³ This term is first used in Florovsky, *Ways*, CW Vol. 5, 37, 72, 84, and 121. . In his article, ‘The Authority of the Fathers in the Western Orthodox Diaspora in the Twentieth Century’, Louth notes that Florovsky borrowed the phrase from Oswald Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*.

³²⁴ Florovsky, *Legacy*, 69.

³²⁵ Florovsky, *Legacy*, 69.

learn before one speaks. And then, when one does speak, it is necessary to recognize that one speaks to an ecumenical audience, for the patristic tradition is ecumenical. So, theologians must use their skills to phrase the message of the Fathers as an ecumenical one, as ‘a truly universal appeal’.³²⁶ Here, we can see that two concepts have solidified in Florovsky’s thought: the tradition of the Church is patristic and the message is to be given to all.

As Florovsky often stresses, mirroring Hegel, this cannot be done by mere repetition of the Fathers. But one must follow their paths since they themselves were ‘bold and courageous and adventurous seekers of the Divine truth’.³²⁷ But this needs be accomplished by ‘returning to the sources’. Florovsky means by this not only the writings of the Fathers, but also the ‘Well of living water’.³²⁸ The rule of prayer was the very means of securing this source of inspiration.

Lex orandi is, and must be, not only a pattern for the *lex credendi*, but above all a source of inspiration. It is, and ought to be, not so much a binding and restricting authority, as a life in the Spirit, a living experience, a communion with the Truth, with the living Lord, who is not only an authority, but the Truth, the Way, and the Life. The true theology can spring only out of a deep liturgical experience.³²⁹

Here is one of the few places where Florovsky truly captures the essence of the true tradition of the Church: life in the Holy Spirit as communion with the Truth. The Tradition of the Church is her spirituality. It is the person’s experience of God in worship and prayer. This indeed has been the distinctive mark of Orthodox theology. It is a theology born out of the worshiping and preaching Church as it engaged with the world as a witness to the Truth. So, according to Florovsky, it is necessary again for Orthodoxy to truly engage the rest of the Christian world, not with the ideas and concepts of other

³²⁶ Florovsky, *Legacy*, 70.

³²⁷ Florovsky, *Legacy* 70.

³²⁸ Florovsky, *Legacy* 70.

³²⁹ Florovsky, *Legacy*, 70.

traditions, but with its own spiritual identity. East must learn to understand the challenges of the West, and West must heed the legacy of the East. As the Orthodox Church moves through history and dialogues with the whole of the Christian world, the legacy of the Fathers must be carried forth, and the task of theology must be accomplished. It is only then that a true synthesis will be had. As Florovsky states: ‘We are perhaps on the eve of a new synthesis in theology—of a *neopatristic* synthesis, I would suggest. Theological tradition must be reintegrated, not simply summed up or accumulated’.

d. The Predicament of the Christian Historian

Ten years later, 1959, in an article written to honour Paul Tillich, ‘The Predicament of the Christian Historian’,³³⁰ Florovsky once again returns to the methods and tasks of the historian. This article is a work of maturity and is, of sorts a final summation. It deals with the issues faced by Christian historians (nothing specifically to do with Paul Tillich). It is well worth the effort to read. At the end of the article Florovsky himself condensed what he felt were the four most important tasks of the Christian historian. But he has others throughout the article and therefore some exegesis is needed.

‘Christianity is a religion of historians’.³³¹ With this opening quote by Bloch, Florovsky sets the tenor of the entire article. Christianity is essentially historic. Its faith is based on particular events in the past that are considered extremely crucial. All of history is seen as ‘Salvation History’, ‘from Creation to Consummation, to the Last Judgment and the End of history’.³³² What are of utmost importance, which is continually emphatically stressed, are certain key events: namely, the Incarnation of Christ, His Crucifixion and His Resurrection.

The problem that Florovsky confronts with this article was the slowly growing anti-historical attitude of the call to *demythologize* the Christian faith. Which, for Florovsky,

³³⁰ Florovsky, ‘The Predicament of the Christian Historian’, *Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of Paul Tillich*, (hereafter *Predicament*) ed., Walter Leibrecht (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 140-166, 359-362. Reprinted in *Christianity and Culture*, CW Vol. 2, 31-65.

³³¹ Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l’Histoire, ou Métier d’Historien*, 3 (Paris: 1949); English translation, *The Historian’s Craft* (New York, 1953), 4.

³³² Florovsky, *Predicament*, 31.

actually meant to ‘de-historicize’ it. The effect of German Idealism was that the emphasis shifted from the ‘outward’ historical facts to the ‘inward’ experience of believers.³³³ This anti-historical attitude was itself an interpretation of history, one that viewed history as irrelevant and accidental. And it was Hegel’s type of historical empiricism that was used as arguments against this attitude. These same types of arguments were being used by conservative Protestants of the same era as well.³³⁴

The arguments of the so-called Liberal school of thought were fraught with preconceptions and ideological prejudices and were only brought to bear to discredit history as relative. It came about that even in conservative circles the ‘appropriate’ use of history was seen as suspect.³³⁵ Historical knowledge itself appeared to be compromised by the skepticism of the learned. Moreover, even if one allows for the possibility that Christians are by their vocation historians, it can be argued that they are bad and unreliable historians due to their prejudices, biases and partialities. This is because they are ‘committed’ to their perspective in advance and therefore could never be critically objective. How can *they* be justified in *their* historical efforts?

Florovsky suggests this: ‘the easiest answer to this charge is to declare that all historians have a bias. An unbiased history is simply impossible, and actually does not exist’.³³⁶ In fact, all other types of historians are committed to something, it just happens to be a different bias. But one cannot leave the argument there, for this ultimately leads to skepticism in reliable historical knowledge. This, then, leads to the question of how does one do historical inquiry. And this, in turn, leads us to Florovsky’s methods and tasks of historical study.

³³³ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 32-33.

³³⁴ See, for example Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (http://www.biblebelievers.com/machen/machen_ch1.html) ‘From the beginning, the Christian gospel, as indeed the name “gospel” or “good news” implies, consisted in an account of something that had happened. And from the beginning, the meaning of the happening was set forth; and when the meaning of the happening was set forth then there was Christian doctrine. “Christ died”—that is history; “Christ died for our sins”—that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity’.

³³⁵ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 33.

³³⁶ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 34.

First, as a preparation, one has ‘to define what is the nature and specific character of “the historical” and in what way and manner this specific subject can be reached and apprehended. One has to define the aim and purpose of historical study and then to design methods by which this aim, or these aims, can be properly achieved’.³³⁷ It is rather obvious that one has to describe what one wants to accomplish before one sets out, but it is a necessary first step to make clear what one means by pursuing historical study. It is equally necessary to know *how* this will be accomplished, for the study of history can be ambiguous unless defined and refined.

Since history cannot be ‘observed’ directly, one must use ‘sources’, and therefore historical research ‘is always a matter of *interpretation*’.³³⁸ But what can be considered a ‘source’? Almost everything, that is, as long as one ‘knows how to use it, how to read the evidence’.³³⁹ This leads to the first task of Florovsky’s historical method (again borrowing from Bloch), all sources are silent until asked the appropriate questions. ‘The first rule of the historical craft is precisely to cross-examine the witnesses, to ask proper questions, and to force the relics and the documents to answer them’.³⁴⁰

The clear analogy is that of a lawyer in court asking questions of a witness. But, using the same analogy, every lawyer while cross-examining asks questions to lead the witness in a certain direction, to accomplish the lawyer’s specific ends. And so with historical study, the historian always asks questions that are leading. Passive observation has never contributed anything in any field.³⁴¹ This presupposes a direction from the very start of the process, but only by these guided questions do the sources actually speak. This

³³⁷ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 35.

³³⁸ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 36.

³³⁹ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 36.

³⁴⁰ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 36.

³⁴¹ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 36. Paraphrased from a quote by Marc Bloch’s *Apologie pour l’Histoire, ou M tier d’Historien*, 64-65, worth quoting in full here: ‘Before Boucher de Perthes, as in our own days, there were plenty of flint artifacts in the alluvium of Somme. However, there was no one to ask questions, and there was therefore no prehistory. As an old medievalist, I know nothing which is better reading than a cartulary. That is because I know just about what to ask it. A collection of Roman inscriptions, on the other hand, would tell me little. I know more or less how to read them, but not how to cross-examine them. In other words, every historic research presupposes that the inquiry has a direction at the very first step. In the beginning there must be a guiding spirit. Mere passive observation, even supposing such a thing were possible, has never contributed anything productive to any science’.

also means that the sources can only speak in direct proportion to the level of questions asked by the student. Outside of this ‘dialogue’ or ‘conversation’ the historical process does not exist.

Reiterating the historical task he learned from Gershenson, that there can be no true understanding without some amount of ‘congeniality’, Florovsky’s next task states that there must be a ‘real *contact of minds*’: he writes, ‘we have to grasp *the mind of the writer*, we must discover exactly what he intended to say’.³⁴² For Florovsky, there can be no real meeting of the minds, between historical figure and writer, without a spiritual or intellectual ‘sympathy’. Although history has its objective facts that must indeed be verified, the purpose of history is an ‘*encounter with living beings*’,³⁴³ or to quote Marrou, ‘an encounter with the other’.³⁴⁴

So, one must read to understand, and the ‘understanding intellect’ cannot be ruled out of the process. Therefore, Florovsky notes, there arises the need for historians to be critical of themselves. ‘One has to check, severely and strictly, one’s prejudices and presuppositions’, yet, at the same time, ‘one should never try to empty one’s mind of *all* presuppositions’.³⁴⁵ All acts of understanding are extremely personal, and thus guide the questions asked, so one needs to be careful of the questions. But, one *is* always present in intellectual understanding and therefore to remove all presuppositions only leads to ‘mental sterility’ and ‘neutrality’, and these for the historian are ‘vices’.³⁴⁶

Next, Florovsky insists that there can be ‘*No history without a retrospect*, that is, without perspective’.³⁴⁷ All historians want to know the past, but the past is known as past, and, therefore, from the perspective of later historical consequences. This being the case, one has a tendency, since one knows the consequences of past events, to ‘exaggerate the

³⁴² Florovsky, *Predicament*, 40.

³⁴³ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 42.

³⁴⁴ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 43. From H.I. Marrou, *De la connaissance historique* (Paris: 1954), 43.

³⁴⁵ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 42.

³⁴⁶ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 42.

³⁴⁷ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 46.

cohesion of various aspects of the past'.³⁴⁸ Here, Florovsky warns that caution must be used. One should not make overgeneralizations for the sake of intelligibility or coherency. This type of shorthand can produce an 'inner necessity' or an 'inherent determinism' of the behaviour of particular historical figures. For Florovsky, there is no such thing as 'typical' or 'categorical', 'actual history is fluid and flexible and ultimately unpredictable... Man remains a free agent even in bonds'.³⁴⁹ Now, it must always be remembered, that since history is a process and new discoveries are often made, historians, whose point of view are limited, must revise their interpretations. Thus, these interpretations are at best 'provisional and approximative'.³⁵⁰

For Florovsky, a true historian is not just a 'registrar' of empirical data, who forfeits the appropriate duty of understanding. Thus, no historian can avoid raising 'ultimate problems of human nature and destiny'. This then is '*the major predicament of all historical study*'.³⁵¹ In order to understand the issues and problems that one faces in historical study, the historian must have their own 'vision' of how to face those problems, and therefore is able to enter into dialogue with their sources. 'In brief, the problem of *Man*, transpires in all problems of *men*'.³⁵² To actually engage in the life one is exploring, the historian must be sensitive to the whole range of human concerns, one must have concerns of one's own, or else the concerns of others are meaningless and the historian has no means of truly understanding the struggles of their subject.³⁵³ Thus, every historical narrative involves a judgment, and so every pretended neutrality 'is itself a bias, an option, a decision'.³⁵⁴

This of course is indirect opposition to the 'Liberal anti-historical' attitude that Florovsky is confronting. All people are committed to something, and all commitments

³⁴⁸ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 46.

³⁴⁹ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 48.

³⁵⁰ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 50.

³⁵¹ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 51.

³⁵² Florovsky, *Predicament*, 51.

³⁵³ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 52.

³⁵⁴ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 52.

are not *'in abstracto'*, instead, they are concrete. Yes, one must have an openness of mind, but 'openness of mind is not its emptiness, but rather its comprehensiveness, its broad responsiveness, or, one is tempted to say, its "catholicity."'³⁵⁵

For this 'catholicity' of mind to be achieved one must adopt a 'radical discrimination', for no one can avoid the ultimate discrimination between 'yes' and 'no'. According to Florovsky a true historian cannot be indifferent, but will take sides between good and evil, for freedom or against it, and between truth and lies.³⁵⁶ A historian cannot be indifferent, all of human actions in history are based on decisions, and to be indifferent distorts the understanding of the human situation.

Therefore, a historian will not escape *the* foremost and central challenge of history: '*Who do men say that I am?*' A denial to face this challenge is indeed a commitment and a judgment. Any history that attempts to avoid the challenge of Christ is in no sense neutral, and, in its essence, prejudices its course of interpretation.³⁵⁷ Although no one can claim a 'definitive interpretation' of the mystery that is life, the Christian historian is free to claim that his approach is the most comprehensive and 'catholic', and 'his vision of that mystery is proportionate to its actual dimension'.³⁵⁸

The Christian historian accomplishes his task of interpreting human life, not based on any 'principles', but based on the Christian vision of history and life. Florovsky concludes with these tasks:

The Christian historian will, first of all, vindicate 'the dignity of man', even of fallen man. He will, then, protest against any radical scission of man into 'empirical' and 'intelligible' fractions (whether in a Kantian fashion or in any other) of which the former is doomed and only the latter is promised salvation. It is precisely the 'empirical man' who needs salvation, and salvation does not consist merely in a kind of disentanglement of the 'intelligible character' out of the empirical mess and bondage. Next, the Christian historian will attempt to reveal the actual course of events in the light of his Christian knowledge of man, but will be slow and cautious in

³⁵⁵ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 52.

³⁵⁶ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 53.

³⁵⁷ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 54.

³⁵⁸ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 54.

detecting the ‘providential’ structure of actual history, in any detail. Even in the history of the Church ‘the hand of Providence’ is emphatically hidden, though it would be blasphemous to deny that this Hand does exist or that God is truly the Lord of History. Actually the purpose of a historical understanding is not so much to detect the Divine action in history as to understand the human action, that is, human activities, in the bewildering variety and confusion in which they appear to a human observer. Above all, *the Christian historian will regard history at once as a mystery and as a tragedy—a mystery of salvation and a tragedy of sin*. He will insist on the comprehensiveness of our conception of man, as a prerequisite of our understanding of his existence, of his exploits, of his destiny, which is actually wrought in his history.³⁵⁹

These are the tasks and methods that Florovsky worked by, and they can certainly be found in his writings. In essence, for Florovsky, a historian is a theological anthropologist. The Christian historian does and should interpret history from a certain perspective, a theological perspective. Florovsky’s overall historical method is sound and buttresses the Christian understanding of history. But there is a clarification that needs to be made between his methodologies for his historical writings verses his theological writings. His methodology for history is very clear, but when he does theology Florovsky adds his sense of entering into the Tradition to incorporate the spirit of the Fathers. This added difference is the neopatristic synthesis, to which we now turn to in his most mature article on the subject.

e. Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church

Florovsky’s article, ‘Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church’, was originally presented to the Faith and Order Orthodox Consultation in Kifissia, Greece, 16-18 August 1959.³⁶⁰ It is the mature summation of his understanding of the way theology should be done in the Orthodox Church; more clearly, it is its very ethos. This is a more balanced presentation of his theory of the neopatristic synthesis. Florovsky starts with quotes from the Decree of Chalcedon, ‘*Following the Holy Fathers...*’ and the

³⁵⁹ Florovsky, *Predicament*, 64, 65.

³⁶⁰ Florovsky, ‘Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church’, (hereafter *Ethos*) CW, IV, 11-30. Originally appeared in written form as ‘The Ethos of the Orthodox Church’ in the *Ecumenical Review*, Vol 12, No. 2 Geneva, 1960), 183-198.

Seventh Ecumenical Council, *'following the Divinely inspired teaching of our Holy Fathers and the tradition of the Catholic Church'*. He views the teachings of the Fathers as a rule to measure 'right belief'. It is not merely an appeal to texts and formulas but ultimately an appeal to persons, *'to holy witnesses'*.³⁶¹ But what exactly does it mean to 'follow the Fathers'? 'To follow the Fathers does not mean simply to quote their sentences. It means *to acquire their mind*, their *phronema*. The Orthodox Church claims to have preserved this *mind (phronema)* and theologized *ad mentem Patrum*.³⁶² But then what does it mean to *'acquire their mind'*?

What Florovsky means is that one must adopt their very 'existential attitude' towards life, their 'spiritual orientation'.³⁶³ One must understand how the Fathers lived and did theology to be able to enter into their 'attitude'. First, the Fathers are a 'witnesses of the true faith, *testes veritatis*'.³⁶⁴ Theology for them could only be an 'intellectual contour', for it was only but a way to testify to the mystery of the Living God. The whole of their theology stemmed from their vital commitment of faith, their spiritual vision. Apart from an encounter with the Living Christ, their theology was meaningless.

Next, patristic theology was always 'intrinsically exegetical'³⁶⁵ that is, they were servants of the Word of God. Their theology was never separated from the life of prayer and the practice of virtue, and the Scriptures. Above all, it was the Holy Spirit that led them into all truth. This 'continuity of divine assistance, the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit',³⁶⁶ is, as we have seen, what Florovsky understands as Tradition.

Florovsky clarifies that the age of the Fathers has not ended, 'the Spirit breathes indeed in all ages'.³⁶⁷ Here we start to see that Florovsky believes that one does not necessarily have to quote from Fathers long past, but that the patristic age still continues,

³⁶¹ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 16.

³⁶² Florovsky, *Ethos*, 18.

³⁶³ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 21.

³⁶⁴ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 16.

³⁶⁵ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 17.

³⁶⁶ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 16.

³⁶⁷ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 18.

though he fails to mention any of his own time. As examples of this he notes the Fathers of the Fourth and Fifth centuries, St. Maximus the Confessor in the Sixth, St. Symeon the New Theologian in the Eleventh, and St. Gregory Palamas in the Fourteenth. In evaluating the Seventeenth century Florovsky brings up again his concept of the influence of Western habits, his 'pseudomorphosis'. But he continues to add that Orthodoxy in its liturgical life had always been 'thoroughly patristic'.³⁶⁸ This can be seen as well in the monastic life of prayer and meditation.

Florovsky gives proper credit to the *Philokalia* being used as a source for those who want to practice Orthodoxy in his own time, and as evidence of the continuance of the 'age of the Fathers'.³⁶⁹ And although the authority of the Fathers had been re-emphasized and a 'return' to the Fathers had been 'advocated', Florovsky wished to make clear that this return needed to be a '*creative return*'. 'An element of self-criticism must be therein implied. This brings us to the concept of a *Neopatristic synthesis*, as the task and aim of Orthodox theology today'.³⁷⁰ Now we must try to understand how Florovsky believed this to work in doing theology.

Florovsky believes that the 'synthesis' must be consistent with the 'central vision of the Christian faith: Christ Jesus, as God and Redeemer, Humiliated and Glorified, the Victim and the Victor on the Cross'.³⁷¹ This is, of course, the Chalcedonian vision, Christ fully God and fully human. For Florovsky, Orthodox spirituality is essentially Christocentric. It is only through Christ that the mystery of the Holy Trinity is revealed. He believes this is demonstrated in the Church's liturgical practices and in all the Sacraments. As one encounters the Living Christ one can know the Father and the Holy Spirit. It was always out of this Chalcedonian context that patristic theology and devotion

³⁶⁸ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 21.

³⁶⁹ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 21.

³⁷⁰ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 22.

³⁷¹ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 23.

flowed. ‘The *lex credendi* and the *lex orandi* are reciprocally interrelated... The aim of man’s existence is the “Vision of God,” in the adoration of the Triune God’³⁷²

The ‘synthesis’ should also present and interpret the mystery of Christ in the ‘perspective of Salvation’.³⁷³ The problems that the Fathers faced were not just speculative, but were ‘existential problems’.³⁷⁴ This soteriological perspective, according to Florovsky, can be seen in many of the Fathers. The whole dimension of the salvation that Christ offers is disclosed in the ‘*totus Christus, caput et corpus*’, according to St. Augustine.

The doctrine of the Church is not just an appendix to Christology, nor is it a mere extrapolation. ‘Ecclesiology in the Orthodox view is an integral part of Christology’.³⁷⁵ The final purpose of the Incarnation was that the Incarnate should have a ‘body’. Christ is always the ‘Head of His Body’. It is in this interpretation of Christianity, from this perspective, that the full ‘existential significance’ of the Incarnation is given. Christ came to solve the problem of man’s ultimate destiny.³⁷⁶

By extension, the ‘synthesis’ will also incorporate the theology of the Cross, which is itself a ‘theology of glory’.³⁷⁷ If one is to theologize concerning man’s ‘existential problem’, one must remember that in the *oikonomia* of Redemption the Cross is the Victory of Life, and at the same time, the defeat of man’s mortality. Death itself is destroyed by Christ’s death on the Cross: ‘trampling down death by death, in the phrase of the Easter Day office. Christ was victorious precisely on the Cross. The death on the Cross itself was a manifestation of Life’.³⁷⁸

The mystery of the Cross and Salvation can only truly be understood in the context ‘of an accurate conception of Christ’s Person: One Person in two natures’.³⁷⁹ For

³⁷² Florovsky, *Ethos*, 24.

³⁷³ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 24.

³⁷⁴ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 25.

³⁷⁵ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 25.

³⁷⁶ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 25.

³⁷⁷ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 26.

³⁷⁸ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 26.

³⁷⁹ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 28.

Florovsky, anyone who does theology must incorporate this ‘Chalcedonian vision’ to truly understand and enter into the ‘mind’ of the Fathers. Only when one ‘synthesizes’ this ‘vision’ into their theology can they truly ‘understand the faith and devotion of the Eastern Orthodox Church’.³⁸⁰

Florovsky’s fundamental proposition is this: it is necessary to return to the Fathers of the Church, not only in their writings but in their spiritual paths. And by so doing, one enters into the same Spirit of Truth that led and guided them: one enters into the ecclesial tradition. But also, there is a need to have a correct theology to begin with, and from this starting point, to take the patristic sources and apply them, synthesize them into contemporary life and existence. Florovsky’s notion seems right and correct, but the true test will be in accomplishing it. Florovsky’s purpose was to oppose all concepts of religious and theological thought that was not consistent with the tradition of the Church. Christianity is historical. It is based on events that happened in history. But it is also an interpretation of those events from the perspective of faith. Florovsky, anticipating the problems with a solely historical view of Christianity, is adamant that although the events happened in the past, each person can encounter and experience the life of the Holy Spirit and the communion with Christ for themselves. This article acts as a corrective to his less mature views of the neopatristic synthesis. The whole appeal to Christian Hellenism is completely removed, and there is no reference to becoming more Greek to be more Christian. The need for Florovsky’s over-emphasized polemics is no longer warranted. Thus, his appeal to the neopatristic synthesis is concerned with the adoption of the Fathers’ existential encounter with the living Christ. For Florovsky each person is free to make decisions that affect history. It is this freedom that is paramount in the context of creation anthropology. This will be considered in more detail in the next chapter. For now we turn to Lossky’s methodology.

³⁸⁰ Florovsky, *Ethos*, 28.

B. Lossky's Methodology

Lossky was, above all, a theologian. This is nowhere more evident than in his apophatic methodology. According to Lossky, his apophatic method is based on the theological method used by the entire Eastern Christian Tradition,³⁸¹ a bold claim to say the least. His claim is that Orthodox theology has always followed this method, and thus feels the need to demonstrate it by citing the Fathers. Lossky does indeed appeal to many of the Eastern Fathers throughout his works, but he also appeals to Western Fathers, modern theologians and Russian religious philosophers as well. Lossky gives support for this claim by referencing some Eastern Church Fathers: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, the Cappadocians (St Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa), St Maximus the Confessor, St John of Damascus, and St Gregory Palamas. But, as we will see, Lossky also shares the methodology of Pavel Florensky's *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*.³⁸² This is immediately evident in reading the first line from Florensky's book: 'Living religious experience as the sole legitimate way to gain knowledge of the dogmas—that is how I would like to express the general theme of my book...'³⁸³ Florensky's commonality of thought is clear if one compares this with Lossky's opening remarks in *MT* concerning the non-opposition between theology and mystical experience: 'we must live the dogma expressing the revealed truth...'³⁸⁴ Lossky shares Florensky's type of mystical experientialism as one of the guiding thoughts throughout his own mystical theology. But more than this, Lossky follows Florensky's methodology of anti-rationalism, antinomy, and the negation of the 'law of identity'. This latter is Lossky's foundation of personalism. It is interesting to note here Florensky's adamant opposition to

³⁸¹ Vladimir Lossky, 'The Divine Darkness', chapter 2 in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (hereafter *MT*), (New York: SVS Press, 1985), 26, also Lossky, 'The Theology of Light in the Thought of St. Gregory Palamas', in *In the Image and Likeness of God*, (hereafter *Light, Image*), (New York: SVS Press, 1985), 46, originally published as 'La théologie de la Lumière chez saint Grégoire de Thessalonique', *Dieu Vivant* 1 (1945), 94-118.

³⁸² Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (hereafter *Pillar*), trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).

³⁸³ Florensky, *Pillar*, 5.

³⁸⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 8.

Florensky as demonstrating ‘in the clearest possible way every ambiguity and failing in the religious-philosophical movement’.³⁸⁵ Florovsky criticizes his deliberate subjectivity and his lack of sense of history. What is curious is that although Lossky uses many of the same concepts as Florensky, Florovsky never once criticizes Lossky for the same ideas.³⁸⁶

But concerning apophaticism, the work Lossky most analyzed is that of the unknown author of the *Areopagitic* writings, also known as Pseudo-Dionysius. All the above Fathers believed in the absolute inaccessibility of God in His nature. But, for Lossky, it was Pseudo-Dionysius who ‘united the total inaccessibility with a total perceptibility’.³⁸⁷ Here, it must be remembered that Lossky’s first academic article was ‘Negative Theology in the Teaching of Dionysius the Areopagite’.³⁸⁸

Two of Lossky’s earliest works (the above article and a revised French edition), analyzed Dionysius’ *The Divine Names* and *Concerning Mystical Theology*. This research Lossky incorporated into ‘The Divine Darkness’, the second chapter of his widely read *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. It is unfortunate that most of the references to *The Divine Names*, which can be found in his earlier editions, are omitted (32 references are found in the article ‘La Théologie Négative’ and only 1 in the chapter ‘The Divine Darkness’.) from this his most popular work on the subject, and thus gives his work a slightly more unbalanced perspective. This coupled with what Lossky himself called a ‘radical apophaticism’³⁸⁹ led some Westerners to believe that he was espousing an ‘impersonalism’³⁹⁰ which denied God’s immanence in Christ Jesus and made Lossky seem an extremist by seeing no use in affirmative theology as compared to negative or apophatic theology.

³⁸⁵ Florovsky, *Ways*, Part 2, 276-281, CW VI.

³⁸⁶ Florovsky, ‘Vladimir Lossky: The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church’, book review, *Journal of Religion*, July 1958, 38 (3), 207-208.

³⁸⁷ Vladimir Lossky, ‘La théologie négative dans la doctrine de Denys l’Aréopagite’, (hereafter La théologie) *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 28 (1939), 204-221.

³⁸⁸ Vladimir Lossky, ‘Otritsatel’noe bogoslovie v uchenii Dionisiya Areopagita’, *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 3, (1929), 133-144.

³⁸⁹ Lossky, *MT*, 37.

³⁹⁰ Rowan Williams, ‘The Via Negativa and the Foundations of Theology: An Introduction to the Thought of Vladimir Lossky’, *New Studies in Theology* 1, edited by Stephen Sykes & Derek Holmes (London: Duckworth, 1980), 95-117.

The following is a brief attempt to understand his apophatic methodological views both from his earlier and more mature writings on the subject. And, although not exhaustive, it hopes to cover the salient points. But, before we consider Lossky's view of the apophatic methodology, we must first understand what, to him, it was not.

1. Dual Methods: Cataphatic and Apophatic

a. What they are not

First, it must be noted, that to Lossky affirmative and negative theologies are not the dialectical method. They are not, that is, where a thesis is proposed and then an anti-thesis is opposed to that thesis which is then transcended by a synthesis of the two into a single concept. Also, for Lossky negative theology is not a corrective to affirmative theology, or vice versa.³⁹¹ The dogmatic fact that the divine nature is absolutely transcendent coupled together with the rational contradiction of the theological affirmation of the possibility of knowing God, leads to what Lossky calls, in agreement with Florensky, antinomy.

Antinomic theology proceeds by considering the oppositions between affirmative and negative theology: two contradictory propositions that are equally true, and always kept in balance without opposing the two concepts. Florensky influences Lossky here: 'The thesis and antithesis together form the expression of truth. In other words, truth is an antinomy, and it cannot fail to be such...Antinomy is a proposition which, being true, jointly contains thesis and antithesis, so that it is inaccessible to any objection'.³⁹² Lossky only mentions Florensky twice in his works. One is in passing in relation to a theory of science.³⁹³ But the other, though not a direct quote, is an unashamed adoption of Florensky's Trinitarian antinomy. First I will quote Lossky, then Florensky.

³⁹¹ Lossky, *MT*, 26.

³⁹² Florensky, *Pillar*, 109, 113.

³⁹³ Lossky, *MT*, 106.

According to a modern Russian theologian, Father Florensky, there is no other way in which human thought may find perfect stability save that of accepting the Trinitarian antinomy. If we reject the Trinity as the sole ground of all reality and of all thought, we are committed to a road that leads nowhere; we end in an aporia, in folly, in the disintegration of our being, in spiritual death. Between the Trinity and hell there lies no other choice. This question is, indeed, crucial—in the literal sense of the word. The dogma of the Trinity is a cross for human ways of thought. The apophatic ascent is a mounting of Calvary.³⁹⁴

Either the Triune Christian God or the dying in insanity. *Tertium non datur*. Pay attention: I do not exaggerate. That is precisely the way things are. I lack the words to express myself even more drastically. Between eternal life inside the Trinity and the eternal second death, there is no clearance, not even a hair's breadth. Either/or. Rationality in its constitutive logical norms is either completely absurd, insane down to its most microscopic structure, composed of improvable and therefore wholly random elements; or its ground is supralogical. Either/or... Both the one and the other lead beyond the limits of rationality. The first decomposes rationality, introducing into the consciousness an eternally insane agony, while the second reinforces it with the ascesis of self-overcoming, with a cross that for rationality is an absurd self-renunciation. The faith by which we are saved is the beginning and the end of the cross and co-crucifixion with Christ... I ask my self, what is 'rational faith'? I answer: 'Rational faith' is foulness and abomination before God.³⁹⁵

It is clear that Lossky follows hard after Florensky's conception that Orthodox Truth is against rationalism. Truth calls for the 'ascesis of rationality', which 'is belief, i.e., self-renunciation'.³⁹⁶ Far from being an example of the failure of Russian religious philosophy, Lossky fully adopts Florensky's anti-rationalism. Antinomy is one of the most important keys for understanding Lossky. Antinomy as demonstrated in the concept of two separate things as one, or a type of consubstantiality, is an overarching theme we see throughout Lossky's works. This influence is Florensky's. 'And the single word homoousios expressed not only a Christological dogma but also a spiritual evaluation of the rational laws of thought. Here rationality was given a death blow'.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 65-66.

³⁹⁵ Florensky, *Pillar*, 48.

³⁹⁶ Florensky, *Pillar*, 109.

³⁹⁷ Florensky, *Pillar*, 41.

Florensky was adamantly against rationalism in all forms, whether empirical or ideal. This is readily demonstrated in his work *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*.³⁹⁸ Whether or not he is consistent in relation to his Sophiology is not a concern here. But Florovsky, because of his emphasis on empirical historicism, was bothered by Florensky's work. Yet, at the same time, Lossky buys in whole-heartedly into Florensky's conceptions of antinomy. And although Lossky did not accept Florensky's metaphysic of Sophia, it is certain that Lossky accepted much that was Florensky's.

Now, an example of this antinomy is St. Gregory Nazianzen's statement concerning the Holy Trinity. 'They are One distinctly and distinct conjointly, somewhat paradoxical as that formula may be'.³⁹⁹ Later, Lossky would call this the 'non-opposition of opposites'.⁴⁰⁰ But a few more words need to be said concerning Lossky's understanding that apophasis is not a corrective. First, Lossky, in his lectures on Orthodox Theology, which became a book by the same name, implies that it is some type of corrective. He states, 'The permanent memory of apophaticism must rectify the cataphatic way. It must purify our concepts by contrast with the inaccessible, and prevent them from being enclosed within their limited meanings'.⁴⁰¹ In later years, in some sense, Lossky was not so adverse to the concept that apophatic theology had some corrective or rectifying effect upon cataphatic theology, though not in a dialectical sense. He sees it having a tempering, or better, purifying measure, as he says:

Certainly God is wise, but not in the banal sense of a merchant or a philosopher. And His limitless wisdom is not an internal necessity of His nature. The highest names, even love, express but do not exhaust the divine essence. They constitute the attributes in which divinity communicates itself without its secret source, its nature, ever becoming exhausted, or becoming objectified beneath our scrutiny. Our purified concepts enable us

³⁹⁸ Florensky, *Pillar*, 25 and 44.

³⁹⁹ Lossky, *MT*, 26; Light, *Image*, 51; 'Apophasis and Trinitarian Theology' (hereafter Apophasis, *Image*), *In the Image and Likeness* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1974), 24, originally published as 'L'Apophase et la théologie trinitaire', Collège philosophique, (Paris: Centre de Documentation Universitaire, 1953).

⁴⁰⁰ Lossky, Apophasis, *Image*, 26.

⁴⁰¹ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology* (hereafter *OT*), (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1984), 33.

to approach God; the divine names enable us in some sense even to enter into Him.⁴⁰²

Secondly, Lossky, in his earlier articles, demonstrates that the mystical union and ecstasy of Dionysius and the Christian East are in no way identical with the Neo-Platonic conception of union or ecstasy. The negative way of Plotinus is concerned with discarding all multiplicity to become united to the One. Plotinus rejects all the attributes proper to being, for at all levels it is necessarily multiple. It is here that Plotinus must have recourse to ecstasy, to that union that unites wholly subject and object of contemplation to the point that the subject is assumed in the simplicity of the One. To be united to the One necessarily means to discard all multiplicity of being in order to be simple as the One is simple. What is foundational to this unity is that Plotinus' God is incomprehensible because of the simplicity of the One. It is this conception of Plotinus that differentiates the Dionysian concept of mystical union. For Dionysius, God is incomprehensible in His nature; God's being is transcendent. 'Now, it is precisely the quality of incomprehensibility which, in Dionysius, is the one definition proper to God'.⁴⁰³

b. What they are

Now, in considering Lossky's perspective on the Eastern Orthodox apophatic method, it is best to quote him:

Dionysius distinguishes two possible theological ways. One — that of cataphatic or positive theology — proceeds by affirmations; the other — apophatic or negative theology — by negations. The first leads us to some knowledge of God, but is an imperfect way. The perfect way, the only way which is fitting in regard to God, who is of His very nature unknowable, is the second — which leads us finally to total ignorance. All knowledge has

⁴⁰² Lossky, *OT*, 33.

⁴⁰³ Lossky, *MT*, 26

as its object that which is. Now God is beyond all that exists. In order to approach Him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him, that is to say, all that which is. If in seeing God one can know what one sees, then one has not seen God in Himself but something intelligible, something which is inferior to him. It is by unknowing (*agnosia*) that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge.⁴⁰⁴

One can see that there are two ways that are espoused, but it is obvious that the apophatic way is to be preferred as the ‘perfect way’. But it does not mean that the affirmative way is to be completely neglected, for the two types of theology find their fundament in God Himself. ‘The conflict between negative theology and positive theology does not imply the illegitimacy of either of them, because the opposition finds its real foundation in God Himself: the difference between the divine Unions (*henóseis*) and divine Distinctions (*diakríseis*), between the hidden Essence (*húparxis, ousía*) and revealed Processions (*proódoi*)’.⁴⁰⁵

Lossky views both methods as analogously having their foundations in the Divine: the affirmative to God’s self revelation and the negative to the inaccessibility of the Divine Essence, or the distinction between God’s essence and energies. Cataphatic theology can be readily accomplished by studying God’s manifestations in creation and His sustaining work. The cataphatic way comes down to us in the processions of God. ‘God condescends toward us in the ‘energies’ in which He is manifested’.⁴⁰⁶

But in apophatic theology, we ascend, ‘we mount up towards Him in the ‘unions’ in which He remains incomprehensible by nature’.⁴⁰⁷ Apophatic theology is but a preparation for the desired goal, for ultimately the goal is ‘deification achieved by the power of the Holy Spirit’ and thus, creatures by acquiring this ‘grace of the Holy Spirit testify to the inaccessibility of the Divine Nature’.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 25.

⁴⁰⁵ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 207.

⁴⁰⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 39.

⁴⁰⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 39.

⁴⁰⁸ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 218.

To Lossky both methods have their respective purposes. He does not renounce positive knowledge, but rather views the affirmative method as having a different, yet all together legitimate purpose.⁴⁰⁹ Both methods of theology produce knowledge of the Truth. Cataphatic theology produces a positive knowledge of God based upon the same measure of His manifestation and sustaining providence in creation. Apophatic theology leads us, by transcending ourselves, and all that is, to union with the ‘transcendent Cause’, which is experiential or experimental knowledge.

It is obvious that this ‘union’, this ‘encounter’, is not rational knowledge, but instead, by means of successive negations, in relation to rational knowledge, a divine ‘Ignorance (*agnosía*)’. ‘There occurs a mysterious “union” with the Divine Light, which is the goal of negative theology. It is therefore evident that negative theology is not knowledge: knowledge relates to what is, God is not what is, He may be seized only by ignorance’.⁴¹⁰ Lossky, sharing with Florensky, makes the distinction between truth and Truth in the same way that he makes the distinction between tradition and Tradition. Florensky states that it is ‘necessary to keep in mind the fact that truth is truth precisely about the Truth, not about something else. In other words, truth finds itself in some sort of correspondence with the Truth’.⁴¹¹

2. The Apophatic Method

But what is the purpose of apophatic theology? According to Lossky, the purpose of the apophatic method is twofold. It is to safeguard the incomprehensibility and inaccessibility of the Divine nature from the objectifying effects of rationalism. This of course is a tool used against the upholders of Sophiology. For in Sophiology the divine Sophia is equated with God’s nature, his *ousia*. And all manner of knowledge is known about it. As Bulgakov clearly states, ‘we can say: the divinity of God constitutes the

⁴⁰⁹ Dimitru Stăniloae, ‘Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God’, Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (trans and ed.), *The Experience of God* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press), vol. 1, 95.

⁴¹⁰ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 214.

⁴¹¹ Florensky, *Pillar*, 107.

divine Sophia (or glory), while at the same time we assume that it is also ousia:

Ousia=Sophia=Glory'.⁴¹² Simultaneously, apophatic theology stresses that the goal of Christianity is existential, instead of intelligible knowledge it is union with God: that is, it safeguards the doctrine of union, deification.⁴¹³ We shall briefly look at these two purposes, but only after we consider the how of the apophatic method: ecstasy.

a. Ecstasy

How then does one go about this methodology? Lossky quotes the opening remarks of Dionysius' advice to Timothy, the recipient of his *Mystical Theology*, he must 'abandon all sense and "rational" operations, all that is sensible or intelligible, with what is as well as what is not, in order to be able to achieve in ignorance union with the One who surpasses all being and all knowledge'.⁴¹⁴

First then, negative theology is a type of purification, a *kátharsis*, an abandonment of all that is, both pure and impure.⁴¹⁵ It is a *metánoia*, a repentance, a 'consciousness of the failure of human understanding'.⁴¹⁶ To obtain this union with God, which surpasses the understanding, one must renounce and go beyond all the limits of all knowledge and therefore go beyond all that exists. 'Thus the negative way in theology happens to be an "exodus," i.e., literally, ecstasy (*ékstasis*)'.⁴¹⁷

Ecstasy to Lossky is the soul's ever-growing love and desire for God. It is a moving beyond itself, and outside itself, where intellectual knowledge disappears and the soul joins itself more and more in union to God, and then only love remains.⁴¹⁸ But is apophatic theology necessarily a theology of ecstasy? No, not necessarily replies Lossky.

⁴¹² Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia: the Wisdom of God* (hereafter *Sophia*)(NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1993), 33. This book is a revised edition of *The Wisdom of God: A Brief Summary of Sophiology*, trans. Patrick Thompson, O. Fielding Clarke and Xenia Braikevtic (NY: Paisly Press, and London: Williams and Norgate, 1937).

⁴¹³ Lossky, *The Vision of God* (SVS Press: Crestwood, NY, 1983). Lossky's *The Vision of God* is a detailed handling of the distinctions made between the East and the West concerning the concept of the 'vision of God' and how the theologians of the East and West treated them. See also the Introduction to *MT*.

⁴¹⁴ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 214, 215.

⁴¹⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 27.

⁴¹⁶ Lossky, *Apophasis*, 13.

⁴¹⁷ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 214.

⁴¹⁸ Lossky, *Darkness and Light in the Knowledge of God*, chapter 2 in *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1985), 37.

‘It is, above all, an attitude of mind which refuses to form concepts of God’.⁴¹⁹ This attitude excludes all philosophical abstractions and intellectual rationalisms that would conform the mysteries of God to human forms of thought. It is the kind of attitude that recognizes that the only rational concept that we can have of God is that He is incomprehensible. Thus apophatic theology is not interested in positive knowledge of God as it is in direct experience of God Himself. ‘This mystical union with God is a direct experience for it is apart from creation, apart from His theophanies...apart from His manifestations’.⁴²⁰ Again, Lossky follows Florensky in that this mystical life, which is union with God, is ‘inaccessible to the rational mind’.⁴²¹

Negative theology being necessarily apart from all creation is therefore the method that brings about the self-transcendence that is ecstatic. But Lossky also affirms that there are differing levels of this ‘school of contemplation’, or apophatic method.

This contemplation of the divine Wisdom can be practiced in varying degrees, with greater or lesser intensity: whether it be a lifting up of the spirit towards God and away from creatures ...; whether it be a meditation on the Holy Scriptures in which God hides Himself; whether it be through the dogmas of the Church or through her liturgical life; whether, finally, it be through ecstasy that we penetrate to the divine mystery, this experience of God will always be the fruit of the apophatic attitude.⁴²²

But still, it is ecstasy that is a preparation and anticipation for ‘theosis’. But, neither the ecstasy nor theosis, nor anything else, can be achieved by mere human effort.

‘The union that surpasses the understanding’ with the Divine Light, union which is achieved in ignorance and the abandonment of all that is, presupposes a ‘unifying power’ (*henopoiòs dúnamis*), grace to which the intelligence is united with what exceeds its nature and reaches to the divine by renouncing itself and by coming divine.⁴²³

⁴¹⁹ Lossky, *MT*, 38-39.

⁴²⁰ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 218.

⁴²¹ Florensky, *Pillar*, 7.

⁴²² Lossky, *MT*, 41, 42.

⁴²³ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 220.

Here we can see that ultimately, according to Lossky, it is the grace of God by the power of the Holy Spirit that accomplishes not only the goal of negative theology but also its self-renouncing means. It is only by the power of God that the contemplative is moved beyond his own nature, renouncing it, and by becoming, by God's grace, divine himself.

b. The Apophatic Goal: Incomprehensibility and Union

Negative theology is the preparation for God, but it is God who pours out His grace to the individual in the union of the mystical experience. Thus, apophaticism is not itself revelation, but a 'receptacle of revelation: they [the contemplatives] arrive at the personal presence of a hidden God'.⁴²⁴ This union is clearly an encounter with the person of God Himself, but the Divine essence still remains incomprehensible and unknowable.

But then one wonders what does one encounter when encountering God if the Divine Nature remains inaccessible and unknowable? First, it must be said, this encounter is made through, by and because of God's love in His very presence.

Denys says that the Apostle Paul exclaimed, 'I live, but not myself, but Christ lives in me' (Gal. 2,20) after having become a participant in the 'ecstatic power' (*dínamis ekstatiké*) of the Divine love, which requires those like this to cease from belonging to themselves to belong only to the object of their love. By His love God proceeds from His Essence in the Energies; as Cause of love He moves towards Himself all created objects, forcing one to detach from one-self to rise towards God.⁴²⁵

Here, somewhat like Aristotle's conception of God, God draws all creation to Himself, but unlike Aristotle's God, by His love and concern. And so, it is divine love that is encountered, and since God is love, it is He that is encountered. God is personally and fully present in the encounter yet still remains incomprehensible and unknowable in His essence. One may be able logically to differentiate a person from their essence, but in the end it is an impossibility to separate them. The above statement made by Lossky indicates

⁴²⁴ Lossky, *OT*, 32.

⁴²⁵ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 220.

that God is encountered as a person in and through His energies, but yet, what of His nature?

‘The divine nature,’ says St. Gregory Palamas, ‘must be called at the same time incommunicable and, in a sense communicable; we attain participation in the nature of God and yet he remains totally inaccessible. We must affirm both things at once and must preserve the antimony as the criterion of piety’. St. Gregory Palamas resolves this antimony, without suppressing it, by preserving the deep-rooted mystery which dwells intact within the ineffable distinction between the essence (*ousía*) and its natural energies.⁴²⁶

God’s nature is encountered, even more so, it is participated in: there is union without God’s nature ever being known or comprehended. Again, following Florensky’s method, it is this antinomy that preserves the mystery that is inherent in God.

c. Its Correspondence in God

Lossky attributes this to his understanding and interpretation of the *unions* and *distinctions* that Dionysius writes about. Lossky states that ‘Above all the *diakríseis* represents the Persons of the Holy Trinity, these are of the Distinctions in the depths of the same super-essential divine “Union” – Processions residing within the same Essence, being at the same time “union” and “distinctions”’.⁴²⁷

This is not exactly what Dionysius says, but it is clearly what he means. In *The Divine Names* Dionysius says this:

Those fully initiated into our theological tradition assert that the divine unities are the hidden and permanent, supreme foundations of a steadfastness which is more than ineffable and more than unknowable. They say that the differentiations within the Godhead have to do with the benign processions and revelations of God... Theology, in dealing with what is beyond being, resorts also to differentiation. I am not referring solely to the fact that, within a unity, each of the indivisible persons is grounded in an unconfused and unmixed way. I mean also that the attributes of the transcendently divine generation are not interchangeable. The Father is the only source of that Godhead which in fact is beyond all being and the

⁴²⁶ Lossky, *The Vision of God* (SVS Press: Crestwood, New York, 1983), 157.

⁴²⁷ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 207. Williams implies that Lossky is misrepresenting Dionysius, I disagree. Williams, *Via Negativa*, 104.

Father is not a Son nor is the Son a Father. Each of the divine persons continues to possess his own praiseworthy characteristics, so that one has here examples of unions and differentiations in the inexpressible unity and subsistence of God.⁴²⁸

What is obvious is that Dionysius believed there exists within the divine essence distinctions and these distinctions are the divine ‘individual persons’, and ‘processions’ from the divine unity. What is not obvious from the context is that the differentiations made by Dionysius concerning the divine persons are the same differentiations made of the processions of the energies of God. Nevertheless, for Lossky it is affirmative theology that ‘corresponds to the procession of the Divinity in the Energies, and its manifestation in the world by Jesus Christ (*theopháneia*)’.⁴²⁹ While, it is negative theology that corresponds to ‘the rise of the creatures towards deification (*théosis*), or to their rapture in the ecstasy which is accomplished as theosis by the Holy Spirit’.⁴³⁰

The divine mystery of the Incarnation is said by Lossky to be the height of both cataphatic and apophatic theologies. It is the height of cataphatic theology for it is the supreme theophanic manifestation. Yet, it is also the height of apophatic theology for it still ‘retains for us its apophatic character’. Lossky quoting Dionysius: ‘In the humanity of Christ the Super-essential was manifested in human substance without ceasing to be hidden after this manifestation, or, to express myself after a more heavenly fashion, in this manifestation itself’.⁴³¹ ‘The affirmations of which the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ are the object have all the force of the most pre-eminent negations’.⁴³²

For both Dionysius and Lossky the manifestation of Christ in His humanity is itself a hiding of the ‘true’ nature of God, for it causes a person to formulate rational positive concepts of the divine nature which are only intended as guides to lead to the true

⁴²⁸ Colm Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Paulist Press: New York, 1987), 62.

⁴²⁹ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 221.

⁴³⁰ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 221.

⁴³¹ Dionysius, ‘Epist. III’, P.G., III, 1069 B, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 39.

⁴³² Dionysius, ‘Epist. IV’, P.G., III, 1072 B, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 40.

contemplation of ‘that which transcends all understanding’.⁴³³ Again, Lossky does not renounce affirmative or positive knowledge, but only believes that it plays a lesser part in experiencing the personal encounter with God. Cataphatic theology is viewed as a ladder, or a series of steps that the soul can ascend that leads to contemplation. As one ascends the steps of concepts concerning God, it is necessary to safeguard against making the loftier concepts and images, such as the beauty of God Himself manifested in His creation, into ‘an idol of God’.⁴³⁴ Moving from cataphatic theology to the apophatic disposition, gradually one moves from speculation to contemplation, from ‘knowledge to experience’.⁴³⁵ The apophatic method casts off positive concepts that ‘shackle the spirit’ at each step of the cataphatic ladder, and reveals ‘boundless horizons of contemplation’.⁴³⁶ Therefore, there are differing levels of contemplation and theology according to the ‘differing capacities of human understanding’.⁴³⁷

Though opposites, both cataphatic and apophatic theology serve their respective purposes. Affirmative theology has its limits in that which can be known, it is the way of ‘positions’ (*théseis*) and is a ‘descent from superior degrees of beings to the inferior’. Negative theology is accomplished by ‘abstractions’ or ‘detachments’ (*aphairéseis*), not in the rationalistic sense but in a spiritual one, and is an ‘ascent towards the divine incomprehensibility’.⁴³⁸ Lossky views both methods as valuable and notes, using a phrase from Dionysius, that both ‘testify to God conjointly and lead the “children of the resurrection” to the contemplation of the divine light’.⁴³⁹

Lossky clarifies in his works that negative theology is not a corrective to affirmative theology. But it is a recognition that God is beyond all that can be objectively known. Thus knowing Him is therefore no longer a question of rational knowledge,

⁴³³ Lossky, *MT*, 40.

⁴³⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 40.

⁴³⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 40.

⁴³⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 40.

⁴³⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 40.

⁴³⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 28.

⁴³⁹ Lossky, *La Théologie*, 219.

whether it is affirmative or negative, but of encounter, or union. As Dionysius concludes in his *Mystical Theology*:

When we make affirmations and negations about things which are inferior to it [the Cause of all things], we affirm and deny nothing about the Cause itself, which, being wholly apart from all things, is above all affirmation, as the supremacy of Him who, being in His simplicity freed from all things and beyond everything, is above all denial.⁴⁴⁰

3. Apophatic Method Applied: Foundation of the Personal

We come now to what is one of Lossky's major contributions to Orthodox theology: his theology of the personal. It is all because of his application of the apophatic method to the Holy Trinity. Drawing off Dionysius' attack on neo-Platonist definitions, Lossky quotes and interprets:

‘He is neither One, nor Unity’ (*oudè hev, oudè henótes*). In his treatise *Of the Divine Names*, in examining the name of the One, which can be applied to God, he shows its insufficiency and compares with it another and ‘most sublime’ name – that of the Trinity, which teaches us that God is neither one nor many but that He transcends this antinomy being unknowable in what He is.⁴⁴¹

To Lossky, God is unknowable in ‘what’ He is, but Lossky never says that God is unknowable in ‘who’ He is. God transcends all appellations, whether positive or negative. God even transcends the tension of antinomies, but, time and time again Lossky speaks of ‘encounter’, ‘union’, ‘mystical experience’, ‘presence and fullness’ and ‘the experience of the unfathomable depths of God’.⁴⁴² For Lossky, God is not the God of philosophers but is the God of revelation.⁴⁴³ Thus, it is only by God's grace and revelation that one can even

⁴⁴⁰ Lossky, *MT*, 29.

⁴⁴¹ Lossky, *MT*, 31.

⁴⁴² Lossky, *MT*, 33.

⁴⁴³ Lossky echoes Pascal's sentiment, which is also used by Florensky in the last paragraph of his book, *Pillar*, 348, and in appendix XXV. Paschal's ‘Amulet’.

know that God is incomprehensible. In referencing Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*

Lossky states,

The very awareness of the inaccessibility of 'the unknown God' cannot, according to him, be acquired except by grace: 'by this God given wisdom which is the power of the Father'. This awareness of the incomprehensibility of the divine nature thus corresponds to an experience: to a meeting with the personal God of revelation.⁴⁴⁴

Thus, Lossky vehemently defends the concept of the incomprehensibility of God for the very reason stated at the beginning of this section. To objectify God as a rational concept to be known means one does not really know God on a personal basis, but only in a philosophical and rational sense. Applying the apophatic method recognizes that God is beyond objectification, that is, that He is beyond our knowledge, and thus incomprehensible in both His nature and His Persons. God's 'incomprehensibility is rooted in the fact that God is not only Nature but also three Persons'.⁴⁴⁵ And this is only arrived at by grace, by God's energies, or in a personal encounter with God Himself, and thus union. N. O. Lossky sees in this fact Lossky's combating Bulgakov's Sophiological fallacy of thinking 'the Divine nature is the manifestation of all the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity'.⁴⁴⁶ Indeed, to Lossky, relying on the Fathers, the Divine nature and the Three Person of the Trinity are 'apophatically equivalent'.

The Fathers, in the application of the apophatic method, use the image of Moses drawing near to God in the divine darkness to express the complete incomprehensibility of God's nature. In the darkness Moses leaves behind him 'all that can be seen or known; there remains to him only the invisible and unknowable, but in the darkness is God. For God makes His dwelling there where our understanding and our concepts can gain no

⁴⁴⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 34.

⁴⁴⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 64.

⁴⁴⁶ N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 397.

admittance'.⁴⁴⁷ Thus, St Gregory Nazianzen can say, alluding to a passage from the *Timaeus*, 'It is difficult to conceive of God, but to define Him in words is impossible'.⁴⁴⁸

St John of Damascus also confirms in like fashion:

God, then, is infinite and incomprehensible, and all that is comprehensible about Him is His infinity and incomprehensibility. All that we can say cataphatically concerning God does not show forth His nature but the things that relate to His nature (*tà perì tèn phúsin*).... God does not belong to the class of existing things: not that He has no existence, but that He is above all existing things, nay even above existence itself. For if all forms of knowledge have to do with what exists, assuredly that which is above knowledge must certainly be also above essence (*hupèr ousían*); and, conversely, that which is above essence will also be above knowledge.⁴⁴⁹

To set up his reasoning about the personal, Lossky asks this question: 'It is time to ask whether Dionysius' apophasis can be considered a supreme *theologia*--whether it transfers beyond the knowable the Trinity of divine Persons—or whether it goes beyond this in its negative rush toward a superessential identity which, at the same time, would be a suprapersonal Unity'.⁴⁵⁰ His answer is purposely misleading.

Indeed, if one follows the Dionysian apophatic method the conclusion is all that one is left with is 'the cessation of all speech and all thought'.⁴⁵¹ And, all theological discourse concerning the Trinity 'ought finally to be swept away by apophasis'.⁴⁵² But, he continues, one should not be too hasty to 'draw conclusions about the supratrinitarian consequences of Dionysian apophasis'.⁴⁵³ For Lossky, to draw such a conclusion would be to misunderstand the rule of the non-opposition of opposites. It is not the way of 'eminence', as can be found in the Middle Platonists or, according to Lossky, Aquinas, which seeks to reinstate signification to God apart from the human means of doing so.

⁴⁴⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 35.

⁴⁴⁸ As quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 34.

⁴⁴⁹ *De fide orthodoxa*, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 36.

⁴⁵⁰ Lossky, *Apophasis*, *Image*, 24.

⁴⁵¹ Lossky, *Apophasis*, *Image*, 26.

⁴⁵² Lossky, *Apophasis*, *Image*, 26.

⁴⁵³ Lossky, *Apophasis*, *Image*, 26.

In the Dionysian method, negations surpass and triumph over affirmations. All attributions, even the use of superlatives, never refer to the divine nature itself, but refer to the processions and energies. The rule of non-opposition inherently implies that both concepts, that of speaking of the economic manifestations of the Trinity and that of the complete unknowability of the divine nature, be held simultaneously. But it also recognizes that to even speak of the attributes of God the concept of the Unity of the divine nature presupposes the distinctions. By apophasis one must go beyond affirmations and enter into Trinitarian theology.

Thus, in the apophatic method, the rule of non-opposition presides and ‘excludes every attempt to reduce the Trinity of hypostases to a primordial, transpersonal Unity’.⁴⁵⁴ “The transcendent Deity is celebrated at the same time both as Unity and Trinity, in fact, He is not knowable, either by us or by any other kind of being, whether as Unity or Trinity.”⁴⁵⁵ And moreover, “the Unknowable, the Superessential, the Good-in-itself, He who is—I mean the *triadic Henad* [or Unitrinity]—cannot be attained either in word or thought.” Thus true transcendence, which Christians alone can confess, belongs to the “Unitrinity,” and this contradictory term must express the “synopsis” of the One and the Three, the object of *Mystical Theology*.⁴⁵⁶

How then, in the face of such radical unknowability, does one speak of the divine? The answer is the ultimate Christian paradox. ‘He is the God to Whom I say “Thou,” Who calls me, Who reveals Himself as personal, as living’.⁴⁵⁷ Here is where Lossky is truly a theologian. God is personal. He is a Person. All that can be said of Him, all descriptors, can never get to the core of what He is, to His essence, because He is personal. To do so would be to determine God, and God is ‘determined by nothing, and this is precisely why He is personal’.⁴⁵⁸ For what a person is, is unknowable. That which is the distinction in

⁴⁵⁴ Lossky, Apophasis, *Image*, 27.

⁴⁵⁵ Lossky, Apophasis, *Image*, 27. *De div. nom.*, 13, 3.

⁴⁵⁶ Lossky, Apophasis, *Image*, 28. *De div. nom.*, 1, 5.

⁴⁵⁷ Lossky, *OT*, 32.

⁴⁵⁸ Lossky, *OT*, 33.

the “united by distinction and distinct by Union” is an ‘*absolute* difference, which can only be personal’.⁴⁵⁹ And the ‘principle of personal non-opposition, the root of the unknowability of the transcendent God-Trinity’ is ‘the object of “theology” properly so called, which can only be “mystical.”’⁴⁶⁰

It is mystical because the Personal Triune God calls us by His love to enter into His presence, to come ‘face to face’ with Him who is unknowable. It is what St. Gregory of Nyssa describes in his commentary on the Song of Songs. It is the

mystical marriage of the soul (and the Church) with God... The more God satisfies it with His presence, the more it thirsts for a presence which is more total, and rushes headlong in the pursuit. The more it is fulfilled with God, the more it discovers Him as transcendent. Thus the soul is penetrated with the divine presence, but sinks ever deeper into the inexhaustible essence, inaccessible in as much as it is essence’.⁴⁶¹

He calls us into personal relationship with Him, and this call simultaneously reveals and conceals Him, ‘we cannot reach Him unless it be in this relationship which, to exist, demands that in His essence God remains forever out of reach’.⁴⁶²

Thus it is, as Lossky says, only the Christian who can truly experience this transcendence. The apophasis of Dionysius and the Christian East reveals the unknowable God as

other, that is to say, always new, inexhaustible. This is the relationship between the person of God, a nature as such inaccessible... and the person of man, man even in his nothingness, as a person who, in the union, does not become abolished but is transfigured and remains, or rather fully becomes, a person.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁹ Lossky, *Apophasis, Image*, 28. *De div. nom.*, 2, 4.

⁴⁶⁰ Lossky, *Apophasis, Image*, 29.

⁴⁶¹ Lossky, *OT*, 33.

⁴⁶² Lossky, *OT*, 34.

⁴⁶³ Lossky, *OT*, 34.

For the Christian, the person (as opposed to Sartre's hell) exists only in relationship with the 'other', that is, the other is the very means of becoming a fully human person. God is unknowable because He is a Person, but His Personhood does not limit but 'transfigures' us by His grace to become the true persons we were meant to be. As we will see later in the section on the person, the concept of the person is not explicit in the Fathers. To arrive at the concept of the person there is much here that is borrowed from Russian religious philosophy, specifically from Soloviev and Florensky. But this will be dealt with in full in the next chapter.

To sum up Lossky then, apophatic theology is, above all, an attitude 'which transforms the whole of theology into a contemplation of the mysteries of revelation... it forbids us to follow natural ways of thought and to form concepts which would usurp the place of spiritual realities'.⁴⁶⁴ For Lossky, theological method is not a working through of abstract intellectual concepts, but is contemplative: 'raising the mind to those realities which pass all understanding'.⁴⁶⁵ Thus, the dogmas of Church are presented to the rational mind as antinomies, truths that the human reason cannot fathom, and so safeguards the mysteries of Christianity from rationalism.

It is not a question of suppressing the antinomy by adapting dogma to our understanding, but of a change of heart and mind enabling us to attain to the contemplation of the reality which reveals itself to us as it raises us to God, and unites us, according to our several capacities, to Him.⁴⁶⁶

For Lossky, as well as the entire Eastern Church, Christianity is not philosophical speculation, but is 'essentially a communion with the living God'.⁴⁶⁷ The unknowability and incomprehensibility of God's nature does not mean that God is unknowable, but according to Lossky, just the opposite:

⁴⁶⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 42.

⁴⁶⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 43.

⁴⁶⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 43.

⁴⁶⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 42.

The apophatic way does not lead to an absence, to an utter emptiness; for the unknowable God of the Christian is not the impersonal God of the philosophers. It is to the Holy Trinity, ‘superessential, more than divine and more than good’ (*Triàs huperousie, kai huperthee, kai huperagathe*) that the author of the *Mystical Theology* commends himself in entering upon the way which is to bring him to a presence and fullness which are without measure.⁴⁶⁸

And finally, St Gregory Palamas says, ‘The super-essential nature of God is not a subject for speech or thought or even contemplation, for it is far removed from all that and more than unknowable, being founded upon the uncircumscribed might of the celestial spirits—incomprehensible and ineffable to all forever.’⁴⁶⁹

It is this concept of the incomprehensibility of God applied by St. Basil, not only to the divine essence, but also to created essences that becomes the foundation of Lossky’s Christian anthropology. Lossky believe that all essences cannot be expressed in concepts:

In contemplating any object we analyse its properties: it is this which enables us to form concepts. But this analysis can in no case exhaust the content of the object of perception. There will always remain an ‘irrational residue’ which escapes analysis and which cannot be expressed in concepts; it is the unknowable depths of things, that which constitutes their true, indefinable essence.⁴⁷⁰

According to the above concept even when one encounters another human person there remains something that is ‘un-objectifiable’, ‘un-analyzable’, something that remains a mystery, and it is this that constitutes for Lossky, the person. Later, we will see this apophasis applied to man in the section on the person. But for now, we begin our understanding of Florovsky’s doctrine of creation.

⁴⁶⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 43.

⁴⁶⁹ As quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 37.

⁴⁷⁰ Lossky, *MT*, 33.

Chapter 4: The Doctrine of Creation

Introduction

This chapter is a demonstration of the creation theology and anthropology of both Florovsky and Lossky. Here we will see how their respective views of Tradition and methodology are worked out in their theologies. Florovsky's theology demonstrates a dependence that is wholly patristic, while Lossky's theology demonstrates a dependence on patristic and Russian religious sources. Here, I will only consider specifically their perspectives on theology and anthropology in relation to their doctrine of creation. This will obviously limit in two ways. First, not all of their theology will be looked at, only that which relates specifically to their anthropology in creation. Secondly, not all of their anthropology will be considered, only that which relates to creation. By narrowing the study thus, I will leave out considerable amounts of both their perspectives on both God and humanity. And although I might stray from these explicit boundaries, hopefully it will not be too far a field. Here, I should add, I use the terms man, mankind, and humanity interchangeably. Not because of insensitivity, but because of consistency of nomenclature with the texts, antiquated though they be.

Before we consider the doctrine of creation of each theologian I think it is important here to give a little more background on the tenets of Russian religious philosophy and Sophiology. Although the first inklings of Russian religious philosophy were seen in Skovoroda⁴⁷¹ and the senior Slavophiles, specifically Kireyevsky and Khomiakov,⁴⁷² they did not provide an over-all system of Russian thought. 'This work was done much later by Vladimir Soloviev who may be regarded as the first Russian

⁴⁷¹ Zenkovsky, *History*, 53-69.

⁴⁷² Zenkovsky, *History*, 180-227.

thinker to have created an original system of philosophy'.⁴⁷³ It was Soloviev who developed the 'Russian metaphysics of All-Unity', which was in reality 'a new school within the classical Western philosophical tradition'.⁴⁷⁴ Horuzhy points-out that it was this metaphysics of the All-Unity that was at the heart of Russian religious philosophy that was at odds with the Tradition of the Orthodox Church. This was because Russian philosophy adopted the Western philosophical tradition's 'methodological and epistemological postulates which in turn defined what philosophy is and how its discourse should be organized; it also accepted the tradition's ontology'.⁴⁷⁵ Its nearest links were with German philosophy. This borrowing caused an obvious tension with the Russian mind. 'Could the spiritual realities that nourished Russian philosophy be expressed within the framework of Western tradition?'⁴⁷⁶ The answer is yes, but only to a limited extent. There was common ground between Western philosophy and Russian thought and 'the optimal strategy for Russian thought was to seek this ground and exploit it as fully as possible'.⁴⁷⁷ It was this that the Russian religious philosophers developed during the Russian religious renaissance. The common ground was the concept of the All-Unity. 'The Orthodox sources of Russian philosophy and the ontological basis of the classical Western tradition found their meeting point in the idea of the All-Unity'.⁴⁷⁸ But what is the metaphysics of All-Unity? 'The Russian metaphysics of All-Unity belongs to the line of Christian Platonism, its type of ontology a so-called "panentheism," according to which the world and all its phenomena are imbued with the essence which is in God'.⁴⁷⁹ It is the hangover of the metaphysics of the World-Soul of Platonism. Horuzhy notes that although the All-Unity found great success in Russian religious philosophy, its limitation were becoming very apparent at the time of the revolution. The metaphysics of All-Unity 'left out vital aspects of Russian

⁴⁷³ N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 15-41.

⁴⁷⁴ Horuzhy, Neo-Patristic, 311.

⁴⁷⁵ Horuzhy, Neo-Patristic, 312.

⁴⁷⁶ Horuzhy, Neo-Patristic, 313.

⁴⁷⁷ Horuzhy, Neo-Patristic, 313.

⁴⁷⁸ Horuzhy, Neo-Patristic, 314.

⁴⁷⁹ Horuzhy, Neo-Patristic, 314.

spirituality—above all, anthropology, Orthodoxy’s views on man in relation to God’.⁴⁸⁰ The limitations of the metaphysics of All-Unity had become obvious. And it was only by returning to the Tradition of the Church concerning anthropology that the real answers were to be found.

During the Russian religious renaissance many of the secular Russian philosophers were returning to the Orthodox Church. The impasse that developed as a result of Western rationalism adopted by Russian philosophers could not be resolved. The inner conflict of the Russian mind was due to the fact that the Russian mind was ‘concerned with other perspectives than those which were revealed to Russia through the prism of Western secular philosophy’.⁴⁸¹ But as Zenkovsky confesses, there is a way, a path that is open to Russians that is the clear solution to philosophical problems.

In part we Russian bear the West *within ourselves* even today; we are determined by its spiritual searchings, and fall inevitably into *its* impasses. But in part we stand on another path, a path which is opened to us by the Orthodox view of culture and life, of man and nature. We stand, as it were, on the threshold—and perhaps have already partly crossed this threshold—of philosophic constructions defined by the insights provided by Orthodoxy.⁴⁸²

It is in this category that the Russian religious philosophers who returned to the Orthodox Church belonged. These philosophers who used patristic and liturgic sources, who used the Tradition of the Church as the basis of their thought and insights were more philosophers than they were theologians. Of special note here are those who attempted to find a true basis in the Church of the All-Unity, that is, those who incorporated it as Sophia: Fr. Pavel Florensky and Fr. Sergius Bulgakov. These two, because of their experiences, saw the world as shot-through with God. They experienced the Divine in the creation. Their theology attempted to explain just how this connection between the

⁴⁸⁰ Horuzhy, *Neo-Patristic*, 314.

⁴⁸¹ Zenkovsky, *History*, 924.

⁴⁸² Zenkovsky, *History*, 924.

creation and the Creator was possible. Anyone who has had such an experience will not easily dismiss their perceptions.

The main problems that both Florovsky and Lossky had with those who supported Sophiology were very obvious and are as follows: Sophia was equal to God's ousia manifested, and thus could be known; the concept of the act of creation as not radically free (Sophiology based it on God's desire to apply the over-abundance of his love); and that the Creator was not completely and utterly distinct from creation (Sophia was the connection between God and creation); and finally, that there was a certain type of determinism concerning humanity's freedom. My purpose in the following is not to argue whether or not these points are legitimate. Nor is my purpose here concerning the interaction with Sophiology to give a detailed analysis of the contradistinctions Florovsky and Lossky are making, but rather, to merely point out in a broad and general sense the fact of them and how each uniquely responded. My purpose is not to discuss all similarities and dissimilarities. My purpose is only to show that these points, whether real or imagined, were what Florovsky and Lossky wrote in response to.

I do not believe that Bulgakov or Florensky can be dismissed without considering what is positive in their works (as Florovsky especially did of Florensky). Much of their work is profitable theology. It is somewhat of an injustice on Florovsky's part to reject all of Florensky's theology because it does not fit his mould of what theology should be. As we have seen above, Florovsky criticizes Florensky's *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* as demonstrating 'in the clearest possible way every ambiguity and failing in the religious-philosophical movement', it is 'deliberately and eminently subjective' and he 'had no sense for history'.⁴⁸³ With this critique I wonder if we actually read the same book. Florensky's book is replete with patristic and liturgic sources and even appeals to the ascetic Tradition of the Church in a very neopatristic synthesis fashion. All this can be said of Bulgakov's works as well (though Sophia is not as systematically pervasive in *The*

⁴⁸³ Florovsky, *Ways*, Part II, CW VI, 276-277.

Pillar and Ground of the Truth as in Bulgakov's *On Divine Humanity*). Aside from their metaphysical All-Unity Sophiological system,⁴⁸⁴ there is much in their theologies that is of the type of 'true theology'. Outside their commitment to Sophia, their dogma is consistent with the Orthodox Tradition. It is this theology, as we will see, that Lossky intuitively senses and uses. And it is the entirety of the works of both these theologians that Florovsky rejects.

A. Florovsky's Doctrine of Creation

Introduction

What is demonstrated in Florovsky's doctrine of creation is the very commitment that we see in his views on Tradition and methodology. For Florovsky, although he theoretically believes Tradition to be the Holy Spirit in the Church, there is a deep need for all theology to be historically rooted. Whatever the theological concept or idea stated, it must be historically found in the Fathers and tied to a specific text. But the idea must also be consistent with the *consensus patrum*. All these strictures are found in Florovsky's work, so much so that in the end his theology ends up resembling a retelling of patristic theology applied to specific problems. But I must add that, here, in his doctrine of creation, is where we will find some of his most creative theological work as he applies patristics to the undisclosed problem of Sophiology. But still, his over-emphasis that all theology be historical leaves little room for theology that does not fit his preconceived agenda. Yet, over-all, it is indeed Traditional Orthodox theology.

As was noted earlier, Florovsky's works on creation were hidden contradistinctions against Bulgakov's Sophiology. Or, as Schmemmann notes, these articles were 'written on topics related to the current debate in Russian ecclesiastical circles. Father Georges does not join the debate, but quietly offers a pondered and weighty description of the

⁴⁸⁴ Alexander Schmemmann believed Sophiology to be unnecessary, but one wonders if it is the same type of unnecessary as all things beautiful. Alexis Klimoff, 'Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy', *SVTQ*, 49, no. 1-2, 2005, 81.

authoritative judgment of the Church'.⁴⁸⁵ But why does he remain so quiet? Florovsky actually gives a reason himself by contributing a one-line sentence in his *Ways*. Before his very acerbic critique of Florensky he graciously absolves Bulgakov: 'Yet Bulgakov confidently returned from religious philosophy to theology, and this provided him with an historical advantage and filial freedom'.⁴⁸⁶ Alexander Klimoff, in his article 'Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy', offers three speculations for the reason for Florovsky's lack of public polemics: Florovsky's loyalty to the senior Bulgakov; Florovsky's desire to stay away from political and jurisdictional disputes; and Florovsky's desire to not be associated with those who wished to falsely vilify Bulgakov.⁴⁸⁷ Klimoff also abstracts from Florovsky's creation articles a possible list of principle objections that he might have had, which I think is an accurate abstraction:

--Sophiology diverges from the traditional (patristic) Orthodox teaching on fundamental issues like creation;

--It falsely claims to be sanctified by historical precedent;

--It represents a retreat from historical religion into abstractions of speculative philosophy;

--Its sources are not only non-patristic, but to a significant degree non-Orthodox (Protestant mysticism) and non-Christian (the occult).⁴⁸⁸

What we will see in Florovsky's articles on creation is the positive side of this negative list of critiques. Florovsky never diverges from the traditional patristic Orthodox teaching. He is always adamant about historical precedent. He never uses speculation to abstract concepts. And his source material is always patristic, Orthodox and Christian. With this let us begin with the analysis of these commitments as demonstrated in his creation theology and anthropology.

⁴⁸⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, 'Roll of Honour', *SVSQ*, vol. 2, Fall 1953, 7.

⁴⁸⁶ Florovsky, *Ways*, part II, CW VI, 276.

⁴⁸⁷ Klimoff, 'Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy', *SVTQ*, 49, no.1-2 (2005), 79-80.

⁴⁸⁸ Klimoff, 'Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy', *SVTQ*, 49, no.1-2 (2005), 79.

Although it is sometimes expedient to separate *economia* from *theologia*, in the study of Christian anthropology they must not be divorced, indeed, it may not be possible to do so. We must consider humanity in the light of the very God who created it, but this is clearly only by way of contrast. As Christians, what we know of humanity we know because God has revealed it to us. And although we can look to the creation to know some things about God, no clear understanding of humanity can be formed until we grasp who and what God is in and of Himself. Yet, on the other hand, no clear understanding of God can be had until the *economía* is first properly ordered and understood, until we fully understand God's dealings with man. This is the principle that Florovsky adopts from St. Athanasius when developing his view of creation.

Florovsky wrote three articles concerning creation: 'The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy',⁴⁸⁹ 'Creation and Creaturehood',⁴⁹⁰ and 'St Athanasius' Concept of Creation'.⁴⁹¹ Each follows consistently with Florovsky's understanding of patristic tradition and each reads like a veritable who is who of a patristic reader. Though the three articles share a lot of the same material, the 'Athanasius' article, which was much later (34 years later), shows the importance of the foundational work St. Athanasius pioneered in separating out theology proper from God's work in creation, or God from His *economía*: more specifically, God's *ousía* from His *boúlesis*. Florovsky points out that the distinction that St. Athanasius makes is crucial in understanding creation. The other two articles, 'The Idea of Creation' and 'Creation and Creaturehood', are a more systematic comprehension of Florovsky's theology of creation. His main point of the three articles is simply this: humanity is *free*. And by extension, though he does not explicitly say this, all

⁴⁸⁹ Georges Florovsky, 'The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy', (hereafter Idea) originally appeared in *The Eastern Churches Quarterly*, 1928, Vol. 8, No.3, 53-77, which was a revised addition of 'L'idée de la création dans la philosophie chrétienne', *Logos: Revue Internationale de la Synthèse Orthodoxe*, No. 1, 3-30.

⁴⁹⁰ Georges Florovsky, 'Creation and Creaturehood', (hereafter Creation) CW, Vol. 3, 43-78. Originally appeared in Russian in *Studies of the Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris*, 1928, No. 1, 176-212.

⁴⁹¹ Georges Florovsky, 'St. Athanasius' Concept of Creation', (hereafter Athanasius) CW, Vol. 4, 39-78. The article originally appeared in *Studia Patristica*, 1962, Vol. 6, ed. F.L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie Verlag), *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, No. 81, 1962), 36-57.

philosophical determinism is overcome by this personal freedom. And these two main points are against the foundation of Sophiology.

His argument is this: 1. The creation is absolutely contingent. The creation is of the will and good pleasure of God, and thus, there is no necessity for creation in creation itself. 2. God, the Creator, is absolutely distinct, from His creation. And since the creation is contingent, there is no necessity internally in God. The creation is absolutely *other* and is *the outside* in comparison to God. (The ‘Athanasius’ article emphasizes these first two points, while the other two articles emphasize all three.) 3. Since the creation is a real substance *other* than God, the creation is, in the most real sense, independent of God and is, therefore, absolutely *free*. This is of primary importance to Florovsky throughout all his thought, because it is ‘the ground of all his thinking about human freedom and grace’.⁴⁹² It is the free will of the individual person, empowered by grace, that is for Florovsky the basis of all ascetic achievement, and therefore, of all participation in the divine nature, that is, theosis. Free will is also foundational for all personalism. God created mankind freely and made it completely *other*. Therefore, humanity, which is completely autonomous of God, inherently possesses this freedom.

The whole development of these three points is in contradistinction to what Florovsky, rightly or wrongly, real or perceived, viewed as the concepts of Sophiology. He viewed Sophiology as a hangover from the metaphysics of All-Unity. The following quotes taken from Bulgakov’s *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*,⁴⁹³ which are ‘the clearest statement of his mature position’,⁴⁹⁴ communicate these concepts.

1. Creation is not heterogeneous from God

Alongside the divine and eternal world exists the world of creaturely being established by God in time. And God created it from ‘nothing’... There can

⁴⁹² Blane, *Florovsky*, 297.

⁴⁹³ Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia: the Wisdom of God* (hereafter *Sophia*) (NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1993). This book is a revised edition of *The Wisdom of God: A Brief Summary of Sophiology*, trans. Patrick Thompson, O. Fielding Clarke and Xenia Braiketic (NY: Paisly Press, and London: Williams and Norgate, 1937).

⁴⁹⁴ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, xx, from the forward by Christopher Bamford.

be no source of the world but God. This is as much to say that the world has been established in its being by God, that it has been created by God by his own power and *out of himself*. Therefore *the creature is distinct from the deity itself not in respect of the source of its being, but only in respect of the particular mode of its reception of that being*.⁴⁹⁵

The divinity in God constitutes the divine Sophia (or glory), while at the same time we assume that it is also the ousia: Ousia=Sophia=Glory.⁴⁹⁶

Sophia so far as the hypostasis of the Father is concerned, connotes predominantly Ousia—prior to its own revelation as Sophia.⁴⁹⁷

[Sophia] stands for the wisdom and the truth of all that is worthy of participating in divine being, namely, of *everything that exists*, since we cannot conceive of the existence of any source of being other than or opposed to the divine. All the manifold forms of being, as many as, having their own specific character, possess a word or an idea, are thereby *included in the content of divine Sophia*.⁴⁹⁸

Creatureliness as such consists in this fusion of being and nothingness, or of being and non-being... *This is the manifestation outside God of the wealth of divine being, now enshrined in creation and existing in dependence upon divine being*.⁴⁹⁹

God creates the world, as it were, *out of himself*, out of the abundance of his own resources.⁵⁰⁰

2. Creation is not completely contingent.

Nevertheless the divine freedom which has manifested itself in the creation of the world is *not something haphazard, nor some casual whim of such a kind that the world might equally well have been created or not*. The reason for its creation is to be found in a quite different, *free 'necessity'*—*the force of God's love overflowing beyond the limits of its own being to found being other than his own*.⁵⁰¹

3. Creation is not completely free.

The *liberty of the creature cannot stand up to the end against the compelling attraction of Wisdom*, and its evident efficacy. This forms, so to speak, an 'ontological argument' for the existence of Sophia... The acceptance of this principle of sophianic determination by no means involves the denial of those torments 'prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25) or of the freedom unto evil of those who will still persist in self-assertion. *But freedom unto evil has no substantive foundation, no resource*

⁴⁹⁵ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 61. Italics mine.

⁴⁹⁶ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 33.

⁴⁹⁷ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 41.

⁴⁹⁸ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 43. The first italics are not mine, the second italics are.

⁴⁹⁹ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 62. Italics mine

⁵⁰⁰ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 63. Italics mine

⁵⁰¹ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 73. Italics mine

to endure to eternity, and sooner must inevitably wither before the radiance of Wisdom.⁵⁰²

These are the major points that Florovsky rejects and quietly counters in his articles on creation. He contests them by the use of a plethora of patristic citations. Note also his complete lack of citation from any Russian religious or modern philosopher for support. What is demonstrated in the following is Florovsky's commitment to his unique approach of the neopatristic synthesis as wholly patristic and historical. The following exposition is a fuller understanding of the main points of Florovsky's argument.

1. Creation is absolutely contingent.

In the midst of tensions between two worldviews, Hellenic and Biblical, St Athanasius would use the Biblical and Creedal conception of creation *ex nihilo* to demonstrate the radical contingency of the world. His purpose was to oppose the Greek philosophical presupposition that the material cosmos was necessary and cyclically eternal, the *kyklophoria* and *anakyklôsis*.⁵⁰³ Clarifying Origen's failure to distinguish between the ontological and cosmological dimensions in creation, St. Athanasius, in *Contra Arianos*, made a decisive contribution by delineating between God's *ousia* and *boúlesis* or *thélesis*, between His essence and His will.

It was only within the Christian faith that the Cosmos was conceived as a 'free' act of God, therefore not 'necessarily' inherent in God's being. Florovsky, in opposition to Bulgakov, suggests a double contingency: 'on the side of the Cosmos – which could "not have existed at all," and on the side of the Creator – who could "not have created" anything at all'.⁵⁰⁴ Or as Florovsky quotes Etienne Gilson, 'it is quite true that a Creator is

⁵⁰² Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 147. Italics mine

⁵⁰³ Blane, *Florovsky*, 295.

⁵⁰⁴ Florovsky, Athanasius, 40, and *Idea*, Sec. II.

an eminently Christian God, but a God whose very existence is to be a creator is not a Christian God at all.⁵⁰⁵

Creation was created *ex nihilo*, that is, out of nothing. Creation came into being and before it there was nothing but God. Creation came into being together with time, for the basis of time is change itself, and there was no change before creation. ‘Only the world exists in time – in change, succession, duration. Without the world there is no time. And the genesis is the beginning of time’.⁵⁰⁶ There was once no time, and at the creation time *began* to be when creation came out of non-being into being. Florovsky clarifies his point by quoting St. Gregory of Nyssa: ‘The very substance of creation owed its beginning to change’, and ‘the very transition from non-entity to existence is change, non-existence being changed by the Divine power into being’.⁵⁰⁷

Since the world began to exist it was possible that the world could not have existed. A created world is a conditional, contingent world.⁵⁰⁸ There is no necessity for the existence of the world. Creation in itself has no basis or foundation for its existence. ‘Creaturely existence is not self-sufficient and is not independent’.⁵⁰⁹ Creation itself is a testimony of its own creatureliness. Florovsky quoting Augustine: ‘[It] cries out that it has been created – it cries out that it did not create itself: [I] exist because I am created; and I was not before I came to be, and I could not issue from myself ...’⁵¹⁰ There is something inherent in man by which he recognizes the obvious fact that he had nothing to do with his coming forth. Man understands, at least, that his production is entirely out of his control. Creation by its very existence indicates that something is beyond its own limits. What exactly does the indicating, whether it is its finiteness or its mortality or its complete

⁵⁰⁵ Florovsky, Athanasius, 40-41, and Idea, Sec. II.

⁵⁰⁶ Florovsky, Creation, 43, and Idea, Sec. IV.

⁵⁰⁷ Florovsky, Creation, 43, and Idea, Sec. IV.

⁵⁰⁸ Florovsky, Idea, Sec. II.

⁵⁰⁹ Florovsky, Creation, 45.

⁵¹⁰ Florovsky, Creation, 45.

lack of ability, Florovsky does not say, but he makes clear that when one looks at the world one understands that its cause and foundation ‘is outside the world’.⁵¹¹

Here Florovsky turns to its true cause and foundation. The world coming into being out of nothing is only possible ‘through the super-mundane will of the merciful and Almighty God, “Who calls the things that be not, to be” (Rom. 4:17)’.⁵¹² And quoting Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, ‘The creative word is like an adamantine bridge upon which creatures are placed, and they stand under the abyss of the Divine Infinitude, over the abyss of their own nothingness’.⁵¹³ Therefore, one would not expect the root of the world’s substantiality and stability be found in its creaturehood and createdness. But it is, Florovsky believed, because ‘the origin from out of nothing determines the otherness, the “non-consubstantiality” of the world and God’.⁵¹⁴ And, ‘the true *reality* of the Universe is secured, in a startling way, precisely by its being *unnecessary* to God’s own being’.⁵¹⁵ Its substantiality is its non-consubstantiality with God.

‘The creation of things is executed by God not out of any necessity, whether of essence or of knowledge or of will, but out of sheer freedom which is not moved – much less constrained — by anything external that it should have to be a cause’.⁵¹⁶ In quoting Duns Scotus, Florovsky shows that there can be no talk of any necessity external to God, which caused Him to create, for creation was not created and then placed outside of God, but creation itself *is* the very first positing of *the outside* by God. The creation, this outside, is indeed the very positing of an *other*, that is, other than God.⁵¹⁷ Florovsky calls the *other*, ‘a heterogeneous substance or nature, one different from Him, and in a certain sense an independent and autonomous subject’.⁵¹⁸ Here then is the ‘incomprehensible miracle’: that this heterogeneous substance, this ‘extra-divine *reality*’, this completely

⁵¹¹ Florovsky, *Creation*, 46.

⁵¹² Florovsky, *Creation*, 46.

⁵¹³ Florovsky, *Creation*, 45.

⁵¹⁴ Florovsky, *Creation*, 46.

⁵¹⁵ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. II.

⁵¹⁶ Florovsky, *Creation*, 52, and *Idea* Sec. VI.

⁵¹⁷ Florovsky, *Creation*, 52, and *Idea*, Sec. VI.

⁵¹⁸ Florovsky, *Creation*, 46.

other, which is created *ex nihilo*, exists along side the ‘illimitable and infinite Ocean of being’,⁵¹⁹ in the words of St. Gregory of Nazianzus.

Creation is an act of the free will of God.⁵²⁰ Since the whole of Creation was brought into existence by the free and sovereign will of God ‘out of nothing’, ‘an ultimate “meonic” tendency was inherent in the very nature of all creaturely things. By their own nature all created things were intrinsically unstable, fluid, impotent, mortal, liable to dissolution. Their existence was precarious’.⁵²¹ Any order or stability that did exist in the creation was external to its nature and given by the Divine Logos, who held together and ordered the entire Cosmos, thereby counter-acting creation’s natural tendency toward disintegration. Thus, humanity in its creaturely nature shared in the instability of the Cosmos. Man was a ‘composite’ being who originated out of non-being: *ek tou mè ontos genómenoi*.⁵²² Man was ‘mortal’ and ‘corruptible’ and could only escape his mortality by the grace of God and participation in the energies of the Logos.

Florovsky, quoting St. Athanasius, makes absolute the dissimilarity between Creation and the Logos. ‘The Logos is present in the world, but only “dynamically”, that is, by His “powers”. In His own “substance” He is outside of the world: *ektòs mén esti tou pantós kat’ ousían, ev pási dé esti taís heautoû dunámesi* (*De incarn.* 17)’.⁵²³

Florovsky notes that this is not the first time that the ‘essence’ and ‘powers’ distinction has been made, but St. Athanasius gives it a new connotation and purpose.

It was no longer to delineate between God and the Logos, but to ‘discriminate strictly between the inner Being of God and His creative and “providential” manifestation *ad extra*, in the creaturely world’.⁵²⁴ Man owes his very existence to the free will and good pleasure of God, but it is solely by God’s life giving grace that man stands in

⁵¹⁹ Florovsky, *Creation*, 46, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 38, In Theoph.*, n 7, PG xxxvi, c. 317, as quoted by Florovsky.

⁵²⁰ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. V.

⁵²¹ Florovsky, *Athanasius*, 49.

⁵²² Florovsky, *Athanasius*, 50.

⁵²³ Florovsky, *Athanasius*, 50.

⁵²⁴ Florovsky, *Athanasius*, 51.

contradistinction to the ‘abyss’ of his own nothingness, and this grace, this power, abides in the creation. The creature only possesses existence or receives being *ad extra*, as a gift imparted from God.

It is this complete *otherness*, this absolute distinction, this infinite distance between creation and God, that Florovsky rightly calls a ‘*distance of natures*’. All of creation is distant from God, is far removed from Him. But this distance is not by place but by nature. Florovsky takes the idea from St John Damascene, ‘*ou τόπο, allà phúsei*’.⁵²⁵ And this distance of natures is never removed but is only ‘overlapped by immeasurable divine love’.⁵²⁶ There always exists the ‘*living duality of God and creation*’.⁵²⁷

Obviously the duality is concerning the differences in nature. God alone is Divine and creation will always be creation, that is, *other* than divine. Florovsky quotes St. Marcarius of Egypt: ‘He is God, and she [the soul] is not God. He is the Lord, and she is the handmaid; He the Creator, and she the creation; He the Architect, and she the fabric; and there is nothing in common between Him and her nature’.⁵²⁸ And in the words of St. Augustine, in creation ‘there is nothing related to the Trinity, except the fact that the Trinity has created it’.⁵²⁹

For Florovsky, any thought that creation could actually become divine in its nature is excluded as an impossibility. And any idea that God could change into creation is completely rejected. Even in the Incarnation itself, where the person of Christ took on humanity, the two natures, although mutually shared complete interpenetration (*perichóresis eis allélas*), remained unchanged and immutably distinct. As the *hóros* of Chalcedon states it: ‘without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the specific property of each nature being preserved’.⁵³⁰ It was in this ‘double and bilateral consubstantiality of the God-Man’ that the Fathers of Chalcedon solidified an

⁵²⁵ St John Damascene, *De fide Orth.*, I, 13, *PG* xcvi, c. 583. As quoted in Florovsky, *Creation*, 46.

⁵²⁶ Florovsky, *Creation*, 46.

⁵²⁷ Florovsky, *Creation*, 47.

⁵²⁸ As quoted in Florovsky, *Creation*, 47.

⁵²⁹ As quoted in Florovsky, *Creation*, 46.

⁵³⁰ As quoted in Florovsky, *Creation*, 47.

indispensable canon and criterion of the faith. Florovsky takes the fact that there was an existence of a nature other and outside of God, yet along side Him, as a logical prerequisite for the Incarnation. The acceptance of this fact for him ‘is an indispensable prerequisite for the accomplishment of the Incarnation without any change in or transmutation of the Divine nature’.⁵³¹ Again, this is due to the fact that the Divine cannot become created and the created cannot become divine.

This stark distinction and precise definition between created nature and Divine nature arose from the Fathers of the Fourth century in their confrontation of the Arian controversy. Above all they stressed the ‘heterogeneity of the created and Creator in contradistinction to the “consubstantiality” of generation; and they correct the heterogeneity with the dependence of creation upon the will and volition’.⁵³² Following is an explication of Florovsky’s concept of the contingency of creation.

It is primarily St. Athanasius who first develops the notion of the complete heterogeneity of the Divine nature and created nature, but other Fathers followed on. Since the creation is ‘from nothing’ and is created, it is of the will of God, for will precedes creating. ‘Creating is *an act of the will* [*ek bouléματος*]’.⁵³³ On the otherhand, the Son is ‘begotten’ ‘which is an *act of nature* [*gennâ katà phúsin*]’.⁵³⁴ Florovsky argues by adding on to a quote by St. Athanasius. Creation “‘is not in the least like its Creator in substance, but is *outside* of Him,” and therefore also could have *not* existed’.⁵³⁵ But the reference that Florovsky gives is from *Contra Arianos*, Discourse 1, verse 20, which reads: creation ‘made by the Word of His Grace and will, and thus admit of ceasing to be if it so pleases Him who made them’. Florovsky makes a slight misreading of the text. For the text assumes creation already exists and the Creator could will it to ‘cease’ existing. Nevertheless, Florovsky’s argument is still valid. Florovsky’s argument follows thus:

⁵³¹ Florovsky, *Creation*, 47.

⁵³² Florovsky, *Creation*, 47.

⁵³³ Florovsky, *Creation*, 48.

⁵³⁴ Florovsky, *Creation*, 48.

⁵³⁵ Florovsky, *Creation*, 48.

creation being of the will of God and God being completely free, mandates the real possibility that God could have willed to have not created. And thus all of creation is unnecessary, or contingent.

Florovsky cites St. Cyril of Alexandria and St. John of Damascus for further support that generation is out of the same substance, out of the same nature of the one doing the generating. While creating is an act not from God's own substance or nature, but is of God's will, *theléseos érgon*.⁵³⁶ This whole argument is to show one very important point. The creation is absolutely contingent. The creation is of the will and good pleasure of God, and thus, there is no necessity for creation in creation itself. This is the first part of the argument that contradicts the foundational concept of Sophiology, from Florovsky's perspective, that creation was not completely contingent. This first point is then followed on by Florovsky's second main point, 'creation is heterogeneous to its creator'.⁵³⁷

2. God is absolutely distinct from creation.

What can be learned from creation about the Trinity is gleaned from applied contradistinctions. For Florovsky there are two modes of existence, which are completely incommensurate with each other: the inner life of God and creation.⁵³⁸ This is the basis for Florovsky's theology proper in his creation theology that is completely opposed to his understanding of the Sophiological tenet that creation is not completely heterogeneous.

Throughout this section, when Florovsky speaks of God and the inner life of God, he consistently uses interchangeably the terms *God* and the *Trinity*. He also often refers to the inner life of Trinitarian existence. Florovsky scarcely considers separately the individual persons of the Trinity. The Father and the Son are treated in the Athanasian distinction of whether or not the creation was generated or made. He also speaks of the

⁵³⁶ Florovsky, *Creation*, 48, and *Idea*, Sec. 5.

⁵³⁷ Florovsky, *Creation*, 48.

⁵³⁸ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. III.

Logos when considering the ‘divine thoughts’, and as the cause, by means of the Incarnation, of the restoring of humanity’s possibility of becoming ‘deified’.⁵³⁹

It is also with reference to the deification of man, to his theosis, that Florovsky uses his sole theological connection to the Holy Spirit. That is, it is only by acquiring the Holy Spirit that deification is accomplished.⁵⁴⁰ And this one reference is only at the end of the ‘Creation and Creaturehood’ article. Outside of these scant references to the different persons of the Trinity, the rest of Florovsky’s creation theology is based upon the Trinity as a whole. That is, his theology only makes reference to the *fact* of the Trinity as separate from creation. There is not any theological impact on his creation theology from his theology of inner Trinitarian life. Nevertheless, his views of both Trinity and creation are consistent with patristic tradition. But it just might be this very fact that causes Florovsky to have so little to say on the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴¹

The creation is a product of the common ‘will’ of the Trinity, and is by nature from non-being, this remains its tendency. It is external to God and is therefore ‘other’ than the Being of God. But, by the grace of God, there is imparted to the creation life and consistency and is therefore completely dependent on God for its existence. The creature is contingent and thus has a beginning, and therefore inherently temporal. On the other hand, the Son is generated from the Being of God, and is by nature of the same essence of the Father. God’s Being is complete and perfect in itself and has no need of creation. In the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity the inner Being of God is manifested and this Being is immutable and eternal, indeed, even ‘necessary’.

The clear premise in Florovsky’s argument is that God, the Creator, is absolutely dissimilar to the creation. This, obviously, is the second premise of Florovsky’s argument. This point is reiterated often in all his works on creation. To describe this distinction he

⁵³⁹ Florovsky, *Creation*, 75.

⁵⁴⁰ Florovsky, *Creation*, 74-76.

⁵⁴¹ Florensky, *Pillar*, 80-91, see also Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2004), Introduction: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Patristic Literature, 1-51.

uses such phrases as ‘radical cleavage’, ‘heterogeneous substance or nature, *absolutely new*, an extra-divine *reality*’, and ‘complete otherness’. In utilizing St. Athanasius’s theological method of distinguishing between God’s economic revelation and God’s Triune Being, Florovsky culls out the absolute Divine distinctiveness.

Florovsky sees in St. Athanasius’ perspective a ‘radical cleavage’ and ontological tension between the Being of God (eternal, incorruptible, immortal and immutable) and all of the Cosmos (temporal, corruptible, mortal and mutable). Thus, as we have said above, there are two modes of existence, God and other than God. ‘There is an *absolute* and *ultimate* distance between God and the created world, an utter and ultimate *hiatus*’.⁵⁴²

Florovsky notes that St Athanasius’ major contribution to Trinitarian theology was that he separated out all references to the *oikonomia* in his description of the inner relationship between Father and Son. God’s Being is considered completely independent of the Creation. Florovsky states that the crucial text is *Contra Arianos* II 31: ‘Even supposing that the Father had never been disposed to create the world, or part of it, nevertheless the Logos would have been with God and the Father in Him... *Kaì gàr kaì ei dóxan ên tô theô mè poiêsai tà genetá , all’ ên oudèn hêtton ho Lógos pròs tòn theón, kaì en autô ên ho Patér*’.⁵⁴³

The line of demarcation passes between Creation and Creator and not between Father and Son. In fact the Son is the Divine Logos who is Creator, who is the ‘undistinguishable image’ of the Father: *aparállaktos eikón*. Although they cannot be fully separated, *theología* and *oikonomia* must be distinguished, and ‘God’s “Being” has an absolute ontological priority over God’s action and will’.⁵⁴⁴ Thus there is a clear distinction between God’s nature and God’s will. Florovsky’s argument, following St. Athanasius, is that God is more than Creator, He is Father, but He is Father ‘before’ He creates. He is Father to the Son through whom He creates all things. And although the

⁵⁴² Florovsky, *Idea*, Section III.

⁵⁴³ Florovsky, *Athanasius*, 51.

⁵⁴⁴ Florovsky, *Athanasius*, 52.

Arians would not admit to anything ‘superior to His will’, obviously, as Florovsky notes, “‘being’ precedes ‘will’ and ‘generation,’ accordingly, surpasses the ‘will’ also. Of course it is but a logical order: there is no temporal sequence in Divine Being and Life’.⁵⁴⁵

Yet this order has ontological significance. There are two kinds of names for God. Trinitarian names denote the very Being of God, His ontology, His essence. While another type are describers of His acts with reference to His will and counsel. God is Father, Son and He is Creator. But God’s Fatherhood must necessarily precede His being Creator, for the Son’s existence is from the essence of the Father while the Creation is of His will, and is therefore external to the essence. Thus there is a contingency to the Creation, but ‘an absolute necessity in the Trinitarian being of God’.⁵⁴⁶

Florovsky takes St. Athanasius’ lead ‘on the necessity of God’ from his *Discourses against the Arians*, although St. Athanasius does not use the phrase explicitly. And Florovsky, as St. Athanasius, foreseeing the question begged, asks the question: ‘does it not imply that God is subject to certain “constraint” or fatalistic determinism? But, in fact, “necessity” in this case is but another name for “being” or “essence”. Indeed, God does not “choose” His own Being. He simply is. No further question can be intelligently asked’.⁵⁴⁷

In contradistinction to Florovsky’s comprehension of Sophiology, Creation is not of the essence nor is it an extension of the Divine Being; it is an act of God’s will. And again to clarify, “‘will’ and ‘deliberation’ should not be invoked in the description of the eternal relationship between Father and Son’. Florovsky notes that in the Athanasian vision the distinction between ‘essence’ and ‘will’ alone establishes the distinction between ‘Generation’ and ‘Creation’.

⁵⁴⁵ Florovsky, Athanasius, 52.

⁵⁴⁶ Florovsky, Athanasius, 53.

⁵⁴⁷ Florovsky, Athanasius, 53, and Idea, Sec. IX.

Between God the Son and the creation there is a complete disparity of natures.

The Son is an offspring of the essence, and His generation is not of the will or deliberation of God. The Father is eternally Father and therefore the Son who is the generation of God's substance has the intrinsic nature to co-exist eternally with the Father. But the proper nature of temporal creatures is to have a 'beginning' and since they are from non-being, *ex ouk ónton*, they cannot co-exist with the eternal God. The two modes of existence are incompatible.

In his third Discourse, St Athanasius covers the Arians' contention that the Son was generated by the 'will and deliberation' of the Father. St. Athanasius suggests that they borrowed their ideas from Ptolemy who believed that God's thought preceded His word and action. Along these same lines the Arians held that the will and deliberation of God preceded the generation of the Son. They believed that unless the Son was not of the 'will' or 'deliberation' of the Father than the Son was generated out of necessity and therefore unwillingly, *anágke kai mē thélon*.⁵⁴⁸ But, St. Athanasius argues, these terms are only applicable to the creation of creatures and this also showed the Arians' inability to understand the basic difference between 'being' and 'acting'. As Florovsky notes, 'God does not deliberate with Himself about His own being and existence'.⁵⁴⁹ This absurd logic is like saying that God's mercy and goodness are voluntary and not part of His nature. But, nevertheless, God is not unwillingly merciful or good. Now, according to St. Athanasius, whatever is 'by Nature' is higher than what is 'by deliberation' and since the 'Son being an offspring of the Father's substance, the Father does not "deliberate" about Him, since this would mean deliberation about His own being: *tòn dè ídion Lógon ex autoû phúsei gennómenon ou probouleúetai*'.⁵⁵⁰ God is the Father of His Son 'by nature and not by will: *ou boulései allà phúsei tòn ídion échei Lógon*'.⁵⁵¹ All of Creation was by God's will and deliberation, but not the Son: He is by nature the generation of God's own

⁵⁴⁸ Florovsky, Athanasius, 57.

⁵⁴⁹ Florovsky, Athanasius, 57.

⁵⁵⁰ Florovsky, Athanasius, 58.

⁵⁵¹ Florovsky, Athanasius, 58.

essence: ‘*ou thelématós esti deimioúrgema epigegonós, katháper he ktísis, allà phúsei tês ousías ídion génnema*’.⁵⁵² As Florovsky aptly concludes, ‘It is an insane and extravagant idea to put “will” and “counsel” between the Father and the Son (III 60, 61, 62)’.⁵⁵³

The same can be said of the entire Trinitarian existence. There is, in a certain sense, a necessity in the consubstantiality of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. God cannot be other than a ‘Triad of Hypostases’. The Trinity of Persons is, again, in some theological sense, a necessity of the Being of God, for the interrelations of the three Persons of the Trinity is not based on the will of God. As St. Maximus states, ‘The three are, in truth, one: for this is their being. And the one is, in truth, three: for this is their existence. For the one divine Mystery ‘is’ in a unitary way and ‘subsists’ in a threefold way’.⁵⁵⁴

To paraphrase von Balthasar, the Trinity’s being is beyond our understanding of the relationship of numbers, beyond our understanding of unity and multiplicity. Thus, to quote Florovsky’s view of St. Maximus’ judgment:

It would be unfitting and fruitless to introduce the notion of will into the internal life of the Godhead for the sake of defining the relations between the Hypostases, because the Persons of the Holy Trinity exist together above any kind of relation or action, and by Their Being determine the relations between Themselves.⁵⁵⁵

St Athanasius’ main purpose was to correct the total theological perspective of his time, that is, to clarify the need to first comprehend God in Himself. He accomplished this task by demonstrating the complete and radical differences between the Creator and the creature. In fact, Florovsky states, it was necessity to sort out the understanding of the

⁵⁵² Florovsky, Athanasius, 58.

⁵⁵³ Florovsky, Athanasius, 58.

⁵⁵⁴ St. Maximus, *Ambigua*, PG 91, 1036C, as quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 105.

⁵⁵⁵ Florovsky, *Creation*, 69. Florovsky cites St. Maximus, *Ambigua*, PG 91.

creation before there could be a true understanding of theology. ‘No real advance can be achieved in the realm of “Theology” until the realm of “Oikonomia” had been properly ordered’.⁵⁵⁶

We must now turn to the question of whether or not there is an internal necessity for creation. As we have seen earlier, from the quote by Duns Scotus, there is no necessity external to God. But is there a necessity internal to God? Even if one admits that there was a time when creation did not exist, ‘*is not the idea of the world* ever present in the Divine mind, does it not belong to the unchangeable fullness of the Divine self-knowledge and self-determination?’⁵⁵⁷ Here, for Florovsky, is a true antinomy. God is immutable, yet the world *began* in time.

And it cannot be solved or simply dismissed by a distinction between the *eternal* will and its *temporal* accomplishment... The real problem is precisely this: what is the relation between the *eternal essence* of God and His *eternal Will*. Or, in other words, the ultimate antinomy is implied in the conception of the *eternal freedom*. Or again, how can we reconcile the perfect *Immutability* of God with His creative Freedom? I mean how can we escape ascribing the *unchangeable* God some plan of Creation?

Florovsky recognizes the creative thought of God as eternal.⁵⁵⁸ But, the idea of the world is not eternal in the same sense that God is eternal. They are not co-eternal, for they are distinct from essence by His volition.⁵⁵⁹ They are as distinct as the difference between what God *is* and what God *has*.⁵⁶⁰ ‘God’, says St. John of Damascus, ‘contemplated everything before creation, *thinking outside time*; and everything comes to pass in its time *according to His timeless volitional thought*, which is *predetermination* and *image* and *pattern* – (*de fide orth.* 1; 9)’.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁶ Florovsky, Athanasius, 58.

⁵⁵⁷ Florovsky, Idea, Sec. VI.

⁵⁵⁸ Florovsky, Creation, 56, and Idea, Sec. VII.

⁵⁵⁹ Florovsky, Creation, 56.

⁵⁶⁰ Florovsky, Idea, Sec. IX.

⁵⁶¹ Florovsky, Idea, Sec. VII.

It is in this verse that Florovsky finds the theological explanation for his understanding that the counsel of God's will is eternal, as well as an explanation on how creation comes from the Uncreated. This is of course in answer to the Sophiological explanation. The 'images' and 'patterns' are the '*eternal and immutable counsel* of God, in which all that is foreordained by God and is being unfailingly realized is eternally figured (*St. John Damasc. De imagin. 1, 10*)'.⁵⁶² But Florovsky also understands these 'images' as the 'second type of the Divine images, oriented *ad extra*' of St John of Damascus, in his *Three Treatises (de imag. 3: 10)*. To clarify even more, Florovsky quotes St. John quoting Pseudo Dionysius, 'And we give the name of "*Exemplars*" to those laws which, pre-existent in God as an Unity, produce the essences of things; laws which are called in theology "Preordinations" or Divine and benevolent Volitions, laws whereby the Super-Essential pre-ordained and brought into being the whole Universe'.⁵⁶³ But this conception of 'eternal' patterns and images raises two more questions in Florovsky's mind. First, what is the 'eternal' patterns relation with the actual temporal world in existence? And, secondly, what is their relation to the essence and being of God?

To answer the first question first, the eternal counsel is God's design of the world and is not the world itself. God's idea of creation 'is not creation itself; it is not the substance of creation; it is not the bearer of the cosmic-process; and the "transition" from "design" [*ennóema*] to "deed" [*érgon*] is not a process within the Divine idea...'⁵⁶⁴ The world is created according to the Divine idea and is a 'norm' and 'goal' found in God. The idea itself is not involved in the formation and realization of creation. Unlike Platonism the idea of a thing is not the thing itself. 'On the contrary, the *created nucleus* of things must be rigorously distinguished from the *Divine idea* about things'.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶² Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. VII.

⁵⁶³ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. VII.

⁵⁶⁴ Florovsky, *Creation*, 61.

⁵⁶⁵ Florovsky, *Creation*, 62.

Creation consists in God's calling, 'out of nothing' into existence a new reality, which becomes the *bearer* and *carrier* of His idea, without being existentially identified with it – which must and can actualize the idea, in the creaturely order of existence, *by its own proper becoming* what it was meant and foreordained to become'.⁵⁶⁶

To answer the second question (what is the relation of the Divine idea to the essence and being of God?) we turn again to the Eastern distinction between essence and energies. This hails back to the primary distinction between 'theology' and 'economy', which in turn is considered from the 'nature' and 'will' distinction, which is tied up with the 'essence' and 'energies' distinction.

Florovsky turns again to the patristic understanding of the distinction between the '*necessity of the Divine nature and the absolute freedom of His beneficent will*'.⁵⁶⁷ There is a distinction between the nature and will of God, but this distinction is not a division, not a separation. There is no division in the Divine Life. In fact, the Divine will reveals the Divine nature. Florovsky quotes St. Gregory of Nazianzus: 'God invented (or imagined) the angelic and heavenly powers, and this imagination became deed', and God

contemplated the splendour ardently desired of His goodness, the equal and equally perfect splendour of His tri-hypostatic Divinity, as it is known to God Himself and to him whom he deigns to manifest it. The Intelligence which gave origin to the world scanned also in its sublime conceptions the forms of the world.⁵⁶⁸

The thoughts of God and the creative ideas are indeed eternal, but they are not co-eternal with God, that is to say, with His essence. The idea of creation is, in some sense, *second* in its eternity. Thus, Florovsky conceives of '*two modes of eternity*: the *essential eternity* in which only the Trinity lives, and the *contingent eternity* of the free acts of

⁵⁶⁶ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. VIII.

⁵⁶⁷ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. IX.

⁵⁶⁸ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. IX.

Divine grace'.⁵⁶⁹ Here Florovsky recognizes the need for an apophatic understanding and admits of 'some mysterious gradation in the eternal life of God'.⁵⁷⁰

Florovsky understands creation, and even the idea of it, 'as an absolute surplus, a superadded reality, or rather a superadded gift, free and generous, of the almighty freedom and superabundant Love of God'.⁵⁷¹ This 'Love' of God is the very force that brings creation into existence. It is the 'energy' and 'acts' of God that produce creation itself. Yet, 'the life-giving acts of God in the world *are God Himself*'.⁵⁷² This is very close to the statement of Bulgakov: The reason for its creation is to be found in a quite different, 'free "necessity"—the force of God's love overflowing beyond the limits of its own being to found being other than his own'.⁵⁷³ But, as we will see, Florovsky makes a distinction.

This is necessary in understanding the distinction between what is God Himself, His nature, and what God is 'involved' in, or that which is "*not His nature, but only what is related to His nature, " ou tèn phúsin, allà tà perì tèn phúsin*".⁵⁷⁴ Here then is the basic principle of Eastern theology: God's essence is unknowable and unattainable, and only the energy of God, His acts and powers, which are God Himself, are accessible to knowledge. This is how it is understood that God really reveals Himself and is really

present in creation through His powers and ideas—in 'providences and graces which issue from the incommunicable God, which pour out in a flooding stream, and in which all existing things participate', 'in an essence producing procession', [*ousiopoion próodon*], in 'a providence that works good things', [*agathopoion prónoian*], which are distinguishable but not separable from the Divine entity 'which surpasses entity', from God Himself, as St. Maximus the Confessor says.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁶⁹ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. IX.

⁵⁷⁰ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. IX.

⁵⁷¹ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. IX.

⁵⁷² Florovsky, *Creation*, 66.

⁵⁷³ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 73. Italics mine

⁵⁷⁴ Florovsky, *Creation*, 63.

⁵⁷⁵ Florovsky, *Creation*, 66.

The basis of the energies and procession of God are His ‘goodness and love’.⁵⁷⁶

But the above begins to sound a lot like Bulgakov’s understanding of creation. But Florovsky clarifies that these energies are not the created things themselves, nor do they combine with them. The energies are creation’s ‘life-giving principles; they are the prototypes, the predeterminations, the reasons, the *lógoi*, the Divine decisions respecting them, of which they are participants and ought to be “communicants”’.⁵⁷⁷ The essence of God is God in and of Himself, His nature. The energy of God is His power and processions and His ‘relations towards the other [*pròs hétéron*]’.⁵⁷⁸ This is his direct contradistinction to the Sophiological perspective.

Florovsky emphasizes that any refusal to recognize the real distinction between the ‘essence’ and the ‘energy’ obscures the border between generation and creation. Florovsky quotes St. Mark of Ephesus’ explanation of what happens if one does not accept the distinction.

Being and energy, completely and wholly coincide in equivalent necessity. Distinction between essence and will [*thélesis*] is abolished; then God only begets and does not create, and does not exercise His will. Then the difference between foreknowledge and actual making becomes indefinite, and creation seems to be coeternally created.⁵⁷⁹

Florovsky comments that the early Church already commonly accepted the distinction between God’s essence and His will, and between ‘generation and creation’. But, he continues, this distinction was carried on in one form or another in different Fathers of the Church throughout history. St Cyril, in his *Thesaurus de sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate*, would rely heavily on the Athanasian *Discourses*, but instead of ‘will’ and ‘deliberation’ he would speak of divine ‘energy’ (*Thesaurus* ass. 18, PG 75, 313; ass. 15, PG 75, 276; ass. 32, PG 75, 564-565). Thus generation (*gonimótes*) is of the

⁵⁷⁶ Florovsky, *Creation*, 67.

⁵⁷⁷ Florovsky, *Creation*, 67.

⁵⁷⁸ Florovsky, *Creation*, 68.

⁵⁷⁹ Florovsky, *Creation*, 68.

essence (*ousias*) or nature (*phúseos*) of God, but creation is of the energy (*evergeias*) of God, a work or act (*érgon*) of the will (*theléseos*). In his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, St John of Damascus uses the same distinction (*De fide orth.* I 8, PG 94, 812-813). In late Byzantine theology this distinction would continue to be elaborated, especially by St Gregory Palamas (see his *Capita physica, theologica* etc., 96, PG 150 1181). And, as we have seen, St Mark of Ephesus would also emphasize the distinction. Indeed, as Florovsky notes, this distinction between *gonimótes* and *thélesis* or *boulésis* ‘is one of the main distinctive marks of Eastern Christianity’.⁵⁸⁰

But is this distinction between ‘Being’ and ‘Acting’, between ‘Essence’ and ‘Energy’ a real ontological distinction or merely a logical distinction to safeguard the Simplicity of the Divine Being? Florovsky response is adamant:

There cannot be the slightest doubt that for St. Athanasius it was a real and ontological difference. Otherwise his main argument against the Arians would have been invalidated and destroyed. Indeed, the mystery remains. The very Being of God is ‘incomprehensible’ for the human intellect: this was the common conviction of the Greek Fathers from the Fourth century—the Cappadocians, St. John Chrysostom and others. And yet there is always ample room for understanding. Not only do we distinguish between ‘Being’ and ‘Will’; but it is not the same thing, even for God, ‘to be’ and ‘to act’. This was the deepest conviction of St. Athanasius⁵⁸¹

Creation is a manifestation of God’s absolute freedom, of His superabundant Love. But creation, because it is created, is contingent. And this absolute contingency of creation coupled with the ultimate distinctiveness of God from creation are the two premises leading up to Florovsky’s, as yet, unspoken conclusion, which is: ‘Creaturehood determines the complete dissimilarity of the creation and God, its otherness, and hence its *independence* and *substantiality*’.⁵⁸² Or in other words, the absolute contingency of creation and absolute distinctiveness of God from creation mandate the creature’s absolute

⁵⁸⁰ Florovsky, Athanasius, 61. Here Florovsky cites Th. De Regnon, *Etudes de Théologie Positive sur la Sainte Trinité. Troisième Série: Théories Grecques des Processions Divines*, Paris 1898, p.263.

⁵⁸¹ Florovsky, Athanasius, 62.

⁵⁸² Florovsky, Creation, 48. Italics mine.

freedom. This is Florovsky's silent argument against the Sophiological concepts seen above. This then leads us to the conclusion of the two premises above, that creation is absolutely free.

3. Creation is absolutely free.

For Florovsky one of the key ideas of the Christian view of creation is that the creature is free. His adamancy is mostly due to the horrors he saw in philosophical determinism. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that in all actuality and reality creation is a *substance* other than God. For in this complete otherness is the creature's independence. The creature is *truly free*.⁵⁸³ This experience is why we see such a violent reaction against the hint of non-distinction in Sophiology.

This otherness is manifested in its freedom. The possibility of choice does not exhaust freedom, but presupposes it. Freedom is disclosed with the real and equal possibility of two ways: 'to God and away from God'.⁵⁸⁴ The possibility is 'real' not only when the choice is encountered, but also when the ability and power is present to pursue either of the possible choices. 'Freedom consists not only in the possibility, but also in the *necessity* of the autonomous choice, the resolution and resoluteness of choice'.⁵⁸⁵ That is, that the creature 'has capacity and power not only for the choice, but for the perseverance in the choice once made'.⁵⁸⁶ The autonomous choice is necessitated by the complete otherness and independence of the creation from God.

It is God Himself who wills this autonomy. In the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, 'God legislates human self-determination'. 'He honoured man with freedom

⁵⁸³ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. XII.

⁵⁸⁴ Florovsky, *Creation*, 48, and *Idea*, Sec. XII.

⁵⁸⁵ Florovsky, *Creation*, 49.

⁵⁸⁶ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. XII.

that good might belong no less to him who chose it than to Him who planted the seed'.⁵⁸⁷ Here then is Florovsky's understanding of human freedom.

Humanity is created by God to be completely free and autonomous. Yet, at the same time, God has designed humanity to find complete fulfilment in desiring and possessing the good of its own efforts. God's has designed creation with the vocation of participating in His divine life. But they are just 'designs and calls'.⁵⁸⁸ 'Creation must ascend to and unite with God by its own efforts and achievements'.⁵⁸⁹

His goal is exactly to surpass himself and to rise towards God, and even more than that – to partake in the Divine Life. It is only by this participation that man becomes fully himself, as it were, creates himself. However, for the full realization the free effort of man must be corroborated by the condescendence of grace.⁵⁹⁰

But this union by self-determination in no way negates the presupposed 'responsive prevenient movement of Divine mercy'.⁵⁹¹ And this predetermination does not undermine what St. Irenaeus called, 'the ancient Law of human freedom'.⁵⁹² This is demonstrated by the fact that the creature is free to pursue non-union with God. God does not predetermine creation by 'irresistible grace'. The way of destruction and death is not closed to humanity. As Florovsky notes, 'creatures can and may lose themselves, are capable, as it were, of "metaphysical suicide."'⁵⁹³

Metaphysical suicide is a real possibility.⁵⁹⁴ God has not bound creaturely nature to a predetermined outcome. There is no necessity for union and communion with God. There is no necessity for humanity to participate in His Divine life. But, of course, there is no life outside of God. Therefore, it is possible for creation to exist in death. As

⁵⁸⁷ Florovsky, *Creation*, 49. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 45*, Paschal Homily, n. 28, *PG* xxxvi, 661, and n. 8, col. 632.

⁵⁸⁸ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. XII.

⁵⁸⁹ Florovsky, *Creation*, 49.

⁵⁹⁰ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. XII.

⁵⁹¹ Florovsky, *Creation*, 49.

⁵⁹² Florovsky, *Creation*, 49, and *Idea*, Sec. XII.

⁵⁹³ Florovsky, *Creation*, 49.

⁵⁹⁴ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. XII.

Augustine phrased it, ‘*being and life do not coincide in creation*’.⁵⁹⁵ According to Florovsky there is only one way that creation can realize its full potential, ‘by overcoming her self-isolation, only in God’.⁵⁹⁶ It is only in relationship with God that creation can realize its true vocation, can only ‘be’ what it was meant and designed to be.

But, even if the creature chooses to reject its purpose and calling, rejects God’s very life, it does not ‘cease to exist’. For Florovsky, creation is ‘indestructible’. And not only the creation that finds its life in God, but also the creation that rejects and rebels against God. And creation does not have the option to self-annihilate. Thus, ‘metaphysical suicide’, a living death, is a very real possibility. Florovsky uses I Corinthians 7:31, ‘For the fashion of this world passes away’, as a text to show that it is only the ‘fashion’ of the world that will be changed, but the creation will continue because it was created that ‘it might have being’.

Although he does not state it here, clearly, Florovsky has in mind the re-creation of the cosmos, ‘a new heaven and a new earth’. So, he is arguing backward from that assumed position (a tactic used by St Basil in the *Hexaemeron*).⁵⁹⁷ For, he believes, that the ‘qualities and properties are changeable and mutable’.⁵⁹⁸ But the ‘elements’ themselves are immutable. He does not clarify what the ‘elements’ of creation are. But he knows from the revealed ‘re-creation’ of the cosmos that creation will remain forever. ‘God has created the world simply for *existence*’.⁵⁹⁹ The creation is ‘unalterably determined for existence’.⁶⁰⁰ This, above all, includes each immutable *hypostasis* of humanity. Which, in their freedom, can choose to rebel against God, which is the way of destruction. But, this rebellion does not lead to non-being, for as we have seen, humanity’s existence endures forever. This rebellion only leads to death, that is, ‘a *separation*—the separation of soul

⁵⁹⁵ Florovsky, *Creation*, 49, and *Idea*, Sec. XII. St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad lit.*, I, 5, *PL* xxxiv, c. 250.

⁵⁹⁶ Florovsky, *Creation*, 49.

⁵⁹⁷ St. Basil, *Hexaemeron*, 1, 6, *PG* xxix, c 6. I refer here to St. Basil’s ‘ascending into the past’, which he uses in his progress retrograde to the beginning of creation. Here, I believe Florovsky is using it from the Eschaton back to the present.

⁵⁹⁸ Florovsky, *Creation*, 49.

⁵⁹⁹ Florovsky, *Idea*, 2.

⁶⁰⁰ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. XII.

from body, the separation of creation from God'.⁶⁰¹ And, as opposed to Sophiology, this defiant human will will not be overcome.

Yet, humanity is predestined and called to union and participation in the Divine Life. But there is a problem. Man has a '*transcendent entelechy*'.⁶⁰² The rest of creation may evolve their hidden potentialities to develop and become what is according to their nature. But man is more than just 'natural being', he is a 'microcosm'. Man is more than just material being, he is a combination of spiritual and material. To fulfil its goal, humanity must rise above its nature to align itself with the 'Proto-Image'⁶⁰³ that God has called it to. The goal of humanity lies beyond its nature.

There is in creation a supernatural challenging goal that is set above its own nature—the challenging goal, founded on freedom, of a free participation in and union with God. This challenge transcends created nature, but only by responding to it is this nature itself revealed in its completeness.⁶⁰⁴

Each person, each created *hypostasis*, has been sealed by God by His love and good pleasure for its own particular destiny. It is because of this 'paradigm' that all things are in God, 'in "image"[*en idéa kai paradeígmati*] but not in nature'.⁶⁰⁵ The created nature is 'infinitely remote' from the Uncreated Nature of God. This remoteness always remains. Yet, it is bridged by the 'hypostatic Incarnation' of the Divine Word.⁶⁰⁶ Thus, it is only by the Divine condescendence, by Divine grace that humanity can truly become itself. Nevertheless, this aid does not strip man of his freedom. God does nothing in man without the consent of the free human will.⁶⁰⁷

But when man freely submits and cooperates with God's will for him, when the paradigm of God is respected, the one who does the 'constructive acts' attains the

⁶⁰¹ Florovsky, *Creation*, 50.

⁶⁰² Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. XII.

⁶⁰³ Florovsky, *Creation*, 73.

⁶⁰⁴ Florovsky, *Creation*, 73.

⁶⁰⁵ Florovsky, *Creation*, 73.

⁶⁰⁶ Florovsky, *Creation*, 73, and *Idea*, Sec. XII.

⁶⁰⁷ Florovsky, *Idea*, Sec. XII.

‘realization of *himself*’.⁶⁰⁸ But the ‘I’ that is realized is not the ‘I’ of the nature, but is an actual ‘rupture—a leap from the plane of nature onto the plane of grace, because this realization is the acquisition of the Spirit, is participation in God’.⁶⁰⁹ In this sense it is an ecstatic rupture. Only when the creature pursues the ‘challenging’ goal of communion with God, only when in self-determination and freedom the creature empties itself of its nature (*kínesis hupèr phúsin*, in the words of St. Maximus)⁶¹⁰ only then is the true and complete self-actualized. But if the creature lives according to its created nature, lives in separation and self-isolation from God, then ‘he falls to a plane lower than himself’.⁶¹¹ This understanding of the non-ecstatic ‘I’ and the ecstatic ‘I’ can also be seen in Florensky’s use of the ‘I’ of the law of identity and the ‘I’ that transcends the law of identity.⁶¹² This is a foundational concept for Lossky, which will be discussed below. This argument is Florovsky’s conclusion of the two above premises. All of this, again, is against Florovsky’s perspective of the Sophiological idea that the creature is not completely free.

4. Summary

Florovsky’s argument, although elaborate, can be simplified, as stated above, to this: 1. The creation is absolutely contingent. The creation is of the will and good pleasure of God, and thus, there is no necessity for creation in creation itself. 2. God the Creator is absolutely distinct from His creation. And since the creation is contingent, there is no necessity internally in God. The creation is absolutely *other* and is *the outside* in comparison to God. 3. Since the creation is a real substance *other* than God, the creation is, in the most real sense, independent of God and is, therefore, absolutely *free*. Each of these points is a masterful use of patristic sources in opposition to Sophiology.

⁶⁰⁸ Florovsky, *Creation*, 74.

⁶⁰⁹ Florovsky, *Creation*, 74.

⁶¹⁰ Florovsky, *Creation*, 74.

⁶¹¹ Florovsky, *Creation*, 74.

⁶¹² Florensky, *Pillar*, Chapter III. Letter Two: Doubt, see 22-24, 36-38, and chapter V. Letter Four: The Light of the Truth, see 67-68.

Florovsky does not do much more than explain and exposit the quotes from the Fathers. Although, one could say, that his theology is sound and consistent with the Orthodox patristic tradition, it is not as creatively interesting as Lossky's. The whole purpose of his creation theology is to under-mind the Sophiological foundations. Each section is a very important contradistinction to Sophiology. Although it is clandestine, this is in fact Florovsky's point of engagement with contemporary thought in his creation theology.

On the one hand, it must be remembered that we are only considering his writings specifically pertaining to creation. But, on the other hand, there is so much more in creation that could have been written about. For example, he only considers the idea of the person once, and that only in passing. He could have elucidated more on his concept of a created *hypostasis*. Also, the only place in his creation works he mentions man as the image of God is in his linking together how that in the 'paradigm' of love, that all things are in God, in image, but does not elucidate. But, we must remember, his overall purpose was a point for point patristic attack of Sophiology.

Overall, it is obvious that Florovsky keeps to his conception of Tradition and his method of returning to the Fathers. But it is also clear, at least in the area of creation, that what is of primary importance to Florovsky, which pervades all his thought, is the free will of the individual person, empowered by the grace of God, that is for Florovsky the basis of all ascetic achievement, and thus, man's deification. Florovsky has little engagement with the thoughts and concepts of the modern contemporary world in his creation theology, but the engagement he did have was of major concern. For a broader and more creative engagement we need to turn to Lossky's doctrine of creation.

B. Lossky's Doctrine of Creation

Introduction

Much of Lossky's view of creation is taken from many of the same patristic texts that Florovsky used, with the notable exceptions of a plethora of texts from both St. Athanasius and St. Augustine. As a matter of fact, the same points outlined against Sophiology in Florovsky's works (that creation is contingent, that God is absolutely distinct from creation, and that creation is absolutely free) can be said of Lossky's understanding of the patristic texts. But Lossky does not rigidly adhere to the neopatristic synthesis of Florovsky. Lossky, because of a more creative understanding of Tradition, a consistent application of apophasis, and a more open and sensitive view of the insights and intuitions of the Russian religious philosophers, links the concept of freedom to the image of God in man and to the concept of the human person. In the sections following, 2. The Creative Trinity and Divine Ideas, 3. Creation: Cosmic Order, and 4. The Image, we will see a heavy dependence on patristic texts with some sharing with the Russian religious philosophers. But in section 5., The Person, we will see some reliance on patristic texts but a greater sharing with the ideas of the Russian religious philosophers. This, as opposed to Florovsky, is what is demonstrated in his doctrine of creation.

Lossky is also consistent in his understanding of the patristic tradition with Orthodox Tradition. Yet, there are some differences between his work and Florovsky's. And there are some very obvious additions as well: notably his use of the Russian religious philosophers, his covering of the Biblical creation accounts, and his Maximian cosmology. Also, Lossky has singled-out the theology of the Image as an important aspect of the creation, and as a corollary, has a very interesting (albeit inherited from the Russian religious philosophers) concept about the notion of the human *person*. These concepts will be the focus of this section.

As we will see, Lossky is more than just an historian treating the patristic texts as so much water drunk from another's reserve. Rather, he is a theologian who, to further the analogy, is like one who has drunk from the source font itself. One might say that it is Lossky, and not Florovsky, that actually accomplishes a true neopatristic synthesis. And it was Lossky who was one of the first, in contradistinction to the metaphysics of the All-Unity in Sophiology, to 'embark on a new path'.⁶¹³ 'Lossky immediately put right at the centre everything—namely a mystical-ascetic anthropology based on the realities of the spiritual experience—that the metaphysics of the All-Unity only wished to incorporate platonically (in all senses)'.⁶¹⁴

Most of the material that is covered on creation is taken from many of the articles found in the book of compilations, *Image and Likeness*. Also used are 'Created Being', and 'Image and Likeness', chapters five and six, respectively, of *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, and finally, 'The Creation', chapter 2 of *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*.

1. Preliminary Remarks

As was said above, Lossky's view of creation is consistent with Florovsky's and by extension, with the patristic tradition. From the outset, his identification of creation as 'the irreducible ontological density of the *other*'⁶¹⁵ sets the tone for his understanding of creation *ex nihilo*. Creation is *being* other than the Divine Being of God. And as God's Being is to be approached apophatically, created being is to be approached in a 'sort of apophaticism in reverse' to arrive at the revealed concept of creation *ex nihilo*. As with Florovsky, this point, as well as most of his theology, is a direct contradiction to the Sophiological principles we have seen above.

⁶¹³ Horuzhy, Neo-Patristic, 316.

⁶¹⁴ Horuzhy, Neo-Patristic, 316. Although I think his critique of Lossky is accurate, his critique of the Sophiologists is a bit extreme.

⁶¹⁵ Lossky, *OT*, 51.

Lossky expounds the idea of creation *ex nihilo* in the second book of Maccabees, 7:28, where a mother, exhorting her son to have courage to suffer martyrdom, says to him: “I beseech thee, my son, look upon the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, and consider that God made them of things that were not; and so was mankind made likewise.” (*hoti ek ouk onton epoieisen auta ho theos*)⁶¹⁶ Here Lossky notes, in the style of an adroit exegete, that the negative adverb used here is the radical negative *ouk*, as opposed to *mei*, and thus leaves no room for doubt in the meaning of the expression. God has created from ‘nothingness’.⁶¹⁷

Creation is a free act of God. There is no necessity in God to create. Lossky’s reasoning for this is that ‘the God-Trinity is plenitude of love; It has no need of another to pour out its love, since the other is already in It, in the circumincession of the hypostases’.⁶¹⁸ Humanity was not created, as some believe, so that God could share His love. This is a direct attack against Bulgakov’s understanding. The love of God is already complete amongst the three Persons of God. Thus, creation, which is based on the free will of God, ‘is an act proper to a God who is personal, to the Trinity whose common will belongs to the divine nature’.⁶¹⁹ It is this ‘personal’ aspect of Lossky’s doctrine of creation that is unique to him in comparison to Florovsky. Lossky creatively uses the inner life of the Trinity as a defense against the Sophiological understanding of why God created. It is this use of the Trinity that identifies Lossky’s theology throughout: a fact fostered by the Sophiologists themselves.⁶²⁰

Lossky shares much in common, sometimes word for word, with many of Florensky’s concepts. Following Florensky, Lossky believes all Truth to be antinomian. Thus to the rational mind Truth would appear as a contradiction. And thus we find that the

⁶¹⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 92 and *OT*, 51.

⁶¹⁷ Lossky, *OT*, 51.

⁶¹⁸ Lossky, *OT*, 52.

⁶¹⁹ Lossky, *MT*, 94.

⁶²⁰ Florensky, *Pillar*, ‘Chapter IV. Letter Three: Triunity’, and Bulgakov’s trilogy *On Divine Humanity*.

‘Truth is therefore *one essence with three hypostases*’.⁶²¹ The Truth is the Trinity.

‘The term *homoousios* expresses precisely this antinomic seed of Christian life-understanding, this one name (“in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit,” and not “in the names”) of the Three Hypostases’.⁶²² Antinomy and consubstantiality are keys to understanding Florensky and Bulgakov. But, more importantly here, these are foundational building blocks for Lossky as well. We will see more of this sharing with Bulgakov and Florensky later.

To continue, for Lossky God creates out of pure freedom. Lossky shows the difference between Divine liberty and human liberty: which, because of the fall, can and does lead to excess and evil. This, he says, ‘disintegrates being’.⁶²³ On the other hand, Divine liberty, which transcends creation, is ‘infinitely good’ and ‘gives rise to being’.⁶²⁴ It is this liberty that is reflected in the creature as God calls it to share in his divinity. It is this ‘call and the possibility of responding to it’, that ‘constitute for those who are within creation the only justification of the latter’,⁶²⁵ that is, the justification of liberty.

It is this freedom that constitutes, in part, what it means to be personal. It is out of His free will that God creates. He creates ‘gratuitously’. Therefore the creation cannot be coeternal with God. And thus, the creation is contingent. But here is another interesting fact supplied by Lossky. Yes, created beings are contingent, but only ‘in relation to the very being of the Trinity, it imposes on created beings the necessity to exist, and to exist forever: contingent for God, creation is necessary for itself, because God freely makes of the created being what it must be’.⁶²⁶ It is the same concept seen in Florovsky, but Lossky recognizes a dual aspect of necessity.

⁶²¹ Florensky, *Pillar*, 37.

⁶²² Florensky, *Pillar*, 41-42.

⁶²³ Lossky, *OT*, 53.

⁶²⁴ Lossky, *OT*, 53.

⁶²⁵ Lossky, *OT*, 53.

⁶²⁶ Lossky, *OT*, 53. Mt. John Zizioulas handles the existential necessity of humanity very well in *Being as Communion* (New York: SVS Press, 1993), 42-43. It is also interesting to note that footnote 38 on page 42 reflects Lossky’s influence on Zizioulas on this subject and on what it means to create.

For Lossky this ‘gratuitousness’ of God is seen positively. It is the gratuity of the poet. And thus, analogously, creation is the poetry of God (which Lossky sees as the very meaning of creation). ‘Poet of the heavens and the earth’, as Lossky transliterates the Creed. Creation is made as a very personal effort of God, and viewing creation as such allows us to ‘penetrate the mystery of created being’.⁶²⁷ What is behind Lossky’s thought is this: implicit in creation is the ‘personal-ness’ of it. This can be seen in Lossky’s description of the negative facet of what it means to create, another jab to Sophiology. ‘To create is not to reflect *oneself*...is not vainly to divide *oneself* in order to take everything unto *oneself*’.⁶²⁸

Constantly behind Lossky assumptions are the ‘personal’ aspect. And so, as Lossky states positively what it means to create, we can see that to truly create is to make something that is completely free and independent of *oneself*. ‘It is a calling forth of *newness*. One might almost say: a risk of newness. When God raises, outside of Himself, a new subject, a free subject, that is the peak of His creative act. Divine freedom is accomplished through creating this supreme risk: another freedom’.⁶²⁹

Thus, for Lossky, creating is the bringing forth of the ‘unique’, a free and independent *other*. This is the first occurrence of Lossky’s concept of the ‘risk of God’. This will be developed more in the section on ‘The Person’. But for now, let it suffice to say that the greatest creative achievement was introducing the possibility of rejection: thus, a risk. This is of course, as seen above, a rejection of Sophiological principle that the freedom of man will be overcome.

Before we move on to Lossky’s understanding of the ‘divine images’, I wish to very quickly look at his short contradiction of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*.⁶³⁰ There is a presupposition in *Being and Nothingness* that assumes that ‘nothingness’ is an actual

⁶²⁷ Lossky, *OT*, 54.

⁶²⁸ Lossky, *OT*, 54. Italics mine.

⁶²⁹ Lossky, *OT*, 54.

⁶³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), Part I, The Problem of Nothingness.

reality.⁶³¹ Lossky states that the original ‘*nihil*’ of creation cannot be objectified.

From Lossky’s perspective, the expression ‘nothing’ used to describe where creation came out of is merely to demonstrate the fact that ‘before’ creation there existed only God.

Thus the whole dialectic of being and nothingness is absurd: nothingness has no existence of its own (it would anyway be a contradiction *in abstracto*); in it a correlative to the very being of creatures; the latter are founded neither in themselves nor in the divine essence, but uniquely on the will of God.⁶³²

Thus, Lossky’s views are the same as Florovsky’s and shares much that is the patristic tradition: creation has no subsistence in and of itself. Creation’s permanency and stability are only because God has willed and created by the ‘thoughts of God’. Not because there is a shared source in God’s being, as Sophiology would say. Next, we consider Lossky’s distinct contributions to the concept of the ‘divine ideas’.

2. The Creative Trinity and Divine Ideas

In describing the Orthodox doctrine of divine ideas, Lossky first emphasizes in his more mature work, *Orthodox Theology*, that creation is the work of the Trinity. This is clearly demonstrated in the tri-attribution of the Creed. The Father is ‘Maker of heaven and earth’, the Son is He ‘by whom all things were made’, and the Spirit is ‘the Giver of Life’.⁶³³ Lossky quotes St. Athanasius, ‘The Father created all things by the Son in the Holy Spirit’.⁶³⁴

Although the creation is the common work of the Trinity, following St. Basil, Lossky notes that each person of the Trinity ‘is the cause of created being in a way which is different though in each case united to the others’. Created being is a result of

⁶³¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 36 and following.

⁶³² Lossky, *OT*, 54.

⁶³³ Lossky, *MT*, 100, and *OT*, 55.

⁶³⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 100, and *OT*, 55.

Trinitarian collaboration.⁶³⁵ St. Basil's description of the creation of angels demonstrates the work of the three persons of the Trinity.

In creation consider first the primordial cause (*tèn prokataptikèn aitían*) of all that has been made—this is the Father; then the operating cause (*tèn demiourgikén*)—which is the Son; and the perfecting cause (*tèn teleiotikén*)—the Holy Spirit: so it is by the will of the Father that the heavenly spirits are, by the operation of the Son that they came into existence, and by the presence of the Holy Spirit that they are made perfect.⁶³⁶

This quote by St. Basil brings Lossky to the concept of the economic manifestation of the 'effecting Word' and the 'perfecting Spirit' in creation. More specifically here, concerning the divine ideas, the work of the Logos as the manifestation of the Father. Thus, the Logos is the 'raison d'être par excellence' of all creation, for all of creation receives its 'ontological reality' from It,⁶³⁷ for the Logos is the divine will manifested. And since the Word is the 'causal principle' it is a type of 'divine nexus, the threshold from which flow the creative outpourings, the particular *logoi* of creatures'.⁶³⁸ Therefore every creature has its 'idea', its 'reason' in God, in the thought of the Creator who creates with 'reason'. 'Divine ideas are the eternal reasons for creatures'.⁶³⁹ Thus Sophia is an unnecessary proposition.

Lossky clarifies that although the Fathers' thought take on a very Platonic character by their word usage, they have 'entirely renewed their [the Platonists] content' by a more biblical perspective.⁶⁴⁰ The biblical emphasis (found in Genesis, Proverbs, Psalms, Job and others) of the newness of creation is stressed. And instead of the dualistic world-view of Platonism, what is adopted is 'the transparency of the visible to the invisible'.⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 100, and *OT*, 55.

⁶³⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 100-101. St. Basil, *Liber de Spiritu Sancto*, XVI, 38, PG 32, 136AB.

⁶³⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 98, and *OT*, 55.

⁶³⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 99.

⁶³⁹ Lossky, *OT*, 56.

⁶⁴⁰ Lossky, *OT*, 56.

⁶⁴¹ Lossky, *OT*, 57.

It must also be said here that Lossky (along with St. Augustine himself), rejects St. Augustine's earlier view of the static 'exemplarism'.⁶⁴² The ideas are not the same as the created thing itself. Also, the divine ideas are not of the essence of God but are of the free and personal will of God. The essence of God far transcends the ideas, which are of the will. But Lossky does accept, as does Florovsky in the acceptance of the Denys' *exemplars*, a 'dynamic' *exemplarism*,⁶⁴³ or of the 'volitional thought' of St. John of Damascus. 'God contemplated all things before their existence, formulating them in His mind; and each being received its existence at a particular moment, according to His eternal thought and will (*katà tèn theletikèn autou àchronon hénnoian*), which is a predestination (*proorismós*), an image (*eikón*) and a model (*parádeigma*)'.⁶⁴⁴

Lossky translates *theletikè énnōia* as 'volitional thought'⁶⁴⁵ and comments that this is a perfect expression for understanding the Orthodox Church's doctrine of divine ideas. The divine ideas are 'Wisdom at work' and constitute the *logoi* in which each creature is rooted: thus, for Lossky it is not Sophia, but the divine energies of God.

As with Florovsky, since the divine ideas are not of the essence, they are of 'that place which is after the essence', or the divine energies.⁶⁴⁶ Thus, there is a dynamic and intentional quality to the ideas. Since they are of the will of God they actually determine the differing modes for created beings to participate in the divine energies. This contradicts the Sophiological concept of Sophia as the connecting and animating factor in creation. The ideas are predeterminations (*proorismoí*) and foreordain the differing 'unequal statures of various categories of beings, which are moved by the divine love and respond to it each according to the proportion of its nature'.⁶⁴⁷ Here Lossky follows Denys' understanding of hierarchical dispositions. The divine ideas are the very method of

⁶⁴² Lossky, *OT*, 57.

⁶⁴³ Lossky, *OT*, 58.

⁶⁴⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 94.

⁶⁴⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 94.

⁶⁴⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 95.

⁶⁴⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 97.

participation in the divine energies.⁶⁴⁸ It is the ‘point of contact’ of each individual creature with God. But, because of the intentionality of the idea, it does not stop there, it continues and is the end, the vocation of its very being: all creatures are called to perfect union with God⁶⁴⁹ We must consider the goal and end of the creature, and within this consider its vocation. But, before we do, we must first regard its original state.

Creatures from the very moment of their creation are separated from God. In the Eastern tradition there is no concept of a ‘pure nature’ in which ‘grace is added as a supernatural gift’.⁶⁵⁰ In the very act of creation itself grace is implied, for the creature was designed with the faculty of union with God. This is the creature’s object of being created. Any distinctions that are made concerning the first nature of the creature and progress added by ‘their ever increasing participation in the divine energies can never be more than fictions; fictions, moreover, which tend to separate into distinct moments an indivisible reality whose appearance is simultaneous’.⁶⁵¹

Since it is in each creature’s predetermination by the ‘thought-wills’ to be united with God, the progress of that creature is a dynamic path by way of a synergy of wills to its final end: union with God. Since the creature’s end and fulfilment is this union, it presupposes that the ‘primitive beatitude’ was not deification, but a perfection of the creature, which was ordained to this end.⁶⁵² Again, all creatures are called to this end, but it is only accomplished by a cooperation of the creature’s will with the ‘idea-willings’ of God. Thus, it is the energy of God, God’s work, which is still God Himself, and not Sophia that is the connecting factor between Creator and creation. Creation is perceived as shot-through with the energy of God as one freely cooperates with the will of God.

This synergy of the two wills presupposes in the creature liberty, a free will. Thus, it is ‘possible to see in the initial state of the created cosmos an unstable perfection in

⁶⁴⁸ Lossky, *OT*, 58.

⁶⁴⁹ Lossky, *MT*, 98.

⁶⁵⁰ Lossky, *MT*, 101.

⁶⁵¹ Lossky, *MT*, 101.

⁶⁵² Lossky, *MT*, 99.

which the fullness of union is not yet achieved and in which created beings have still to grow in love in order to accomplish fully the thought-will of God'.⁶⁵³ According to St. Maximus, the creatures are beings that are created as limited beings, for 'their end is outside of themselves, that there is something towards which they tend'.⁶⁵⁴

Thus, man is in a constant state of 'becoming'. All of creation is in this state of movement, pushing, as it were, to its final end designed by God. This is its vocation. Lossky uses Bulgakov's understanding of the creature as 'being in the process of becoming.... The process of becoming lies at the very root of creatureliness...'⁶⁵⁵ But for Lossky, instead of Sophia being the 'divine power sustaining the being of the world',⁶⁵⁶ it is simply God's divine power and love. And, in a sort of Aristotelian manner, God is the one who produces this movement, which is a movement of love in the creature, which makes them move toward God. 'He draws them to Himself, "desiring to be desired and loving to be loved." His will for us is a mystery, for the will is a relationship with another'.⁶⁵⁷ And this personal relationship is union.

Here again, for Lossky, is the personal aspect of the theosis, or deification of the creature. It is only in this personal relationship that God has with the world that we know His will. It is the divine 'willings', the divine ideas that are the 'point of contact between the infinite and the finite'.⁶⁵⁸ Thus, it is by renouncing all that is finite and cooperating with God's predeterminations, the divine ideas, that the process of 'becoming' unified with God is accomplished. This is man's final end. But it is by acquiescing freely to the 'will-word', the single individual divine idea in each creature, which is its 'norm of existence' and its 'way of transfiguration', that union occurs. This, for Lossky, is what it means to be a person.

⁶⁵³ Lossky, *MT*, 97.

⁶⁵⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 98.

⁶⁵⁵ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 62.

⁶⁵⁶ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 63.

⁶⁵⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 98.

⁶⁵⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 98.

The saint whose created will cooperates freely with the will-idea of God Who at once establishes and solicits it, perceives, through the detached contemplation of nature, the world as ‘a musical arrangement’: in each thing he hears the word of the Word, the thing being no more for him, in this fervent deciphering of ‘the book of the world’, than an existing word, for ‘heaven and earth pass away, but my words will not pass away’ (Matt. 24:35).⁶⁵⁹

This change of perception, this seeing the world shot-through with God, this union with God, this transfiguration, this ‘movement of becoming’ is personal. This is critical for Lossky. This flies in the face of all impersonalism that was to be found in Sophiology. The personal God does not bring about theosis by an impersonal force but by His very personal energy and love.

3. Creation: Cosmic Order

Florovsky never considers the six days of creation. And although Lossky does, he is very explicit that he only considers specific theological ideas that pertain to the doctrine of the union with God. He follows the *Hexaemeron* of St. Basil fairly closely. But before we examine this, it is first necessary, as a prelude, to consider Lossky’s understanding of the ‘geocentrism’ of Christianity.

Revelation, Lossky says, is ‘essentially geocentric’ for it has to do with conferring the truth of the salvation of humanity ‘under the conditions which belong to the realities of life on earth’.⁶⁶⁰ This of course is a spiritual geocentrism; here we already see St. Maximus’ influence, for

the earth is *spiritually central* because it is the body of man, and because man, penetrating the indefiniteness of the visible to bind it again to the invisible, is the central being of creation, the being who reunites in himself the sensible and the intelligible and thus participates, richer than the angels, in all the orders of the ‘earth’ and of ‘heaven’.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁹ Lossky, *OT*, 58.

⁶⁶⁰ Lossky, *MT*, 105.

⁶⁶¹ Lossky, *OT*, 64.

With this much emphasis on humanity, he might have gone a little further and called it a geo-anthropocentric. What is important here, following St. Maximus, is that humanity is at the centre of the cosmos and not Sophia.

Lossky is clear on two points when considering the six-day creation. First, the psychology intertwined with the Copernican cosmology betrays a spiritual ‘off-centeredness’ as it moves away from the soteriological attitude of life outward toward the universe. In this way this attitude seeks to find meaning but in its external and limited perspective of disintegration, which is due to our nature after the fall. It is only the Christian mystic who, by moving inward, into the interior of the heart, finds, as he spiritually ascends, that the ‘universe appears more and more unified, more and more coherent, penetrated by spiritual forces and forming one whole within the hand of God’.⁶⁶² In this sense, the problem of the unified field theory becomes solved only spiritually.

Secondly, with this type of spiritual geocentric cosmology all scientific cosmologies become irrelevant, or rather, any one of them can be ‘accommodated’ by Christianity. That is provided the scientific theory ‘does not attempt to go beyond its own boundaries and begin impertinently to deny things which are outside its own field of vision’.⁶⁶³ Lossky’s view of science is shared with Florensky, whom he mentions in this same passage.⁶⁶⁴ It has its place and is a useful tool but it is limited to the sensible and material universe. But science should not be applied in areas beyond this limitation, that is to say, to metaphysics. And thus, it cannot speak to the weightier questions of life. With these things said it is now time to consider the cosmic order from Lossky’s gleaning of the *Hexameron*. It is important to remember that this is how Lossky explains how the Creator created creation, how and to what extent they are linked and connected. Obviously this is in contradiction to Sophiology.

⁶⁶² Lossky, *MT*, 106.

⁶⁶³ Lossky, *MT*, 106.

⁶⁶⁴ Florensky, *Pillar*, 93.

Lossky does not believe in a literal six-day creation. But this should be obvious as well to anyone reading the Genesis text, since the heavenly luminaries are not even established until the fourth day. The six days of labour are a ‘successive distinction of elements which were created simultaneously on the first day’.⁶⁶⁵ Thus the first day itself is the positing of the entire created universe, both intelligible and sensible, the visible and the invisible. Following on from this, the remaining five days are a progressive organization by God of the creation. Heaven, the world of angelic beings, is dealt with only in passing, which reemphasizes the geocentric theory.⁶⁶⁶ According to St. Isaac the Syrian, the angelic world was created in relative ‘silence’ when compared to the rest of creation.⁶⁶⁷

The remaining days are viewed as stages, more hierarchical than chronological, with man at the centre of these concentric spheres of being. But first the whole cosmos is created as a ‘mixture of undifferentiated elements’. The ‘earth was deserted and void, darkness covered the abyss’.

Then God gives the first of many commands: ‘God said: let there be light, and there was light’. The first defining information dictated to the elements is light. It is the Word that ‘introduces Itself’ into the elements. Here is where the contact between the divine and the created is demonstrated. ‘Light therefore is the perfection of created being, the “luminous-force,” raised by the “logoi-wills” which radiated from the Word and go to fertilize the darkness: less physical vibration in consequence than intellectual light’.⁶⁶⁸

Lossky, who seems aware of the physical nature of light, does not wish to be misconstrued and so clarifies: the light he is speaking of is intelligible.

Lossky says concerning the darkness, that it is a ‘positive darkness’. This darkness ‘is the potential moment of created being’.⁶⁶⁹ The darkness represents the ‘uterine mystery

⁶⁶⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 106.

⁶⁶⁶ Lossky, *OT*, 63-64.

⁶⁶⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 107.

⁶⁶⁸ Lossky, *OT*, 65.

⁶⁶⁹ Lossky, *OT*, 65.

of fertility'.⁶⁷⁰ Here, all of the created being is found as potential, waiting, as it were, in a womb. Such was the first day. In the second day, God orders the separation of the firmament. The third day God orders the physical waters to separate and the earth appears. Then God commands the earth to produce the first life, plants. The fourth day the lights are set in the sky and the physical rotation of the universe begins. It is here that the 'creative simultaneousness of the first days becomes, for the creature, succession'.⁶⁷¹ The fifth day the Logos creates the fishes and birds. Because of the relationship established between the two, Lossky notes that it is obviously not a scientific cosmogony, but instead a vision of being that is hierarchical, a 'vision for which the mystery of form, the secondary quality of the sensible (so greatly neglected by science) have a decisive meaning which hark back to the intelligible depths, the "logoi" of creation'.⁶⁷²

But because of the fall, our nature has difficulty seeing this vision of the universe. Lossky knows and expresses our fallen psychology. But Lossky states that it can be found again in the 'ecclesiastical "new creation," both in the liturgical and sacramental cosmos and in the liturgical *theoría phusikè* of the ascetics'.⁶⁷³ It is only in the Church, with the liturgical and sacramental *habitus*, that our perception can be changed. This is much like Blake's 'doors of perception', which need to be cleansed, but what is understood for the infinite is the '*logoi-wills*' of God.

On the sixth day God orders the earth to produce animals. Here, with the creation of humanity, Lossky's excitement is so obvious and engaging that I quote him at length.

But suddenly the tone of the narrative changes; a new style of creation emerges. 'Let us make', says God. What does this change signify? The creation of angelic spirits was done 'in silence' (St. Isaac). The first word was light. Then God ordered and blessed ('God saw that it was good'). But on the sixth day after the creation of the animals, when God said 'Let us make man in Our image and according to Our likeness', it seemed that He stopped Himself and that the persons of the Trinity were in consort. The

⁶⁷⁰ Lossky, *OT*, 65.

⁶⁷¹ Lossky, *OT*, 66.

⁶⁷² Lossky, *OT*, 66.

⁶⁷³ Lossky, *OT*, 66.

plural number that appears now shows that God is not alone. It is the deliberation of the 'Divine Council' which proves that creation was the work neither of necessity nor of arbitrariness, but a free and reflective act.⁶⁷⁴

But does this not sound very similar, near identical to the very concept that Bulgakov promoted? This is Bulgakov's concept of 'free necessity' as seen above. This is the antinomic understanding that God neither creates out of necessity nor of arbitrariness. Because Lossky accepted the antinomic anti-rationalism of Florensky, he was free to see Bulgakov's insights. And it is Florovsky's lack of antinomic understanding that caused him to fail to grasp Bulgakov's intuitions. But we must remember that although the words and the concepts are the same Lossky does not buy into the metaphysical aspect of Bulgakov's Sophia.

Lossky, by following the narrative of Genesis, mirrors the slow build-up to the climax of the summit of creation. Humanity is distinct from all the rest of created existence. It is man alone that the text reveals that God creates out of His 'Divine Council', out of the Tri-unity of persons. But why is man different, singled out as such?

Man is singled out because he is a person. God ordered the creation and commanded the organization of all the parts of creation. But man, who is personal, is not a part of the whole, 'for a person cannot contain a part of the whole, since it contains the whole within itself'.⁶⁷⁵ Since man is a composite of both intelligible and sensible, he unites within himself both worlds. Thus, he participates in all the aspects of the created cosmos. Man who is a personal being is created from the personal aspect of God, whose image he is made in. Man created in the image of God, must 'reflect' His 'free totality'.⁶⁷⁶ From this, Lossky's understanding of what it means to be a person is that man did not arise out of an 'order to be', but instead, arose, was created, from the free common will of the three

⁶⁷⁴ Lossky, *OT*, 66.

⁶⁷⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 108.

⁶⁷⁶ Lossky, *OT*, 67.

persons of the Divinity. This is the image of God in man, or at least one aspect of it.

The image of God in man will be treated more fully later.

Also, what it means to be a person for humanity is caught up in man ‘being a whole’ of the created universe. That is, that he participates in the unifying of all creation. This is his ‘unique perfection’. As is stated in an unsubstantiated quote of St. Maximus. ‘For all things which have been created by God, in their divers natures, are brought together in man as in a melting-pot, and form in him one unique perfection—a harmony composed of many different notes’.⁶⁷⁷ It is humanity created in the image of God that is the connection between the divine and the created. This is a natural place to consider Lossky’s treatment of St. Maximus’ divisions of Creation.

Lossky follows very closely St. Maximus’ belief concerning the five divisions of creation. In these divisions are concentric spheres of being with man being at the centre, incorporating them all within himself. First, there is the division between uncreated nature and created nature, that is, between God and all that is created. Second, there is a division between the intelligible and the sensible. Third, the sensible universe is divided between the heaven and the earth. Fourth, paradise, where man habituates, is divided from the rest of the earth. Fifth, and final, man is divided into two sexes, male and female. According to Maximus, this final division is made definitive, an inherent characteristic, after the fall.⁶⁷⁸

On this final division Lossky exhibits a struggle and some theological tension. The main problem is that both St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Maximus (who reproduces St. Gregory) believed that God as a prevision for sin created the division of the sexes.

Being, which has its origin in change retains an affinity with change. This is why He who, as Scripture says, sees all things before their coming to be having regarded or rather having foreseen in advance by the power of His

⁶⁷⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 108. The quote comes from L. Karsavine, *The Holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church* (in Russian), (Paris: 1926), 238. Lossky notes that although he could not find the quote in St. Maximus’ works, the idea itself is found in other places: see *De Ambigua*, PG 91, 1305 AB.

⁶⁷⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 108.

anticipatory knowledge in which direction the movement of man's free and independent choice would incline, having thus seen how it would come to pass, added to the image the division into male and female: a division which has no relation to the divine Archetype, but which, as we have said, is in agreement with irrational nature.⁶⁷⁹

This quote, coupled with the biblical text that 'God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female', and that man was created 'very good', caused in Lossky some cognitive dissonance.

In *Mystical Theology*, Lossky's earlier work on this subject, he attributes this idea of the Fathers of division of the sexes as prevision to 'inevitable confusion in theological reasoning, so that clear expression becomes impossible'.⁶⁸⁰ The reason for this is because when speaking about the original state of creation before the fall one cannot get away from the fact that one speaks from the perspective of post fall understanding. There is a natural tendency to 'superimpose' our fallen concepts of the sexual division upon the sexual division of pre-fall. The true meaning of this final division is a mystery and can only be 'glimpsed in those places where sex is surpassed in a new plenitude'.⁶⁸¹ Here he means, of course, the Church's understanding of Mariology, marriage and monasticism.

In *Orthodox Theology*, his later understanding, Lossky is far more adamant about his position, 'One cannot, however, follow Gregory when, arguing about this "preventive" character of sexuality'.⁶⁸² His understanding of the subtle theological problem that the Fathers faced is clearer. But so is his theological position. Here, in opposition to 'following the Fathers', is a clear case when Orthodox theology and Tradition is better served by not following the Fathers. This is where the unique approaches to the neopatristic synthesis of Lossky and Florovsky are clearly demonstrated. Lossky relies more upon theology than on patristic sources, or rather, rejects patristic sources.

⁶⁷⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, 16, PG 44, 181-185, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 108.

⁶⁸⁰ Lossky, *MT*, 109.

⁶⁸¹ Lossky, *MT*, 109.

⁶⁸² Lossky, *OT*, 77.

The issue that the Fathers faced is this. Did a biological necessity exist in paradise, as the divine command to ‘multiply’ suggests? If so, does this not imply multiplicity and death? Again, St. Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus’ answer was to state that sexuality was a prevision of sin to ‘preserve humanity after the Fall, though simply as a possibility’.⁶⁸³ Sexuality was put in place to defend man against finitude after the fall. But it was put in place merely as a safeguard. And as a life-jacket on a boat does not compel a person to jump into the sea, neither does the sexuality compel the break of human nature. But sin actualized this possibility. Thus our ‘crude biological state’, these ‘tunics of skin’ are far ‘different from our transparent corporeality of Paradise’.⁶⁸⁴

Lossky was dissatisfied with this answer that the division of man into male and female was a prevision. Though not really an answer, but perhaps more of a statement of knowability and unknowability, Lossky’s exposition of the biblical text is his solution. Although we cannot know what the original state was, we can know what we are now, and what God’s original design was as stated in the biblical text. For the biblical text clearly states that the division is part of the image of God in man. Thus Lossky, following Florensky, sees a one to one correspondence of the single nature in diversity of persons of man with the single nature in diversity of persons of the Trinity. Moreover, he believes that the command to ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ corresponds to the triad overcoming the duality in the Trinity.

Thus the mystery of the singular and plural in man reflects the mystery of the singular and plural in God: in the same way that the personal principle in God demands that the one nature express itself in a diversity of persons, likewise in man created in the image of God. Human nature cannot be the possession of a monad. It demands not solitude but communion, the wholesome diversity of love. Then the divine order, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it’, establishes a certain correspondence between sexuality and cosmic domination of the first couple and the mysterious overcoming in God of duality by the triad.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸³ Lossky, *OT*, 76.

⁶⁸⁴ Lossky, *OT*, 76.

⁶⁸⁵ Lossky, *OT*, 67.

What we see here is an obvious borrowing from Bulgakov's concept of original humanity. Bulgakov takes seriously that man was created in God's image as male and female, bi-unity. But Bulgakov also sees in humanity's ability to reproduce the overcoming of bi-unity to multi-unity, as is the image of God. Here are Bulgakov's words.

In other words, the human hypostases have a double Proto-Image, which belongs to the heavenly humanity in its two countenances: the Logos and the Holy Spirit. This also corresponds to the fact that man, created in the image of God, was created as both male and female, and the context of Genesis 1:26-27 compels one to see the fullness of the image of God precisely in this bi-unity. In man, a clear distinction is established between male and female, expressed in the fact that the female was made out of one of the male's ribs (not directly out of the dust of the earth) and, in general, in the fact that the male plays the dominant role, since he bears the image of the demiurgic hypostasis, the Logos. Male and female, differing as two distinct images of man, bear, in their unity, the fullness of humanity and in this humanity, the fullness of the image of god: they bear the imprint of the dyad of the Son of the Holy Spirit, who reveal the Father. In their ability to reproduce, they contain the image of multi-unity that is inscribed in the human race as a whole. Thus, man is an uncreated-created divine-cosmic being, divine-human in his structure by his very origin. He is the living image of the trihypostatic God in His Wisdom.⁶⁸⁶

Lossky also believes that the very fact that humanity is personal demands a diversity of persons and a common nature. For Lossky, to be a person means to be not in 'solitude', but in 'communion', that is, a diversity of persons bound to one another in love. In the second narrative of creation man is seen as the hypostasis of the terrestrial cosmos. But, also, Eve is seen to be 'consubstantial' with man. (The antinomy of consubstantiality and diversity as person is a favourite theme of Florensky's, which we will take up later.) The Fathers related the procession of the Holy Spirit to the 'procession' of Eve; she is different but is of the same nature as man. Thus 'woman is not inferior to man: for love demands equality and love alone wished this primordial polarization, source of all the

⁶⁸⁶ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (hereafter *The Lamb*), (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 140.

diversity of the human species'.⁶⁸⁷ But it was this communion, this 'consubstantial interiority' that was lost at the fall. Thus the diversity that was intended for 'good' was corrupted, and persons became individuals. We shall speak more about this Florenskian distinction later.

Because of the fall, because of sin this paradisiacal love and communion of sexuality is very different from the 'devouring sexuality' we now know. In fact, the fall has even changed the very meaning of the words. Thus, that which God called blessed, sexuality and multiplicity, are now seen from our perspective as 'irremediably linked to separation and death'.⁶⁸⁸ This is clearly seen in humanity's 'biological reality', where our bodies have undergone a 'catastrophic mutation'.⁶⁸⁹ But humans still sense, still remember that there is something better than the way they love. For Lossky it is this 'paradisiacal nostalgia' that is a painful reminder of our first condition where death did not exist and the other was not known externally but internally.

And human love, the absolute passion of lovers, has never ceased harbouring, in the very fatality of its failure, a paradisiacal nostalgia where heroism and art are rooted. Paradisiacal sexuality, stemming completely from consubstantial interiority and whose marvellous multiplication, which should fill everything, would certainly demanded neither multiplicity nor death, is almost entirely unknown to us; for sin, by objectifying bodies ('they saw that they were naked'), made the first two human persons separate natures, two individual beings, having between them external relations.⁶⁹⁰

For Lossky a person is one who shares in a community of love with other persons of the same nature. One is no longer a person when one does not share in the love of a community, and thus becomes individuated nature. Though it is clear that because of sin the two original persons lost their communion and became individuals, it is not necessary for Lossky to say that human nature itself was made into separate natures. It is possible to

⁶⁸⁷ Lossky, *OT*, 70.

⁶⁸⁸ Lossky, *OT*, 67.

⁶⁸⁹ Lossky, *OT*, 67.

⁶⁹⁰ Lossky, *OT*, 77.

speak of the human nature after the fall as still one nature but fractured, splintered from the whole. Thus, each individual fractured human nature would now only be a part of the whole and no longer the whole itself. And therefore, being consistent with Lossky's understanding of personhood, would no longer be a person.

The fall did not only effect the division of the sexes, which is the final division of St. Maximus. Sin effected all five divisions and so all five divisions need to be integrated. And this is St. Maximus' understanding of man's original vocation. Man was to unite himself with the entire creation by overcoming the divisions, while at the same time reach his perfect union with God, and thus, deify all of creation. Thus humanity becomes the centre of all creation and not Sophia.

First it was necessary for man to overcome the division of the sexes by a chaste life, which would be a union more total than the external relation of the sexes. Secondly, man would be in a position to reunite Paradise with the rest of the terrestrial sphere. This would be accomplished by the love of God, which would prompt man to detach himself from the world in order to embrace everything. By his carrying Paradise in himself, by being in constant communion with God, man would 'transform the whole earth into Paradise'. Thirdly, man in his spirit and body would overcome spatial conditions and unite the entire sensible world. Fourthly, having surpassed the sensible, man would enter into the celestial cosmos and by living like the angels he would reunite in himself the sensible and intelligible worlds. Finally, in a sacramental act, having united all of creation in himself, man, motivated by love, would return to God all of His creation. God in turn, out of mutual love, would give Himself to man and by this gift, which is grace, man would 'possess all that God possesses by nature'. Thus the deification of man and the entire creation would be accomplished.⁶⁹¹

But Adam did not fulfil this vocation given to man. Because of the fall he was made inferior to the task. But God's plan did not change. And since Adam did not fulfil

⁶⁹¹ Lossky, *MT*, 109-110, and *OT*, 74. See also, Lars Thurberg, *Man and the Cosmos* (New York: SVS Press, 1985), 180-191, Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 2002), 72-74, 155-162.

it, we must look to the work of the second Adam, Christ, to understand what it was meant to be. Though Lossky's treatment of this will not be treated in this thesis, let us briefly note that Christ's work for Lossky is not substitutionary. This to Lossky would be a violation of man's freedom. The task itself still needs to be accomplished by man. Christ's work is 'in order to return to man the possibility of accomplishing his task, to reopen for him the path of deification, this supreme synthesis, through man, of God and the created cosmos, wherein rests the meaning of all of Christian anthropology'.⁶⁹²

4. The Image

a. Preliminary Remarks

'Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness... So God made man; in the image of God He made him; male and female He made them' (Gen. 1:26,27⁶⁹³). What is the image of God in man and where does it reside? Is the image of God inherent in man or is it mere 'reflection'? Did man lose the image after the fall or is it inalienable? What is human nature? These are some of the questions that Lossky addresses in his understanding of the image of God in man. For Lossky the image of God, freedom and person are so intimately connected, that is, that they are different aspects of the same thing, that although I treat them as different topics, there will be repetition and overlap.

As Lossky notes, the Fathers of the Church, both East and West, see a 'primordial correspondence between the being of man and the being of God'⁶⁹⁴ in the concept of the image of God in man. Lossky implies here that the Roman Catholic Church can be much in agreement with the conception held by the Orthodox Church. Although, and Lossky does deal with this distinction, there is the major difference of the concept of *donum superadditum*, that is, the superadded grace in the original man. Nevertheless, to Lossky

⁶⁹² Lossky, *OT*, 75.

⁶⁹³ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, (USA: Thomas Nelson, 2008)

⁶⁹⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 114.

there is much agreement between East and West.⁶⁹⁵ Lossky does clarify that although the expressions of the Orthodox Church and Catholic Church may differ, such as St. Augustine's method of psychological analogies applied to theology versus St. Gregory of Nyssa's method of taking Revelatory knowledge of God applied to anthropology, they are by no means contradictory.

Where Lossky does see conflict is in some contemporary Protestant theologians of his time: explicitly Barth, Brunner and Nygren (and I think implicitly Reinhold Niebuhr). These theologians do have a concept of the image of God in man, yet, as they see it, such a developed theology of the image of God in man is absent from Revelation.

Lossky concedes this but adds that what such theologians are missing is the fact of God's providential choice of the expression of this foundational theology was Hellenic. Here specifically Lossky has in mind the differences between the Hebrew texts versus the Greek texts of the Septuagint.⁶⁹⁶ What Lossky addresses in his theology of the image and his concept of the person can be seen as directed at Protestant misunderstandings of patristic texts and Orthodox Traditional theology.⁶⁹⁷ But his theology, as has been said many times, is also much directed against the Sophiological tendencies, by the use of Sophia as the All-Unity (the World-Soul) to link the divine and the creature. Whatever one might make of Bulgakov's understanding that man has in him something that is uncreated,

⁶⁹⁵ This is clearly the case now as one compares Lossky's theology with the Catechism of the Catholic Church (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1995), 101-108.

⁶⁹⁶ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness*, 126-128.

⁶⁹⁷ Specifically, Emil Brunner, *Der Mensch im Widerspruch* (Berlin, 1937), the English trans. *Man in Revolt* (London, 1939) and 'Man and Creation', Chapter 2 in *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 59-60, paragraph c. Because of his bent that the image of God in man is solely a 'relation', Brunner is fixed against any other concept. Also, although he does not reference the Fathers in some instances, Brunner seems to convey some of their theology. See, for example, page 61 of the *Doctrine* where he states, 'Man ought to know nothing of this freedom save in the form of the generous love of God. The fact that he is aware of this freedom of choice is already the effect of sin, and of separation from his connexion with God'. This is, of course, from St. Maximus. For according to Lossky, following St. Maximus, it is this freedom of choice that is the problem in the first place. 'However, according to St. Maximus, this freedom of choice is already an imperfection, a limitation of our true freedom. A perfect nature has no need of choice, for it knows naturally what is good. Its freedom is based on this knowledge. Our free choice (*gnomei*) indicates the imperfection of fallen human nature, the loss of divine likeness'. But Lossky also is in response to, Barth's *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III. 1 (Zurich: Zollikon, 1945), the English trans. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, part 1. (Edinburgh, 1958) 191ff, and also, though Lossky does not mention it, Reinhold Niebuhr, 'Man as Image of God and as Creature', in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. 1., Human Nature (London: Nisbet & Co., 1941).

that man ‘has in himself an uncreated, divine principle, the spirit...’⁶⁹⁸ (probably following Gregory of Nyssa), Lossky is against the idea. And, for Bulgakov man ‘has the image of God in his spirit, as well as in his nature and in his relation to the world’.⁶⁹⁹ Lossky is also opposed to this concept that man bears the image of God in his nature. For Lossky the entirety of man’s make-up is created and the image is the ‘someone’ that transcends the nature.

First, Lossky shows that the Fathers take up the concept of the Image from the ancient philosophy of man as a microcosm (as we have seen in St. Maximus’ understanding above), but without the Neo-Platonic content, or as he says, ‘with a vigorous bypassing of all immanentism’.⁷⁰⁰

There is nothing remarkable in wishing to make of man, the image and likeness of the universe, for the earth passes away, the sky changes and all that they contain is as transitory as that which contains them... People said that man is a microcosm and thinking to elevate human nature with this grandiloquent title, they had not noticed that they had honoured man with the characteristics of the mosquito and the mouse.⁷⁰¹

For Lossky, as St. Gregory, the true greatness in man is not what assimilates him to the rest of creation but what assimilates him to the Creator, that is ‘in his being in the image of the nature of the Creator’.⁷⁰² What is interesting is that Gregory actually says ‘image of the nature of the Creator’, which means to Lossky that we are created in the image of the Triune God. It is important to Lossky to convey to his contemporaries that although the Greek Fathers follow the terminology of Platonic philosophy, the content of their thoughts is completely Christian.⁷⁰³ The point to the Sophiologists is that whatever

⁶⁹⁸ Bulgakov, *The Lamb*, 137.

⁶⁹⁹ Bulgakov, *The Lamb*, 141.

⁷⁰⁰ Lossky, *OT*, 70.

⁷⁰¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XVI, par. 1, *P.G.*, t. 44, 177 D-180A, as quoted by Lossky, *MT*, 114, and *OT*, 70 and 119. Lossky here actually quotes the second half first and the first half second.

⁷⁰² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XVI, par. 2, eds. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5, (MA: Hendrickson, 1999).

⁷⁰³ Reinhold Niebuhr, ‘Man as Image of God and as Creature’, in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. 1., *Human Nature* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1943), 163-164. The misunderstanding of the Fathers as Platonists

content in the Fathers that was Platonic was eradicated. Thus, the content of the World-Soul, or the All-Unity, is not to be found in the Fathers.

What is the image of God in man? It is obvious that because of a lack of systemization in the Greek Fathers that it is hard to find a clear definition, that is, that there are different understandings of just what the image of God in man is. As Lossky explains, ‘we run the risk of losing ourselves amidst varying assertions, which though not contradictory, cannot be applied to any one part of human nature’.⁷⁰⁴ This is an important point to which we will return later.

The differing conceptions of the image of God that are sought in man by the Fathers are these: in his dominion, the lordship of man over the world; or in the soul, his spiritual nature; or in the mind (*noûs*), the ruling principle of his being; or in the higher faculties, the intellect, the reason (*lógos*); or in the freedom of man, his self determination (*autexousìa*) which makes him the true author of his actions; or in a characteristic of the soul, its simplicity or its immortality; or in the ability of knowing God, that is, in living in communion with Him, ‘with the possibility of sharing in divine being or with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the soul’.⁷⁰⁵

Lossky specifically mentions St. Macarius of Egypt’s concept of the image being presented in two ways:

First it is the formal condition of liberty, free will, the faculty of choice which cannot be destroyed by sin; secondly, it is the ‘heavenly image’, the positive content of the image, which is that communion with God, whereby before the fall man was clothed with the Word and the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰⁶

can be seen in Reinhold Niebuhr. He states that the Greek Fathers had a ‘strong Platonic influence’, and that their work, specifically St. Gregory of Nyssa, was ‘essential Platonism’ and ‘rationalism’. For a defense that Gregory’s thought is wholly Christian see Jean Danielou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, ed. 2 (Paris, 1953).

⁷⁰⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 115, and *OT*, 120.

⁷⁰⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 115, and *OT*, 120.

⁷⁰⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 116, and *OT*, 120.

Now, we shall consider the lack of agreement amongst the early Fathers on what the image of God in man is. Niebuhr agreeing with Calvin writes, ‘Calvin rightly points to Augustine’s profundity in distinction from the inconsistencies and obscurities in the doctrine of man in the early fathers. He says: “...such are the variations, fluctuations and obscurities of all the fathers, except Augustine, upon this subject that scarcely anything certain can be concluded from their writings”’.⁷⁰⁷ Lossky, on the other hand, views this reticence as a positive. ‘The number of these definitions and their variety show us that the Fathers refrain from confining the image of God to any one part of man’.⁷⁰⁸ Even the Biblical text itself is not precise as to what and where the image of God is.

What is clear is that man alone is created distinct from every other created being. As we have seen above, God ‘commanded’ the rest of creation, the angels were created in ‘silence’, but to man alone God said, ‘Let Us make man’. Following St. Irenaeus, it was God who fashioned man with His own hands, the Word and the Holy Spirit. It was into man alone that God breathed the breath of life. ‘Then God formed man out of dust from the ground, and breathed in his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul’ (Gen. 2:7).

Lossky gives St. Gregory of Nazianzus’ interpretation of the above text:

‘The Word of God taking a portion of the newly created earth, has with his own immortal hands fashioned our frame, and imparted life to it; since the spirit which he breathed into it, is an effluence (*aporroé*) of the invisible Divinity. Thus out of the dust, and out of the breath, man was created in the image of the Immortal, for in both the spiritual nature reigns supreme. That is why being but dust, I am bound to the life here below; having also a divine part (*theian moíran*) I carry in my breast the longing for eternal life’. And in the same poem on the soul, he says: ‘The soul is a breath of God, and though heavenly, it allows itself to mingle with the earth. It is the light shut up in a cave, but it is none the less a light divine and inextinguishable’.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁷ Niebuhr, *Human Nature*, 165, quoting Calvin, *Institutes*, Book II, Ch. 2, par. 4.

⁷⁰⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 116, and *OT*, 120.

⁷⁰⁹ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poemata dogmatica*, VIII, *peri psucheis*, vv. 70-7, *P.G.* 37, col. 452, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 117 and *OT*, 121.

It is easy to see how someone might take offence to these statements. They make man out to be more or less divine, or at least some part of man. Any attempt to make something inherent in man as divine is a problem. Brunner speaking against the idea of the ‘reason’ in man as being the ‘divine spark’ speaks to the problem as a whole:

If, on the contrary, as in the Catholic tradition, the *Imago Dei* is conceived in the formal structural sense as the endowment with reason, as creative freedom, then Man possesses the Image of God *in himself*. This view of the *Imago Dei* is the gate by which a pantheistic or an idealistic deification of man can enter. Man then possesses the divine reason in himself; his spirit is then a ‘spark’ from the divine Spirit. He has ‘divinity within himself’, ‘*est Deus in Nobis*’.⁷¹⁰

Because of Sophiology Lossky is clearly aware of this problem as well. If the passages of St. Gregory were taken literally, then one would see in man a character that was uncreated. Man would be some sort of God who possessed a body. This of course would not only contradict all accepted Christian teaching about the absolute distinction between created and Uncreated being, but St. Gregory would be contradicting his own teaching as well. It would fly in the face that ‘man is a creature called to *attain* to union with God, to *become* god by grace, but in no way god by virtue of his origin’.⁷¹¹ There would be other consequences as well, but the main would be the problem of evil. These passages taken literally would make either Adam not able to sin, since he was God, or else, Adam being of the same nature as God, God Himself would have sinned in Adam. This is Lossky’s confronting of the Sophiological understanding.

Obviously St. Gregory did not hold such views. So, there must be a different understanding of these passages. And this is just what Lossky interprets. The mingling of God with the soul is the ‘effluence of deity’, is the presence of God’s divine power, it is grace itself: not superadded but presupposed. God’s ‘divine breath’ is the ‘mode of creation’ and demonstrates the intimacy of the soul with God’s divine energy. The soul ‘is

⁷¹⁰ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, 60.

⁷¹¹ Lossky, *MT*, 117, and *OT*, 122.

produced by it in the same way as a movement of air is produced by the breath, contains this breath and is inseparable from it'.⁷¹² This is man's participation in the God's energy. Man's creation in the image and likeness of God presuppose his participation in God's being, that is, by grace man has communion with God. Man is called light because the 'archetypical Light' illuminates his mind. This is Lossky's correction of the Sophiological concept.

b. The Whole Man: Body and Soul

From the perspective of some of the Fathers the image of God resides in the whole man, that is, in body and soul. Here, it is interesting to note that Fr. Pomazansky in his book *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* insists that 'the image of God may be seen only in the soul, not in the body'.⁷¹³ This is of course motivated by the fact that God 'is Spirit' and has no materiality. But as Fr. Hopko points out, 'God is not "a spirit." And to say that God 'is Spirit', in this sense, is simply an anthropomorphism.⁷¹⁴ It also neglects much of the understanding of the body in patristic theology.

Lossky mentions St. Irenaeus, St. Gregory of Nyssa and gives a quote from St. Gregory Palamas in support of the concept that not only the soul but also the body shares in the character of the image of God: 'The word Man is not applied to either soul or body separately, but to both together, since together they have been created in the image of God'.⁷¹⁵ To substantiate this claim more fully, I offer these quotes.

From St. Irenaeus:

⁷¹² Lossky, *MT*, 118 and *OT*, 122.

⁷¹³ Fr. Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1997), 136.

⁷¹⁴ In support that 'God is Spirit' is not to be taken literally Fr. Thomas Hopko says, in *Christian Faith and the Same Sex Attraction* (CA: Conciliar Press, 2006), 19, fn. 3, 'God is not "a spirit." God is completely different (*totaliter aliter*) from creatures in every way. To refer to God as "spirit" is as anthropomorphic as to speak of God's eyes or hands. In St. John's Gospel, Jesus says, "God is Spirit" to indicate that God is not located anywhere, and must be worshipped "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). The Lord here is not making a meta physical statement about God's being, which, according to the Orthodox church fathers' interpretation of the Bible, as well as their personal mystical experience, is "beyond being [*hyperousios*]" and even "beyond divinity [*hypertheos*]"

⁷¹⁵ A work attributed to St. Gregory Palamas, *Prosopopeiae*, *P.G.*, 150, col.1361 C., as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 116, and *OT*, 120.

Against Heresies (Book V, Chapter 6)

God will bestow salvation upon the whole nature of man, consisting of body and soul in close union, since the Word took it upon Him, and adorned with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of whom our bodies are, and are termed, the temples.

I.

Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modelled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God.⁷¹⁶

From St. Gregory of Nyssa:

‘For as the nature of man is compounded of body and soul...’⁷¹⁷

From St. John of Damascus:

For since we are twofold, fashioned of soul and body, and our soul is not naked but, as it were, covered by a mantle, it is impossible for us to reach what is intelligible apart from what is bodily... For this reason Christ assumed body and soul, since human kind consists of body and soul...⁷¹⁸

And finally, from St Maximus the Confessor:

Gregory is saying that out of God’s great goodness human beings were composed of a soul and body. The rational and intellectual soul given to man is made in the image of its maker and through desire and intense love it holds fast to God and participation in the divine life. The soul becomes godlike through divinization, and because God cares for what is lower, that is the body, and has given the command to love one’s neighbour the soul prudently makes use of the body. By practicing the virtues the body gains familiarity with God and becomes a fellow servant with the soul. God who dwells in the soul uses it as an instrument to relate to the body and through the intimate bond between body and soul makes it possible for the body to share in the gift of immortality. [1092C] The result is that what God is to the soul the soul becomes to the body, and the one God, Creator of all, is shown to reside proportionately in all beings through human nature. Things that are by nature separated from one another return to a unity as they

⁷¹⁶ St Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1, (MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 531.

⁷¹⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit*, eds. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. 5, (MA: Hendrickson, 1999).

⁷¹⁸ St. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, translation by Andrew Louth, ed. John Behr, Popular Patristic Series (New York: SVS Press, 2003), 93.

converge together in the one human being. When this happens God will be *all in all* (1 Cor 15:28), permeating all things and at the same time giving independent existence to all things in himself. Then no existing thing will wander aimlessly or be deprived of God's presence. For through the presence of God, we are called *gods* (Jn. 10:35), *children of God*, *the body*, and *members* of God, even 'portion of God'. In God's purpose this is the end toward which our lives are directed. For this end man was brought into the world.⁷¹⁹

After the departure of the body the soul is not simply (and without further qualification) called 'soul', but the soul of a human being--in fact, of a particular human being. For even after (its separation from) the body, its essential concept is still determined by its relationship (to the body) as to a part of the whole; only in this way is it called 'human'. The same is true of the body.⁷²⁰

In all aspects of Orthodox theology the whole nature, both the soul and body together, are necessarily what it means to be human. This is a problem with Lossky and all others that see the image of God in man as 'not in the nature'. This is in Lossky a contradiction to patristic sources. For what is human nature but body and soul or spirit? For according to these patristic sources the image of God in man is both the body and soul, the entire human nature. In this sense, and from these specific quotes, Bulgakov is more correct in his understanding. But Lossky must reject the image in the whole nature to be consistent with his concept of person as the image of God in man in opposition to the individual nature. Nevertheless, since 'man' whole and complete, was created in the image of God, somehow the image extends to the body. From the creation to deification and the final destiny of man, the resurrection of the body, we are fashioned both body and soul. This is a necessary doctrine for the understanding the veneration of relics as well. For an excellent development of this theology see Dumitru Stăniloae's 'The Creation of Man'.⁷²¹

⁷¹⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7, in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (New York: SVS Press, 2003), 66.

⁷²⁰ St. Maximus, *Ambigua*, P.G. 91 1341 AB, as quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 175.

⁷²¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, Vol. 2 of *The Experience of God* (MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 65-74. Also, another fascinating perspective is Pavel Florensky's understanding of the 'holy body'. See Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, tran. Boris

c. Freedom

Now, I would like to discuss a little about Lossky's understanding of freedom, which he assumes but does not explain. The purpose of this section is not to explore all the different concepts of freedom in their development, which would actually be an excellent study for another time, but to try to understand Lossky's concept of freedom.

For Lossky, man never ceases from being a free responsive being, even if he is in opposition to God. According to St. Gregory of Nyssa the primary importance of man as the image is, 'the fact that he is freed from necessity, and not subject to domination of nature, but able freely to follow his own judgment'.⁷²² Thus, freedom from our nature, which is, according to Lossky, the 'formal' image, is the necessary prerequisite for the union with God, not just relationship, but participation in the nature of God by grace. According to this quote Lossky is correct. One can deduce from this apparent conflict with those quotes above, that there is not a consistency in the patristic sources.

In St. Gregory of Nazianzus, this freedom is given to man from God. And since God has called man to become by grace that which God is by nature, God demands a free response. God desires that this movement of man to God is a movement of love. God does not want automatons but persons to respond in love. And as such, love implies true freedom. As we have seen in Florovsky, freedom means the real existence of choice and the ability to enact it. Thus, the possibility of refusal is as real as the possibility of acceptance. In loving God, Lossky says, one must recognize the real possibility of revolt.⁷²³

Jakim (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 213 ff, originally published by *Put*, Moscow, 1914. I am also reminded of Whitman's poem 'I Sing The Body Electric': 'The bodies of men and women engirth me, and I engirth them, They will not let me off nor I them till I go with them and respond to them and love them... The man's body is sacred and the women's body is sacred...it is no matter who...In them and of them natal love...in them the divine mystery...the same old beautiful mystery'. *Selected Poems* (new York: Gramercy Books, 1992), 116.

⁷²² Lossky, *MT*, 119, and *OT*, 124.

⁷²³ Lossky, *OT*, 72.

But there is a bit of confusion in Lossky's thought. 'The resistance of freedom alone gives sense to the union', and freedom, which comes from God 'is the seal of our divine participation'.⁷²⁴ Lossky views the union with God as freedom itself, for union only has meaning if one is able to resist *this freedom*. And freedom itself is given as a seal, as the participation in God has been enacted, for a seal is usually placed after the fact, or at least simultaneously. But Lossky also states that 'the idea of person implies freedom *vis-à-vis* the nature. The person is free from its nature, is not determined by it. The human hypostasis can only realize itself by the renunciation of its own will, of all that governs us, and makes us subject to natural necessity'.⁷²⁵ If freedom is defined as the ability to renounce the nature and thus choose the will of God and as a gift of God Himself, then there must be two different aspects of freedom.

The understanding of the concept of freedom in general is a very difficult task. And here is no exception. Because Lossky himself does not explain his own theory it is hard to know what he assumes. Lossky has two different aspects of freedom: the one aspect of freedom that makes up a person, which is, according to Lossky, freedom from the necessity of the nature; and the other aspect of freedom which actually is the relationship with God. It is in the rejection of God's grace that one loses this one aspect of freedom, this original freedom that is given by God. The freedom to make decisions still remains, but not concerning the divine spiritual life. God gives his grace to man and thus man possesses true freedom: freedom to choose the virtues that will assimilate man to God's likeness. This understanding of freedom follows the 1928 article written by Nikolai A. Berdiaev. Berdiaev in 'The Metaphysical Problem of Freedom'⁷²⁶ holds to the two aspects of freedom idea. We must remember that Lossky was the son of a Russian religious philosopher and surrounded by and engaged with many of the contemporary exiled Russian intelligentsia. Here Lossky follows closely the personalist freedom of Berdiaev.

⁷²⁴ Lossky, *OT*, 72.

⁷²⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 122.

⁷²⁶ Nikolai A. Berdiaev, 'The Metaphysical Problem of Freedom' (hereafter Freedom), *Put'*, Jan. 1928, no. 9, 41-53.

There are two freedoms. There is a first freedom, irrational, a freedom of choice of good and evil, freedom, as a path, freedom, which conquers and which they conquer not, a freedom by which they accept the Truth and God, but it is not that, which they receive from the Truth and God. This also is a freedom, as indeterminism, as groundless. There is a second freedom, a rational freedom, a freedom in truth and good, a freedom as a goal and highest attainment, a freedom in God and from God. When we say, that such and such a man has attained to freedom, since that in him the higher nature has conquered the lower nature, since that in him reason has won out over the passions, wherein the spiritual principle has subordinated the soul-emotive element to itself, then we are speaking about this second freedom. And it is about this second freedom that the words of the Gospel speak: 'know ye the Truth and the Truth will set you free'.⁷²⁷

It is obvious that Lossky follows the same stream of thought as Berdiaev. As with Lossky, man must first encounter the Truth, a reference here to God Himself, to actually possess freedom. And although Lossky might disagree with him concerning his metaphysics of how freedom is grounded, they do share the same ideas concerning the dual concept of freedom.

One can accept the necessity of the nature and therefore reject God's will or, as a person, reject the necessity of the nature and accept the will of God. According to Lossky, this is the relationship with God; it is 'the living tension of opposites'.⁷²⁸ And God gives this freedom to man: 'it is the seal of our divine participation, the masterpiece of the Creator'. Thus, Lossky implies that there is no real freedom if one rejects the call of God. If one rejects the participation in the divine nature, then there is only the freedom to do the necessary will of the nature.

A couple of distinctions need to be made absolutely clear. First, for Lossky, as well as the entire Eastern Church, the limitations of freedom are not because man has a physical body, but the limitations are because the nature of man was created out of nothing. In the often-quoted statement of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, 'Creatures are

⁷²⁷ Berdiaev, *Freedom*, par. 1.

⁷²⁸ Lossky, *OT*, 72

poised on the creative word of God as on a diamond bridge; beneath the abyss of divine infinity, above the abyss of their own nothingness'.⁷²⁹

Secondly, again, for Lossky as well as the Orthodox Church, grace is the energy of God, that is, grace is God Himself in His energy. And it is man who was created with this grace, this giving of God of Himself, which is understood as the image, which we will now consider more closely.

d. The Image

Ultimately for Lossky the image of God in man, as far as it is authentic, is 'necessarily unknowable'. This understanding is a result both of an application of his apophatic method, and, I think, one of Lossky's great conveyance and explication of the Fathers. But moreover there is also clear sharing with Florensky. The concept is a synthesis of patristic and modern sources. First I consider Lossky's dependence on Florensky and then on the patristic sources.

As was said before, for Lossky the concepts of the image and the person are identified together with freedom from the nature. Since such is the case, we will see here in part what is more fully developed in the section on person. Lossky uses Florensky's conception of person, but applies it here to the image. Florensky's idea was used against the idealist conception that personal identity is self-consciousness. For the idealist personal identity is self-identity. Florensky counters the conclusion of idealist thought:

The general conclusion from the above is clear: the more rigorous is the definition of identity, the more distinctly will it isolate into its object the specific identity and the more decisively will it exclude numerical identity from its consideration. And, here, this definition concerns itself exclusively with things. But when one deals with numerical identity, all that can be done is to describe it, to explain it, by referring to the source of the idea of identity. And, here, this source, this proto-identity, is found in the depths of a living person.

⁷²⁹ Lossky, *OT*, 55.

It is natural that it could not be otherwise. For numerical identity is the most profound and, one might say, the unique characteristic of a living person. To define numerical identity is to define a person. But to define a person is to give a concept. However, it is impossible to give the concept of a person, for a person differs from a thing precisely by the fact that, in contrast to a thing, which is subordinate to a concept and therefore 'conceptualizable', a person is 'unconceptualizable', transcends all concepts.⁷³⁰

Lossky never mentions Florensky in connection with this idea. One wonders how aware he was of with whom he shared these ideas. Was his understanding of the person so engrained that he was unaware of such sharing? Nevertheless, the concept of the image as unknowable is shared with Florensky. But why does Lossky equate the image of God with person? If man is created in the image of God and man really is a person, then the equating of the two concepts is expected. This is also a shared idea with Bulgakov's understanding of the image of God.

There is something in man that must be directly correlated with God's being, and this something is not some individual feature but man's very *humanity*, which is the image of God. Man, as a creaturely spirit, has personality (hypostasis) and his own nature, just as God has personality (trihypostatic) and His nature...

But Lossky arrives at the equating of the image with the person because he marries Florensky's concept with St. Gregory's understanding. It is the synthesis of Florensky's 'person as unknowable' with St. Gregory's 'image as unknowable'. Lossky attributes this theology to St. Gregory of Nyssa but does not quote him. Following is what I think is the correct reference.

For if, while the archetype transcends comprehension, the nature of the image were comprehended, the contrary character of the attributes we behold in them would prove the defect of the image; but since the nature of our mind, which is the likeness of the Creator evades our knowledge, it has

⁷³⁰ Florensky, *Pillar*, 61.

an accurate resemblance to the superior nature, figuring by its own unknowableness the incomprehensible Nature.⁷³¹

His hesitation to quote this verse explicitly is because he decried the image of God as being something specifically in man: and it was especially not in his reason, or mind. Lossky himself recognizes this fact and states: ‘Whenever Gregory [of Nyssa] tries to locate the “image of God” only in the higher faculties of man, identifying it with the *noûs*, he seems to want to make the human spirit the seat of grace by reason of a certain proximity which it has with the divine nature’.⁷³² Lossky sees this as a legacy from Origen’s concept of the *suggéneia*, ‘kinship’. But there are other texts which show that Gregory also had a more ‘dynamic concept of human nature’. Nevertheless, although the one specific quote is in contradiction to Lossky’s belief, the principle of corresponding ‘unknowableness’ in the image of God in man is, I think, still accurate. Here is another place where Lossky is in contradiction to a patristic source in order to promote his theological conceptions.

Here, as a quick aside, I would like to clarify the concept of *noûs*. Gregory specifically states ‘mind’. But it would be an error of translation to assume that what is meant by mind is the purely rational faculties of man. As Bishop Kallistos Ware clarifies:

With his spirit (*pneuma*), which is sometimes termed *nous* or spiritual intellect, he understands eternal truth about God or the *logoi* or inner essences of created things, not through deductive reasoning, but by direct apprehension or spiritual perception . . . The spirit or spiritual intellect is thus distinct from man’s reasoning powers and his aesthetic emotions, and superior to both of them.⁷³³

⁷³¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XI, par. 4, eds. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. 5, (MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 396-397.

⁷³² Lossky, *Image*, 138-139.

⁷³³ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (New York: SVS Press, 1995), 48. See also Dumitru Stăniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, Vol. 2 of *The Experience of God* (MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 74-80.

Since man is an image of God he expresses and possesses in the same manner as the archetype ‘the unknowable character of the divine Being’.⁷³⁴ As God transcends our comprehension, as we have seen in Lossky’s emphasis of the apophatic method, so man also is incomprehensible. This is why it is impossible for the Fathers to agree on an explicit definition of what exactly the image of God in man is. The only way we can conceive of the image is in the idea of participation in God’s infinite goodness. To demonstrate this Lossky quotes St. Gregory of Nyssa:

God is, by His very nature, all the good it is possible to conceive; or rather He surpasses in goodness all that it is possible for our minds to understand or grasp. And His reason for creating human life is simply this – because He is good. Such being the nature of God, and such the one reason why He undertook the creation of man, there were to be no half measures when He set about to show forth the power of His goodness. He would not give a mere part of what was His own, and grudge to share the rest. The very perfection of goodness is displayed in the fact that He brought man into being from nothing and showered all that is good on him. Now so many are the benefits bestowed on every man that it would not be easy to enumerate them. For this reason *all are briefly summed up in this one phrase, that man was made in the image of God.* For this is equivalent to saying that God made human nature a sharer in all that is good . . . But if the image resembles in all respects the excellence of the Prototype, it would no longer be the image, but would itself be the Prototype, there being no means of distinguishing them. Wherein, then, lies the distinction between the Divine and that which resembles it? In this: that the one is uncreated and the other exists through creation.⁷³⁵

The only distinction between man and God, in this reference, is not that one is uncreated and the other created. But the distinction is that one is uncreated and the other ‘exists through creation’. The distinction is subtle, but would it not give some credit to the Sophiological tendency? Lossky interprets this distinction as referring to the final perfection of man, the sharing in the divine fullness, the *pleroma*. Lossky sees ‘the image

⁷³⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 118 and *OT*, 122.

⁷³⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XVI, par. 1, *P.G.*, t. 44, 177 D-180A, as quoted by Lossky, *MT*, 119, and *OT*, 123-124.

that is limited to the sharing of certain benefits⁷³⁶ as a yet incomplete image, as an image ‘becoming’.

But what exactly is the image? ‘To be in the image of God, the Fathers affirm, in the last analysis is to be a personal being, that is to say, a free responsible being’.⁷³⁷ Although the Fathers don’t explicitly state this, it is, I think, a correct extrapolation. But, it is also a synthesis with Russian theology. So, as God is a personal being, man, who is his image, is a personal being. Man is ‘absolute correspondence of person with a personal God’.⁷³⁸ That which is the image of God, the divine character in man is that he is a ‘person’ as God is a personal God. And this is why the image ‘cannot be objectified, “naturalized” we might say, by being attributed to some part or other of the human being’.⁷³⁹ And those that try are not free from the error of the Greek philosophical concept of the *suggéneia*.⁷⁴⁰ Of course what Lossky is against is the Sophiological (Bulgakov’s (as was seen in the quote above)) belief that the nature of man was incorporated into the image of God.

Since what it means to be a person is founded on the fact that man is a ‘free responsible being’, the pre-eminent character of the image is, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, ‘the fact that he is freed from necessity, and not subject to domination of nature, but able freely to follow his own judgment. For virtue is independent and her own mistress’.⁷⁴¹ This freedom from nature is the necessary condition in man for ‘the attainment of the perfect assimilation to God’. This is what Lossky calls the ‘formal’ image.⁷⁴² The assimilation is the likeness. Man must necessarily be free to choose the virtue, which is able to make him in the likeness of God. It is only by freedom that man is able to own the goodness of virtue himself. According to St. Gregory of Nazianzus, ‘God

⁷³⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 119, and *OT*, 124.

⁷³⁷ Lossky, *OT*, 71.

⁷³⁸ Lossky, *OT*, 71.

⁷³⁹ Lossky, *OT*, 71.

⁷⁴⁰ Lossky, *Image*, 138.

⁷⁴¹ Lossky, *MT*, 119, and *OT*, 124.

⁷⁴² Lossky, *MT*, 120, and *OT*, 124.

honoured man in giving him freedom, in order that the goodness should properly belong to him who chooses it, no less to Him who placed the first fruits of goodness in his nature'.⁷⁴³ It is only by this power of freedom that man as a personal being can rule his own nature and conform it into the likeness of God.

For Lossky the image of God in man is indestructible.⁷⁴⁴ Following Gregory of Nyssa, freedom is not an aspect of man's nature, but is an aspect of man that is separate from his nature. This for Lossky is the very definition of what it means to be a person. For Lossky the freedom of man is primary, for it is that which makes one a true human person. Again, the image is indestructible. Even if man rejects the call 'to become God', and becomes 'unlike Him in His nature',⁷⁴⁵ he still remains in the image of God, that is, a person. Whether man chooses good or evil, likeness or unlikeness, man 'possesses his nature freely, because he is a person created in the image of God'.⁷⁴⁶

The image is not in any one part of man's nature, but is the person, which contains the nature in itself. This is an apparent contradiction in Lossky. For if the image of God in man is the spirit/soul and body, the whole person, and the spirit/soul and body is the nature of man, then does not the image of God need to incorporate the nature? But this is exactly Lossky's point, the person of man, which is spirit/soul and body, contains the nature, not the other way around. Lossky, following Leontius of Byzantium, says that the nature is in the person. The person contains the nature in itself. The nature is *enhúpostaton*, 'enhypostasized'.⁷⁴⁷ This is the term from which this theological concept is derived. Accordingly, there can be no naked nature, 'all nature is found in hypostasis, such being the nature of a hypostasis which cannot otherwise exist'.⁷⁴⁸ This argument is not new to

⁷⁴³ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *In sanctum Pascha*, oration 45, 8, P.G. 36, col. 632C, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 124, and *OT*, 128.

⁷⁴⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 124, and *OT*, 128.

⁷⁴⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 124, and *OT*, 128.

⁷⁴⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 124, and *OT*, 128.

⁷⁴⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 122, and *OT*, 126.

⁷⁴⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 123, and *OT*, 127. Leontius of Byzantium, *Against Nestorius and Eutyches*, P.G. 86, col. 1277CD. Lossky notes that these same ideas are developed by St. Maximus the Confessor, P.G. 91, col. 557-560, and St. John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, 1, IX, 531.

Lossky but is taken from Bulgakov's *The Lamb of God*.⁷⁴⁹ According to Louth, this is a mis-transliteration and a misunderstanding. First, the word itself does not exist. It is a bastardization of *enypostatos*. Next, the context in which the term is used simply means 'real'. Louth, speaking of St. John of Damascene's stand on whether or not the nature could be separated from the *hypostasis*, states:

John, following Leontios of Byzantium, agrees with the Monophysites that there can be no *ousia anypostatos* or *hypostasis anousios*, arguing instead that every *ousia* is *enypostatos* and every *hypostasis* is *enousios*. . . By insisting that every *ousia* is *enypostatos*, and every *hypostasis* is *enousios*, John means that no essence exists without having a concrete form (*enypostatos*), and that there is no particular thing that does not manifest some essence (*enousios*).⁷⁵⁰

Louth's point is this, the term was used simply to say you could distinguish the two, but you could not have one without the other. If this is true, it causes problems with Lossky's concept of image and person, for his argument is that the person is not in the nature. But we have already seen that he has contradicted some patristic texts already. Because of his theological commitment, Lossky does gloss over the texts that speak of the image in the nature. His defense seems to rest on this text that the nature is in the person. Nonetheless, for Lossky the image is the constant dynamic principle, the person, which 'is always directed by its will to an external end'. Namely, the will of the person inclines itself to a personal relationship with God.⁷⁵¹

Lossky believes that the human person is not just a part of humanity. This is analogous with the persons of the Trinity. As the persons of the Trinity are not parts of God, so the human person does not make-up part of humanity. Each person carries the whole human nature. The first unique person contained in himself the entire human nature. Lossky cites St. Gregory of Nyssa:

⁷⁴⁹ Bulgakov, *The Lamb*, 63-74.

⁷⁵⁰ Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 159.

⁷⁵¹ Lossky, *MT*, 127, and *OT*, 131.

For the name Adam is not yet given to man as in the subsequent narratives. The man created has no particular name, but is universal man. Therefore by this general term for human nature, we are meant to understand by His providence and power, included all mankind in this first creation... For the image is not in part of the nature, nor is grace in one individual among those it regards; this power extend to the whole human race... In this respect there is no difference between the man made in the first creation of the world, and he who shall be made at the end of all things; both bear the same divine image... Thus man is made in the image of God, that is to say the whole human nature; it is that which bears the divine likeness.⁷⁵²

This is the theological reasoning behind why each individual human person bears the image of God as the first man. For the image was applied to the universal man, that is to all humanity. Lossky gives a description of humanity, which he borrows from St. Gregory Palamas:⁷⁵³ ‘plurality of human hypostases’. He opines, ‘That is why in Adam’s race the multiplicity of persons, each of whom bears God’s image (one may say this is the multiplying of God’s image in the plurality of human hypostases), in no way contradicts the ontological unity of the nature common to all men’.⁷⁵⁴

Now, concerning the image of God in man and the distinguishing of nature and grace. Lossky says that the original man ‘was created perfect’.⁷⁵⁵ This in no way means that the last state of man is identical with his first state. Nor does it mean that man was in union with God from the very beginning. At creation, before the fall, Lossky states that man was neither ‘pure nature’ nor ‘deified man’.⁷⁵⁶ Lossky claims that in Orthodoxy there is, because of the dynamic nature of its anthropology, no ‘juxtaposing the ideas of nature and grace’. Nature and grace mutually interpenetrate each other, the one exists in the other. Man was created for moving to union with God, for deification. ‘The perfection of our first nature lay above all in the capacity to communicate with God, to be united more and

⁷⁵² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XVI, P.G. 44, col. 185,204, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 120, and *OT*, 124-125.

⁷⁵³ St. Gregory Palamas, *Theoph.* PG cl, 941, as quoted in Florovsky ‘Creation and Creaturehood’, 73.

⁷⁵⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 120, and *OT*, 125.

⁷⁵⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 126, and *OT*, 130.

⁷⁵⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 126, and *OT*, 130.

more with the fullness of the Godhead, which was to penetrate and transfigure created nature'.⁷⁵⁷ Thus St. Gregory of Nazianzus' 'divine part', which was breathed in by God, is the grace of God, which is 'able to receive and make its own the deifying energy of God'.⁷⁵⁸ Lossky: 'Why, one may ask, did God create man free and responsible?'⁷⁵⁹ And his answer is precisely the major difference between all forms of Protestant theology and Orthodox theology. Because God wanted to call all mankind to the 'supreme vocation: deification; that is to say, to become by grace, in a movement boundless as God, that which God is by nature'.⁷⁶⁰

e. The Basis for Lossky's Image Theology

But what exactly is the basis for Lossky's understanding of the image of God in man? For Lossky it is the Theology of the Trinity as understood through Russian Orthodox theology. Not only does this inform his concept of the image of God in man, but also, as we shall see later, his theology of the person. For Lossky it is necessary to start with the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is in the Incarnation that theology and image are intimately linked together. But this is only true 'if one chooses to regard theology as a knowledge of God in His Logos, who is the consubstantial Image of the Father'.⁷⁶¹ This is a not so subtle jab at Lossky's Protestant contemporaries. For Lossky theology is, 'knowledge of God in His Logos'.

But, as we have seen, knowledge of God to Lossky did not mean informational knowledge gleaned from the Scriptures. Knowledge of God was in the encounter with God Himself. Knowledge is union and participation in the living God.

For there is also a dead God, the God of a particular school of Biblical purists who are too wedded to the Hebraic letter, which they study in

⁷⁵⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 126, and *OT*, 130.

⁷⁵⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 126, and *OT*, 130.

⁷⁵⁹ Lossky, *OT*, 71.

⁷⁶⁰ Lossky, *OT*, 72.

⁷⁶¹ Lossky, *Image*, 133.

historical context of its redaction, to be able to recognize the life (dynamic, and in this sense never ‘pure’) and the living tradition which leads to the discovery in the most ancient texts of a meaning ever new...⁷⁶²

Lossky also adds that it was the fact of the Incarnation that gives the image of God its full theological value as compared with the impoverished perspective of the critical exegetes. But Lossky also makes clear that there is importance and value in the historical method of studying the Bible. ‘But never must this exegesis usurp a place which does not belong to it: that of a judge in theological matters’.⁷⁶³ I think this could also be said of the purely historical method of studying patristics.

Now, Lossky gives some historical background in the concept of the image. In Greek thought, the concept of the image would be a ‘correspondence of the image to its archetype: Logos would be the image of the first hypostasis’. This was seen as a ‘correspondence of likeness’ and this was based on a ‘natural participation of the inferior to the superior’. What is most important is that there would be a ‘non-identity of nature’, but there would still remain a ‘kinship, a *suggéneia*’.⁷⁶⁴

But there needs to be, in the context of Trinitarian theology, an utter transformation in the understanding of the relationship between the image and archetype. This is demonstrated in a quote by St. Gregory of Nyssa: ‘The Son is in the Father as the beauty of the image resides in archetypal form ... the Son is in the Father as the archetypal beauty remains in its image ... and we must think both these things simultaneously’.⁷⁶⁵ This is a new element of doctrine that is particular to Christian Trinitarian theology. This, as we have seen in Florovsky, was one of the major doctrinal distinctions of Christianity, and a necessary position to those holding to the divinity of Christ. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not identical in person, but are identical in nature.

⁷⁶² Lossky, *Image*, 132.

⁷⁶³ Lossky, *Image*, 136-137.

⁷⁶⁴ Lossky, *Image*, 133-34 for all the quotes in this paragraph.

⁷⁶⁵ Lossky, *Image*, 134.

This is the exact meaning of the term *homooúsios*, which is approximately translated by the adjective ‘consubstantial’. Since the Logos of Christians is the consubstantial image of the Father...this relationship of the image to that which it manifests...can no longer be thought of as a participation (*méthexis*) or a kinship (*suggéneia*), for it is a matter of identity of nature. So it would seem that this relationship of the image to the model which it manifests ought to be interpreted as the personal relation of the Son to the Father.⁷⁶⁶

Although this concept implies the personal relationship of the Trinitarian persons, what is actually manifested by the Son, who is in the image, is the nature and not the person of the Father. Lossky does this in contradistinction to Sophiology, where the Son is the Image of the person of the Father.⁷⁶⁷ Lossky does not leave any place for the idea that the Son is the Image of the Father’s person, which seems to contradict such statements as ‘if you have seen me you have seen the Father’ (St. John 14:9). Lossky, because of his commitment to his theological understanding of person and image, and armed with the following patristic text, cannot arrive at such an understanding. The image manifests the nature or natural attributes while referring them to another Person in the Trinity. So, therefore, the Son is ‘a concise declaration of the nature of the Father’,⁷⁶⁸ in the words of St. Gregory of Nazianzus. The same can be said of the Holy Spirit who is the image of the Son. For, according to St. John of Damascus, “no man can say that Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit”. So it is in the Holy Spirit that we know Christ as Son of God and God, and it is by the Son that we see the Father’.⁷⁶⁹ Lossky says, consistent with the above theology, that the image of God ‘is attached here to the hypostasis of the Son who, in becoming man, makes visible in the human nature which He assumes His divine Person, consubstantial with the Father’.⁷⁷⁰

It is obvious, because of the infinite distinction between created and uncreated, the Hellenic concept of *suggéneia* cannot be applied to the image of God in man. This also

⁷⁶⁶ Lossky, *Image*, 134.

⁷⁶⁷ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 43 and *Lamb*, 111.

⁷⁶⁸ Lossky, *Image*, 135.

⁷⁶⁹ St. John of Damascus, *De imaginibus* III, 18; P.G. 94, col. 1340 AB, as quoted in Lossky, *Image*, 135.

⁷⁷⁰ Lossky, *Image*, 137.

must be given a ‘new meaning along the same line of thought which made us distinguish in God the personal or hypostatic from the essential or natural’.⁷⁷¹ Though patristic anthropology never explicitly speaks about the human person or human hypostasis, according to Lossky, it does always presuppose it. It is by way of analogy that this personal aspect is discovered in man. Man is above all a person, following Florensky, ‘not reducible to the common (or even individualized) attributes of the nature which he shares with other human individuals’.⁷⁷² Man is not just one individual among many in the particular nature of humanity. Each human being, because he has been created in the image of God, has a unique relationship with Him. This is how Lossky defines personhood, as we will see below.

Created in the image of the personal God, man is not only nature. Man is free in regards to his individual nature. This brings us to Lossky’s full explication of his theology of the image of God in man, which I quote in full.

In its Trinitarian use, the term ‘image’ denoted one divine Person who shows in Himself the nature or the natural attributes while referring them to another Hypostasis: The Holy Spirit to the Son, the Son to the Father. This presupposed, as we said, identity of nature or consubstantiality, something which is obviously out of the question for a created person who must be thought of as an ‘image’ of God. ‘Image’ or ‘in the image’, the human person could not truly be either; it could not make God manifest, transcending the nature which it ‘enhypostasizes’, if it did not have the faculty of becoming like God, of assimilation to Him. Here enters the theme of *homoiosis*, of resemblance, with all that it can imply of Platonic heritage, going back to the *Phaedrus* and the *Theaetetus*. Of course, in Christian anthropology resemblance or assimilation to God can never be thought otherwise than as by grace coming from God, which excludes the natural *suggéneia* of Greek philosophy, replacing it with the idea of filial adoption... Man created ‘in the image’ is the person capable of manifesting God in the extent to which his nature allows itself to be penetrated by deifying grace. The image—which is inalienable—can become similar or dissimilar, to the extreme limits: that of union with God, when deified man shows in himself by grace what God is by nature...or indeed that of the extremity of falling-away which Plotinus called ‘the place of dissimilarity’ (*tópos tês anomoiótetos*), placing it in the gloomy abyss of Hades.⁷⁷³

⁷⁷¹ Lossky, *Image*, 137.

⁷⁷² Lossky, *Image*, 137.

⁷⁷³ Lossky, *Image*, 138-139. It is this concept that is also critical in understanding how in iconography the image can manifest the divine nature.

This is the only theology of the image for Lossky that makes consistent coherent sense, which also meets the requirements of Christian anthropology. It is only with the concept of person that the image of God, in Lossky's theology, becomes a coherent whole. It is to this concept of person we now turn.

5. The Person

a. Preliminary Remarks

In this analysis of Lossky's theology of the 'person', his unique theological creativity will be manifested. It is no wonder that Olivier Clément calls him the theologian of the Person and the Holy Spirit, as his *hommage* to him is entitled.⁷⁷⁴ Lossky notes that it is only in Christian theology that the true concept of the person can be found. And, although he does not find the concept of the human person explicitly in the Fathers, he does find anthropology that is 'personalist'.⁷⁷⁵ But is it possible to promote a concept not explicitly found in the Fathers? Lossky himself is aware of this issue: 'For my part, I must admit that until now I have not found what one might call an elaborate doctrine of the human person in patristic theology, alongside its very precise teaching on the divine persons or hypostases'.⁷⁷⁶ But he does find an anthropological personalism in the Fathers. 'However there is a Christian anthropology among the Fathers of the first eight centuries, as well as later on in Byzantium and in the West; and it is unnecessary to say that these doctrines of man are clearly personalist'.⁷⁷⁷ This must be so because there is an underlying presupposition in Christianity that is personalist. 'It could not have been otherwise for a theological doctrine based upon the revelation of a living and personal God who created

⁷⁷⁴ Clément, 'Vladimir Lossky: Un théologien de la Personne et du Saint-Esprit', title.

⁷⁷⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 53, and 'The Theological Notion of the Person', (hereafter Person) in *Image*, 112.

⁷⁷⁶ Lossky, Person, *Image*, 112.

⁷⁷⁷ Lossky, Person, *Image*, 112.

man “according to his own image and likeness”⁷⁷⁸ With such an understanding Lossky presupposes that Christianity is a dynamic interaction of persons: the personal God with human persons. Any other theological understanding would not be Christian. So, as in the theology of the image, the whole basis for Lossky’s theology of the person is based on the presuppositions found in the theology of the Persons of the Trinity.

This is all well and good. But what Lossky does not mention, or is unconscious of, is that his theology of the person also follows Russian theology and religious philosophy. Florensky, as we have seen above, had some influence on Lossky. Here we will see more of it concerning the Triunity of the Trihypostatic God. And, as was said in the history section, Lossky was constantly aware of Bulgakov as an interlocutor. Lossky was sensitive to the unique insights and intuitions that Bulgakov and the Russian religious philosophers had, and wanted to convey those insights from what he believed was a traditional Orthodox perspective.

Some of the first inklings of the concepts found in Lossky are in the writings of the Slavophiles as they confront the tension between the ‘whole’ versus the ‘individual’: notably A. S. Khomiakov, I. V. Kireievsky and Y. F. Samarin. Although Lossky is clearly against the Slavophiles’ use of *sobornost*,⁷⁷⁹ the roots of his concept of freedom from necessity are borrowed, at least in part, from them. For the Slavophiles the bondage to necessity cannot be overcome in the nature. Men are slaves to natural necessity. Here is where we find a comparison to Lossky’s understanding of the opposition of personal freedom from the necessity of nature. Khomiakov places emphasis on the ‘escape from freedom’, which is, according to Zenkovsky, ‘a phenomenon which gives rise to the paradox that, being destined for freedom and endowed with the power of freedom, men freely seek an order of life and thought in which necessity prevails’.⁷⁸⁰ This parallels the gnomic will of St. Maximus well. And it is only of the self-renouncing love of each

⁷⁷⁸ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 112.

⁷⁷⁹ Lossky, ‘Concerning the Third Mark of the Church’, *Image*, 170.

⁷⁸⁰ Zenkovsky, *History*, 190.

person in the Church, which is a unity of persons, that the ‘freedom of each individual is preserved’.⁷⁸¹ Thus, it is in the Slavophiles that we find the roots of the opposition between personalism and individualism.⁷⁸² It is in their works that we find the understanding of the unbreakable link between love and freedom that is so prevalent in Lossky. Christianity is a religion of love and, as a result, a religion of freedom. But a complete understanding of this link between love and freedom needed, according to N. O. Lossky, Vladimir’s father, ‘a fully worked out system of metaphysics—a theory about the ontological structure of personality and of the world...’⁷⁸³ This work was not done by the Slavophiles, but by Vladimir Soloviev, who developed these theories much later.

Although the roots of some of Lossky’s key concepts are found in the Slavophiles, it was the fully developed system of Vladimir Soloviev that had a greater impact on Lossky’s notion of the person. And although some might see many problems with Soloviev’s philosophy (read here Florovsky),⁷⁸⁴ ‘he was the first to create an original Russian system of philosophy’.⁷⁸⁵ Soloviev also had an impact on Lossky’s older contemporaries, such as Florensky and Bulgakov, and as such there can be seen similarities in their works. It is not my goal here to analyze Bulgakov, Florensky, or Soloviev’s works, but only to make some comparisons that demonstrate Lossky’s use and borrowing.

Throughout I quote from Soloviev’s 1878 *Lectures Concerning Godmanhood*⁷⁸⁶ to demonstrate Lossky’s reliance on his work, at least terminologically. I say this because it is certain that Lossky would not agree with much of what Zouboff calls Soloviev’s ‘pure Idealism’.⁷⁸⁷ But nonetheless, we see in Lossky, some of the structure, or the framework, or even the contours (one might say, how it feels) of Soloviev’s thought. For example:

⁷⁸¹ N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (New York: International Universities Press, 1972), 34.

⁷⁸² Zenkovsky, *History*, 230.

⁷⁸³ N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 41.

⁷⁸⁴ Florovsky, *Ways*, vol. 6, CW, 243-251. This is a bit of an understatement on my part, for a more balanced account see the beginning chapters in Peter P. Zouboff, *Solovyev on Godmanhood* (hereafter *Solovyev*), (New York: Harmon Printing House, 1944), or chapter 8, ‘Vladimir S. Soloviev’ in N. O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 81-133.

⁷⁸⁵ N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 133.

⁷⁸⁶ Soloviev, *Lectures on Godmanhood* (hereafter *Lectures*) as translated in Zouboff, *Solovyev*.

⁷⁸⁷ Peter P. Zouboff, *Solovyev*, 18.

Originally we have three basic elements: these are, first, *nature*, that is to say, the given, present reality, the material life and consciousness; second *the divine beginning*, as the sought aim and content, which is gradually revealing itself; and, third, *human personality*, as the subject of life and consciousness, as that which passes from the given to the sought and, by adopting [assimilating] the divine beginning, reunites with it nature also, transforming the later from the accidental into that which ought to be.⁷⁸⁸

Again, Lossky might disagree with his underlying metaphysics, but the same structure is in his work as well. If one slightly modifies Soloviev's *divine beginning* to mean the striving of man for the likeness of God, the pursuit of the participation of the divine nature, we have Lossky's schema: nature, assimilation of the divine likeness to the image, and the person.

In Lossky we also see the person as distinct from and in opposition to the individual nature. Thus, it is the person who assimilates the divine nature and who reunites and transforms its own nature. Recently there has been much discussion concerning the legitimacy of this opposition of person to individual. This is in obvious contradiction, as Lossky demonstrates, to the Western understanding of the person as the individual existence of the nature. And though it is not my purpose here to enter the debate, I will demonstrate that this concept, whose roots are found in the Slavophiles, is inherited from the Russian religious philosophy developed by Soloviev. We will see these above concepts throughout Lossky's works

b. The Basis for Lossky's Theology of the Person:

Trinitarian and Christological Theology

'Trinity unisubstantial and indivisible, unity trihypostatic and consubstantial', Florensky says, quoting the Divine Liturgy, 'is the patristic definition of the Trinity'.⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁸ Soloviev, *Lectures*, III, in Zouboff, *Solovyev*, 111.

⁷⁸⁹ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, tran. Boris Jakim (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 39.

For Lossky it is this Triune God who lives that is the foundation for all his theology of the person. But besides this, as we have seen above, Lossky shares Florensky's antinomy and anti-rationalism, his 'no third way': *Tertium non datur*.

The Trinity, Lossky says, following Florensky as seen above, is a cross for all human intellectual thought. The antinomy and mystery that is the Trinity crucifies all philosophical rationalizations and speculations. The doctrines that follow are, for Lossky, reproductions of the divine life of the Trinity. For him, there could be no other basis for the concept of the person. Since all of Christianity is, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, an 'imitation of the nature of God', then it necessitates that the Triune God be the basis and foundation of its anthropology. And thus Lossky rightly says, the Trinity 'is the foundation of all Christian anthropology'.⁷⁹⁰

There are four areas where Lossky utilizes analogy to the Trinity and Christ in his conception of the person: 1. Irreducibility, 2. Image, 3. Unity and Diversity, and, 4. Kenosis.

1. Irreducibility

Lossky sees as ingenious the patristic preference for the term *hypóstasis* over *prosopon*, and then their distinction between the *hypóstasis* and *ousía*. 'It was a great terminological discovery to introduce distinction between the two synonyms, in order to express the irreducibility of the *hypóstasis* to the *ousía* and the person to the essence, without, however, opposing them as two different realities'.⁷⁹¹ This genius, of course, was the work of the fourth century theologians who battled-out the orthodox understanding of the Trinity. It was the endeavour of Sts. Athanasius, Basil, and Gregory of Nazianzus. Their genius was in using the synonymous terms to distinguish in the Trinity that which

⁷⁹⁰ Lossky, *MT*, 124. Olivier Clément says, 'Dieu s'est fait homme pour se révéler Trinité et nous communiquer la plénitude de l'existence personnelle', Clément, Lossky, 153.

⁷⁹¹ Lossky, *Person*, *Image*, 112.

was common, the *ousía* or essence, from that which is particular, *hypóstasis* or person.

But it was also more than that, as we shall see in Lossky's later analysis.

The terms themselves were not original to them. Aristotle uses the term making a distinction between the 'first ousias', which is individual substances, and the 'second ousias', which are essences. Lossky notes St. John of Damascus' definition of the two terms:

Ousia is a thing that exists by itself, and which has need of nothing else for its consistency. Again, *ousía* is all that *subsists* by itself and which has not its being in another. It is thus that which is not for another, that which does not have its existence in another, that which has no need of another for its consistency, but is it itself and in which the accident has its existence.... The term *hypóstasis* has two meanings. Sometimes it means simply existence. From this definition it follows that *ousía* and *hypóstasis* are the same thing. Hence certain of the holy Fathers have said: natures, or hypostases. Sometimes it denotes that which exists by itself and in its own consistency; from which meaning it comes that it denotes the individual, differing numerically from every other—Peter, Paul, this particular horse.⁷⁹²

And we can see the same in Theodoret of Cyrhus:

According to secular philosophy, there is no difference between *ousía* and *hypóstasis*. For *ousía* signifies that which is (*tò ón*), and *hypóstasis* signifies that which subsists (*tò hyphestós*). But according to the doctrine of the Fathers, there is between *ousía* and *hypóstasis* the same difference between the common and the particular, that is to say, the same difference as between the genus or the species and the individual.⁷⁹³

But one must pay close attention to the subtle shift in Lossky's understanding of the real value being made here. There is, not an evolution *per se*, but a clarification in his understanding of the terms' usage. In *Mystical Theology* Lossky uses these verses to demonstrate that the genius of the Fathers was the taking of two synonyms 'to distinguish

⁷⁹² St. John of Damascus, '*Peigei gnoseos*', 39 and 42, P.G. 94, 605 and 612, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 50-51, and Person, *Image*, 114.

⁷⁹³ Theodoret of Cyprus, *Eranistes I*, P.G. 83, col. 33, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 51, and Person, in *Image*, 113-114.

in God that which is common—ousia, substance or essence, from that which is particular, *hypóstasis* or person'.⁷⁹⁴ But in his later thinking not only does Lossky emphasize the distinction of the two terms—where the hypostasis is ultimately irreducible to the ousia—but he also emphasizes that the two terms remain synonymous, and therefore out of the realm of conceptual knowledge. And it is both that must be maintained in tandem. In his later works he relies more heavily on Florensky's concept of antinomy.

In Lossky's earlier writings, specifically *MT*, he understands the texts by St. John and Theodoret as substantiating the genius of distinguishing the two terms by the Fathers. In his later article of 1955, 'The Theological Notion of the Human Person', Lossky states that these texts are mere 'preamble to Trinitarian theology'. And more specifically, he states that Theodoret is 'wrong when he opposed the conceptual distinction introduced by the Fathers to the identity of the two terms in "secular philosophy"'.⁷⁹⁵ The reason is that in his later years Lossky was more convinced that the individual was not identified with the person.

The problem for Lossky was that when one emphasizes the distinction of the terms, one inevitably enters into the realm of conceptual knowledge. But these definitions can only be a 'conceptual starting-point leading towards a deconceptualized notion which is no longer that of an individual of a species'.⁷⁹⁶ In Trinitarian theology these definitions are but constructs for the reality that is beyond all concepts. The definitions of the conceptual forms are only 'approximations of that which cannot be conceptualized'.⁷⁹⁷ Here, as we have already seen, is Florensky's concept of a person as 'unconceptualizable', which Lossky fully adopts.

It is natural that it could not be otherwise. For numerical identity is the most profound and, one might say, the unique characteristic of a living person. To define numerical identity is to define a person. But to define a

⁷⁹⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 51.

⁷⁹⁵ Lossky, Person, *Image*, 115.

⁷⁹⁶ Lossky, Person, *Image*, 114.

⁷⁹⁷ Lossky, Person, *Image*, 114.

person is to give a concept. However, it is impossible to give the concept of a person, for a person differs from a thing precisely by the fact that, in contrast to a thing, which is subordinate to a concept and therefore ‘conceptualizable’, a person is ‘unconceptualizable’, transcends all concepts.⁷⁹⁸

For Lossky the true sense of the Trinitarian theology of the Fathers is that hypostasis is neither the ‘individual of a species’ nor an ‘individual substance of the divine nature’.⁷⁹⁹ This is, according to Lossky, the concept of person in the Trinity. The person is irreducible to the nature. Lossky instructs that ‘one must situate this theological truth beyond concepts: concepts here divest themselves of regular meaning to become signs of the personal reality of a God who is not the God of philosophers nor (very often) the God of theologians’.⁸⁰⁰ This hint of Pascal is also found in Florensky.⁸⁰¹

But where does Lossky find the meaning of person as that which is irreducible?

This irreducibility cannot be understood or expressed except in the relation of the Three Hypostases who, strictly speaking, are not three but ‘Tri-Unity’. In speaking of three hypostases, we are already making an improper abstraction: if we wanted to generalize and make a *concept* of the ‘divine hypostasis’, we would have to say that the only common definition possible would be the impossibility of any common definition of the three hypostasis.⁸⁰²

In other words the three persons are exactly the same in the way they are different, or that they are absolutely different in their absolute identity. It is very difficult to grasp with the rational mind. In actuality it is impossible. And that, I believe, is Lossky’s point. It is impossible to say anything about the persons of the Trinity. And this is the ‘primordial antinomy of absolute identity and no less absolute diversity in God’.⁸⁰³ Their

⁷⁹⁸ Florensky, *Pillar*, 61.

⁷⁹⁹ Lossky, Person, *Image*, 114.

⁸⁰⁰ Lossky, Person, *Image*, 115.

⁸⁰¹ Florensky, *Pillar*, XXV. Pascal’s ‘Amulet’, 407.

⁸⁰² Lossky, Person, *Image*, 113.

⁸⁰³ Lossky, ‘The Procession of the Holy Spirit’, 80, ‘Redemption and Deification’, 106, ‘Concerning the Third Mark of the Church’, 178, in *Image*.

Three-ness is their One-ness and their One-ness is their Three-ness. So, the hypostasis, the person, is irreducible to the ousia, and therefore ‘is no longer a conceptual expression’.⁸⁰⁴ As Florensky states, ‘The Truth is therefore *one essence with three hypostases*. Not three essences, but one; not one hypostasis, but three. But, despite all this, hypostasis and essence are one and the same’.⁸⁰⁵

The beauty of the Fathers’ usage is that the words remained synonyms, sharing all the same attributes or negations of the ‘superessence’, while at the same time the *hypóstasis* meant that which was ‘irreducible’ to the *ousía*. Thus, St. Gregory of Nazianzus can say, ‘The Son is not the Father, because there is only one Father, but He is what the Father is; the Holy Spirit, although He proceeds from God, is not the Son, because there is only one Only Begotten Son, but He is what the Son is’.⁸⁰⁶ It is in this irreducibility that the Fathers wish to convey the three persons of the Trinity. Here again Lossky is following Florensky’s understanding. Florensky states:

Hypóstasis is, so to speak, the personal essence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, insofar as each of them is considered separately from the others; no one hypostasis is fused with any other, but neither is it separable from the others. If terminologically, formally, the word *hypóstasis* became fundamentally distinct from *ousía*, then, in content, in its logical significance, *hypóstasis* remains definitely the same thing as *ousía*.⁸⁰⁷

This Trinitarian theology impacts directly on Lossky’s theology of the human person. It is this same type of handling of the terms with the Trinity that Lossky applies to the human person. But is it legitimate to assume that the Fathers meant the same irreducibility of the hypostasis to the ousia to be applied to humanity? Do we see this

⁸⁰⁴ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 113.

⁸⁰⁵ Florensky, *Pillar*, 37.

⁸⁰⁶ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, ‘Oration 31, 9’, P.G. 36, 144A, as quoted in Lossky, *Person, Image*, 113.

⁸⁰⁷ Florensky, *Pillar*, 40.

same idea of ‘personal’ as the ‘human hypostasis not reducible to the level of natures or individual substances’?⁸⁰⁸

In fact, what Lossky encounters, in the theology of both East and West, is the idea of the human person as nothing but an ‘individual numerically different from all other men’.⁸⁰⁹ In the East, this is the understanding that can be seen in Theodoret and St. John’s texts above. The idea that the hypostasis is an individual of a species and so, ‘Peter, Paul, a particular horse’. But this can also be demonstrated in St. Gregory of Nazianzus who used the term ‘hypostasis’ for ‘individuals of a reasonable nature’.⁸¹⁰

There is this same understanding of person in the West. Lossky relies here on Fr. Bergson’s *La structure du concept latin de personne*⁸¹¹ for his understanding of this path of the historical idea. Boethius follows St. Gregory’s definition of the person as ‘*substantia individua rationalis naturae*’, and Lossky is quick to add, ‘and let us note that *substantia* here is a literal translation of *hypóstasis*’.⁸¹² This was the concept that Thomas Aquinas adopted for designating created being. It must be remembered here that the theologians of both East and West sought to transform the term hypostasis in order to apply it to the persons of the Trinity. But, according to Lossky, the theology of the Trinity in the West became different from the East, ‘the philosopher’s *persona* becomes the theologian’s *relatio*’.⁸¹³

Lossky finds it interesting that Richard of Saint-Victor, who rejected Boethius definition, conceived ‘the divine hypostasis as *divinae naturae incommunicabilis existentia*, which according to Fr. Bergson, would bring him close to the concept of the Greek theologians’.⁸¹⁴ How accurate Lossky’s interpretation is a matter of debate, but Lossky’s point here is this: none of these theologians, the Fathers, Aquinas or Richard of

⁸⁰⁸ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 115.

⁸⁰⁹ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 116.

⁸¹⁰ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 116.

⁸¹¹ Fr. Bergson, *La structure du concept latin de personne*, (= *Études d’histoire littéraire et doctrinale du XIIIe siècle*, 2nd series, Paris, Ottawa, 1932), as found in Lossky, *Person, Image*, 116.

⁸¹² Lossky, *Person, Image*, 116.

⁸¹³ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 116.

⁸¹⁴ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 116.

Saint-Victor ‘abandoned the notion of human person = individual substance’ in their anthropology, even ‘after having transformed it for use in Trinitarian theology’.⁸¹⁵

Obviously, Lossky cannot leave it here, for theologians of both East and West see the term for human person to be the same as the term for human individual. Lossky is well aware that his opposition of the person to the individual is in contradiction to the general understanding of the terms. So then, Lossky widens his search to all theology and ascetic

⁸¹⁵ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 116. Lossky has an in depth interaction with von Balthasar about St. Thomas. Although von Balthasar asks some important questions, Lossky feels he only remains on the surface. After comparing the “‘new ontological categories’” of hypostasis or person and existential *esse* which Thomas Aquinas discovered beyond Aristotelian order of substantiality—the presence of existence...’ (Lossky, *Notion*, in *Image*, 121.) von Balthasar pursues the investigation no further. Lossky thinks that it is here that he falls short. In the face of von Balthasar’s comparison Lossky asks:

Did the real distinction between essence and existence—though it finds at the root of each individual being the act of existing, which places him in his own existence—attain at the same time the root of personal being? Is the non-conceptualizable character of existence of the same order as that of the person, or does the new ontological order, discovered by Thomas Aquinas, still fail to reach the personal? (Lossky, *Notion*, *Image*, 121.)

The answer, obviously for Lossky, is ‘yes’, it still fails to reach the personal. The following is Lossky’s major concern with von Balthasar. The conceptions are not taken, are not pursued, to what Lossky thinks is the next and final conclusion: that of person. So, Lossky would agree with some of his findings, such as St. Maximus’ concept of created hypostasis reaching a ‘new domain of that which cannot be conceptualized because it cannot be reduced to its essence’. (Lossky, *Notion*, in *Image and Likeness*, 122.) But Lossky is clear, that in either of the works of von Balthasar or Aquinas, one will not find the pure notion of person. One will not find ‘a distinction which penetrates to the existential depths of *individual* beings—the ontological solution of the mystery of the human person’. (Lossky, *Notion*, *Image*, 122.)

For an understanding of Aquinas, Etienne Gilson in his book, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 2002), 274-275, captures the gist of Aquinas’ discovery: ‘What is being? St. Thomas replied: it is that which has actual existence. An ontology like this sacrifices nothing of the intelligible reality accessible to man under the form of concepts. Like Aristotle’s, it never grows tired of analyzing, classifying, defining. But it always remembers that in what is most intimate to itself, the real object it is struggling to define is incapable of definition. It is not an abstraction; it is not even a thing. It is not even merely the formal act which makes it to be such and such a thing. It is the act which locates it as a real being in existence, which actualizes the very form which makes it intelligible...If all beings “are” in virtue of their own act-of-being, each one of them breaks through the enclosing frame of its own definition. Better, perhaps, it has no proper definition; *individuum est ineffabile*. Yes, the individual is ineffable’. So, Aquinas does not make the distinction between individual and person.

What is especially helpful here is Aquinas’ understanding of person summarized in Disputed Questions on the Power of God, Q IX, Art. III, Aquinas sharing Richard of Saint Victor’s understanding of ‘person’ as the ‘incommunicable existence’.

Accordingly we reply that the term person signifies nothing else but the individual substance of rational nature. And since under an individual substance of rational nature is contained the substance, individual, i.e. incommunicable and distinct from others, whether of God, of man or of angels, it follows that a divine Person must signify something subsistent and distinct in the divine nature, just as a human person signifies something subsistent and distinct in human nature: and this is the formal signification of a person whether divine or human.

Aquinas does have a personalism in his anthropology and also sees that which is ‘person’, following Richard of Saint Victor, as incommunicable. Or as Gilson says, that the ‘individual is ineffable’. (*The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 375.) But Aquinas does not make a distinction between the individual and the person. In fact, the individual is part of his definition of the person and is that which is ‘incommunicable’.

teachings. He is still in pursuit of the notion that does not equate person to the individual, a notion that ‘remains unfixed by any term, as a basis implied but most often not expressed’.⁸¹⁶ For this he turns to the Christological dogma of Chalcedon.

The dogma of Chalcedon...shows us Christ ‘consubstantial with the Father in divinity, consubstantial with us in humanity’. We can conceive of the reality of God’s incarnation without admitting any transmutation of the Divinity into humanity, without confusion or mixture of the uncreated and the created, precisely because we distinguish the person or hypostasis of the Son from His nature or essence: a person who is not formed *from* two natures, *ek dúo phúseon*, but who is *in* two natures, *en dúo phúsesin*.⁸¹⁷

In the Incarnation, the Son of God became Man. But in the humanity in which He was consubstantial with us, there was only one hypostasis, the divine person Jesus. But no one would deny that Christ was an individual substance. And this is Lossky’s point: there are not two distinct persons in the Incarnation. Christ is a divine Person ‘enhypostasized’, according to the expression of Leontius of Byzantium, in a human nature, ‘here the hypostasis of the assumed humanity cannot be reduced to the human substance, to that human individual’.⁸¹⁸ As we have seen, Lossky incorrectly uses Leontius, but his Christology is theologically sound. So, to be logically consistent with Chalcedonian Christology, it is necessary to stop using the term ‘person’ to designate the individual substance. If one recognizes the irreducibility of the person to the nature, then one will only recognize one hypostasis, one person of Christ. ‘And this refusal to admit two distinct personal beings in Christ means at the same time that one must also distinguish in human beings the person or hypostasis from the nature or individual substance’.⁸¹⁹ This, I think, is a reasonable conclusion.

Thus, there cannot be any single element in the make-up of human nature that can be considered hypostasis or person. And this is exactly the irreducibility of the hypostasis

⁸¹⁶ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 117.

⁸¹⁷ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 117.

⁸¹⁸ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 118.

⁸¹⁹ Lossky, *Person, Image*, 118.

or person to the individual nature. Any attributes or definable property would belong to the nature. This is Lossky's guiding principle, which he shares with Soloviev and Florensky. Concerning the distinction between person and nature Soloviev says that man, after falling to the powers of the nature, must realize that these forces are conditional, that therefore, there is a distinction between person and nature.

But since human personality distinguishes itself from nature, places the latter before itself as an object, and therefore comes to be not only a natural being but also something different and greater than nature, the dominion of natural elements over human personality cannot be unconditional—for that power is given to them by human personality itself.⁸²⁰

Every human personality has in itself something absolutely unique which defies all external determination, which does not fit any formula, and yet imposes a certain individual stamp upon all the acts and perceptions of this personality. The peculiarity is not only something indefinable, but also something unchanging: it is completely independent of external direction of the will and action of this person; it remains unchanging under all circumstances and in all the conditions in which this personality may be placed. Under all these circumstances and conditions the personality will manifest that indefinable and elusive peculiarity, that its individual character, will put its imprint upon every one of its actions and perceptions.⁸²¹

Here is Lossky's development of the same concept.

Under these conditions, it will be impossible for us to form a concept of the human person, and we will have to content ourselves with saying: 'person' signifies the irreducibility of man to his nature—'irreducibility' and not 'something irreducible' or 'something which makes man irreducible to his nature' precisely because it cannot be a question here of 'something' distinct from 'another nature' but *someone* who is distinct from his own nature, of someone who goes beyond his nature while still containing it, who makes it exist as human nature by this overstepping and yet does not exist in himself beyond the nature which he 'enhypostasizes' and which he constantly exceeds.⁸²²

⁸²⁰ Soloviev, *Lectures*, III, in Zouboff, *Solovyev*, 112.

⁸²¹ Soloviev, *Lectures*, IV, in Zouboff, *Solovyev*, 126.

⁸²² Lossky, *Person, Image*, 120.

Person, then, is that which is irreducible. The person is that which, or perhaps better, the person is the ‘who’ that is indescribable in conceptual terms. This is Lossky’s understanding of how and why the person is in opposition to the individual. We shall speak more about this at the end of the section on kenosis.

2. Image

As we have seen, his concept of the person is directly connected to his concept of the image of God in humanity. The person is the image of God in man, these two are equated, and the both are man’s freedom from his nature. It is ‘the fact of being freed from necessity and not being subject to the domination of nature, but be able to determine oneself freely’, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa.⁸²³ It is interesting to note here that one can see a development of Lossky’s thought. In referencing this text in his *Mystical Theology*, Lossky equates freedom to the image. While in his later work, *Orthodox Theology*, in referencing this text he equates freedom to the person. As his conceptions of how Jesus, the Son, is the image of the Father solidified, so did his certainty that the image of God in man, his freedom from his nature, really is personhood.

As we have seen in the above section concerning the Son as the image of God, Lossky also develops his concept of the person using how the incarnate Son as image manifests the Father. The Son does not manifest the Person of the Father, which is obvious, but the Person of Christ does manifest the nature, that is, the divine Tri-unity. The image, therefore, must be tied to the person as separate from the nature. This Trinitarian theology, coupled with the above text of St. Gregory concerning freedom from nature, brings Lossky, I think rightly, to the conclusion that the image of God in man is the person, which is freed from the necessity of the individual human nature.⁸²⁴

⁸²³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XVI, par. 1, *P.G.*, t. 44, 177 D-180A, as quoted by Lossky, *MT*, 119, and *OT*, 72,123-124.

3. Unity and Diversity

Here, we see Lossky's application of the 'primordial antinomy of absolute identity and no less absolute diversity in God'.⁸²⁵ The Persons of the Trinity are not three parts of a whole, but rather each contains the whole divine nature. Lossky, relying on Maximus' Chalcedonian theology, equates absolute identity in the Trinity with absolute unity. Following St. Gregory Palamas, it is this multiplicity of persons in unity that Lossky sees in humanity. 'The human person is not part of humanity, any more than the persons of the Trinity are parts of God'.⁸²⁶ Again, as we have seen in the section on the image, when God created man in His image, that is, personal, the first person was 'universal man', a general term to mean all of humanity. Or in the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa:

For the image is not in part of the nature, nor is grace in one individual among those it regards; this power extend to the whole human race... Thus man is made in the image of God, that is to say the whole human nature; it is that which bears the divine likeness.⁸²⁷

Thus, the multiplication of persons, or, to quote Lossky's use of St. Gregory Palamas appellation, 'the multiplication of the divine image in the plurality of human hypostases—is in no sort of contradiction with the ontological unity of the nature which is common to all men'.⁸²⁸ So, the original conception of God, according to Lossky who is following St. Gregory of Nyssa, is that there is only one humanity, a unity of nature, and, analogous to the Trinity, each person contained the whole of human nature.

⁸²⁵ Lossky, 'The Procession of the Holy Spirit', 80, 'Redemption and Deification, 106, 'Concerning the Third Mark of the Church', 178, in *Image*, 80.

⁸²⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 120, and *OT*, 124

⁸²⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XVI, P.G. 44, col. 185,204, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 120, and *OT*, 124-125.

⁸²⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 120, and *OT*, 124

Negatively, the only way to fulfil the image in the perfection of likeness to God is to not individuate, or particularize the nature in rejection of the whole nature. This is key to his concept of the person. For

a human person cannot realize the fullness to which he is called, that is to become the perfect image, if he claims for himself a part of the nature, regarding it his own particular good. For the image reaches its perfection when the human nature becomes like the divine, in attaining a complete participation in God's uncreated bounty'.⁸²⁹

In other words, positively, to participate in the fullness of the divine image, which is the divine likeness, or the participation in the divine nature, one has to incorporate the entire human nature in their person and exist for its universal good. To Lossky, although there is only one human nature that is common to all, it 'now appears to us split up by sin, parcelled out among many individuals'. Note here, as opposed to above, it only 'appears', for in reality it is still one. Perhaps another way of saying this is that the nature is fractured, fragmented or splintered. Anyway, the single humanity has been affected by the fall, by sin. This original nature seemed so absolutely one to St. Paul, that when it was 're-established in the Church...he called it the *body* of Christ'.⁸³⁰ The solution to the problem of man's disintegration is kenosis.

4. Kenosis: Individual Versus Person

Kenosis, emptying, is the theological concept derived from Phillipians 2:7, '*allà heautòn ekénosen morphèn doúlou labón*: But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave'. Lossky uses this theological concept of the self-emptying of Christ but applies it to the whole Trinity. And it is the kenosis of the Trinity that is used, by analogy, for his concept of the person. But he also shares much with Soloviev, Bulgakov and Florensky. Lossky clarifies, time and time again, that his concept of 'the perfection of the person

⁸²⁹ Lossky, *MT*, 120, and *OT*, 124

⁸³⁰ Lossky, *MT*, 121, and *OT*, 125.

consists in self-abandonment: the person expresses itself most truly in that it renounces to exist for itself'.⁸³¹ In Lossky's works, it is this self-emptying, this denial of the self-will for the other in community that is the basis for all the concepts of how one is a person. But, for Lossky, if this is true, it must be demonstrated in the three persons of the Trinity, and such he does.

Lossky has taken this understanding from Bulgakov, but does not explicitly use the term *kenosis* in reference to the Father, as does Bulgakov.⁸³² Though he does deal with a kenotic understanding of the Father in relation to the Son and the Spirit: the monarchy of the Father. The Father, as the source of all divinity, as the one who confers His own nature equally on the Son and Holy Spirit, demonstrates His own Person in this conferring, emptying itself.⁸³³

With reference to the Father, causality expresses the idea that He is God-Person, in that He is the cause of the other divine persons—the idea that He could not be fully and absolutely Person unless the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal to Him in possession of the same nature and *are* the same nature.⁸³⁴

One must admit that in the application of the principle, especially in his later works, Lossky demonstrates that it works. For if a person is, as Lossky believes, one who exists in the self-emptying, renouncing to exist for self, then there must be the other that the person exists for. To exist as a person presupposes the existence of an other; 'one person exists "to" or "towards" the other: "*Ho logos ên pròs tôn theón*"'.⁸³⁵ Thus, according to St. Maximus, 'God is identically Monad and Triad'.⁸³⁶ And in the philosophical language of St. Gregory of Nazianzus: 'The monad is set in motion in virtue

⁸³¹ Lossky, *MT*, 144, and 'The Procession of the Holy Spirit', (hereafter *Procession*), *Image*, 71-96.

⁸³² Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 384-386.

⁸³³ Lossky, *MT*, 59-61.

⁸³⁴ Lossky, *Procession*, *Image*, 83.

⁸³⁵ Lossky, *Redemption and Deification*, *Image*, 106.

⁸³⁶ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 2, 13; P.G. 90, col. 1125A, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 63, and *Procession*, *Image*, 84.

of its richness; the dyad is surpassed (for deity is above matter and form); the triad contains itself in perfection, for it is the first which surpasses the composition of the dyad'.⁸³⁷

It is this influence and understanding of the Trinity that Lossky understands how God is personal. The number two separates, but the number three is the number that 'transcends all separation'.⁸³⁸

If, as we have said, a personal God cannot be a monad—if he must be more than a single person—neither can he be a dyad. The dyad is always an opposition of two terms, and, in that sense, it cannot signify an absolute diversity. When we say that God is Trinity we are emerging from the series of countable or calculable numbers.⁸³⁹

So, the Father is person in the fact that He eternally confers His nature on the Son and Spirit. This is the sense that the Father bestows His kenotic love, His emptying of Himself, His divesting Himself of His nature in the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. But this sharing is not an act of the will or an act of necessity internal to God. 'If the Father shares His one essence with the Son and the Holy Spirit and in that sharing remains undivided, this is neither an act of will nor an act of internal necessity. In more general terms, it is not an act at all, but the eternal mode of Trinitarian existence in itself'.⁸⁴⁰ This raises some concerns. If the Father begets the Son and processes the Holy Spirit freely, that is, not out of internal necessity, it must be an act of the will, but Lossky says it is not. And if it is not an act of the will how is it free? But if it is free and not an act of the will, what then does he mean by free? Lossky's answer is that it is not an act at all, but the 'eternal mode of Trinitarian existence'. In plain terms, this is just how the Trinity exists. Or more crudely, it is just how God *is*. This is, of course, an antinomy.

⁸³⁷ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40, 41, P.G. 36, col. 417BC, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 46

⁸³⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 47.

⁸³⁹ Lossky, *Procession*, *Image*, 84.

⁸⁴⁰ Lossky, *Procession*, *Image*, 86.

Lossky, following St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. John of Damascus, says that it is impossible to explain the mode of God's existence because the generation and the procession are incomprehensible.

You ask what is the procession of the Holy Spirit? Do you tell me first what is the unbegottenness of the Father, and I will then explain to you the physiology of the generation of the Son, and the procession of the Spirit, and we shall both of us be stricken with madness for prying into the mystery of God.⁸⁴¹ You hear that there is generation? Do not waste your time seeking after the *how*. You hear that the Spirit proceeds from the Father? Do not busy yourself about the *how*.⁸⁴²

In the mystery of the Trinity the Tri-Unity of persons, freely caused by the monarchy of the Father *are* self-emptying love. This is the 'eternal movement of love' distinguishing the hypostases of St. Maximus.⁸⁴³ And this is the love that is manifested in the mystery of the cross. 'The love of the Father crucifying, the love of the Son crucified, and the love of the Holy Spirit triumphant in the invincible power of the cross',⁸⁴⁴ according to Philaret of Moscow.

The kenosis of the Son is far more obvious. It is Christ who renounces His own will to accomplish the will of the Father. This theology is taken from the Philippians passage:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation (*ekénosen*), taking the form of a bondservant *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in the appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

⁸⁴¹ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oratio 31 (Theologica 5), 8, P.G. 36, 141B, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 55.

⁸⁴² St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oratio 20, ii, P.G. 35, 1077C, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 55.

⁸⁴³ St. Maximus, Scholia in lib. de Divin. Nomin., II, 3. *henóseis te kai diakríseis*, P.G. 4, 221A, quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 60.

⁸⁴⁴ Philaret, *Oraisons funebres, homelies et discours*. French translation by A. de Stourdza, Paris, 1849, 154, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 85.

In Christ's self-emptying of His own will for the will of the Father, St. Cyril of Alexandria sees 'the entire mystery of the economy'.⁸⁴⁵ If a person is one who consists in self-renunciation, then Christ is obviously a person. But, Lossky says, Christ's self-renunciation is of his own will, it 'is not a choice, or an act, but is so to speak the very being of the Persons of the Trinity who have only one will proper to the common nature'.⁸⁴⁶

Each Person of the Trinity share a common will for they share a common nature. Because of this common nature the Son is bound, according to St. Cyril, 'to possess the same will and the same power...' and when Christ is manifested He manifests the nature of the Father, only as the Begotten. And this nature is self-emptying. The Son exists because of the Father's self-emptying. So, when He is manifested, He manifests this self-emptying, He is self-emptying. This is why 'He who has seen the Son has seen the Father'. 'The *kenosis* is the mode of existence of the Divine Person who was sent into the world'.⁸⁴⁷ Christ's kenotic renunciation of His will is a demonstration and manifestation of what it means to be divine. And since He shares the common essence and common will, His work on earth is the work of the Trinity.⁸⁴⁸

The same, obviously, can be said of the Holy Spirit. In the communication of the Holy Spirit, not to the entire Church, but to each person, He becomes present. The Holy Spirit marks each member of the Church with a seal of unique personal relationship to the Trinity. But how does this come about?

That remains a mystery—the mystery of the self-emptying, of the *kenosis* of the Holy Spirit's coming into the world. If in the *kenosis* of the Son the Person appeared to men while the Godhead remained hidden under a form of a servant, the Holy Spirit in His coming, while He manifests the common nature of the Trinity, leaves His own Person concealed beneath His Godhead'.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁵ St. Cyril, 'Quod unus sit Christus', P.G. 75, 1308, 1332, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 144.

⁸⁴⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 144.

⁸⁴⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 145.

⁸⁴⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 145.

⁸⁴⁹ Lossky, *MT*, 168.

In this hidden-ness, in this concealment of identity, Lossky sees the Spirit's kenosis. This is an insight taken from Bulgakov.⁸⁵⁰ Lossky says the purpose is that the gift that the Holy Spirit imparts can be completely ours, 'adapted to our person'.⁸⁵¹ Interestingly, Lossky never quotes the Gospel of St. John passage that states, speaking of the Spirit, 'for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but what ever He hears He will speak...He will glorify Me' (John 16:13-14). But this is obviously the text that Lossky has in mind; for the Spirit, if you will, is to deflect His own glory to glorify the Son. The Spirit empties Himself for the glory of another, that is, Christ. In this the nature of the Father is manifested and, simultaneously, so is the deity and Person of the Holy Spirit.

Also, it must be remembered that it is the procession of the Holy Spirit that 'presents us with a Trinity which escapes the laws of quantitative number, since it goes beyond the dyad of opposed terms, not by means of a synthesis or a new series of numbers, but by an absolutely new diversity, which we call the Third Person'.⁸⁵² It is this absolute identity and unity of shared nature with absolute diversity of the self-renouncing Persons that we call the personal Triune God of Christianity. This is where Lossky gets his understanding of person: 'a person can be fully personal only in so far as he has nothing that he seeks to possess for himself, to the exclusion of others, *i.e.*, when he has a common nature with others'.⁸⁵³

Lossky shares Florensky's concept that all true persons are consubstantial with one another. Florensky starts, in his search for certitude, with the 'law of identity', which in fact can never give certitude. He demonstrates non-consubstantiality.

⁸⁵⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 219-227 and *Sophia*, 111-112.

⁸⁵¹ Lossky, *MT*, 168.

⁸⁵² Lossky, *Procession, Image*, 87.

⁸⁵³ Lossky, *Redemption and Deification, Image*, 106.

In excluding all other elements, every A is excluded by all of them, for if each of these elements is for A only not-A, then A over against not-A is only not-not-A. From the viewpoint of the law of identity, all being, in desiring to affirm itself, actually only destroys itself, becoming a combination of elements each of which is a centre of negations, and *only* negations. Thus, all being is a total negation, one great 'Not'. The law of identity is the spirit of death.⁸⁵⁴

It is this that leads Lossky to the concept of the individual as opposed to the person.

This is self-affirmation as opposed to self-renunciation.

The law $A=A$ becomes a completely empty schema of self-affirmation, a schema that does not synthesize any real elements, anything that is worth connecting with the '=' sign. 'I=I' turns out to be nothing more than a cry of naked egotism: 'I!' For where there is no difference, there can be no connection. There is therefore only the blind force of stagnation and self-imprisonment, only egotism. Outside of itself, I hates every I, since for it this I is not-I; and hating, I strives to exclude this I from the sphere of being.⁸⁵⁵

For Florensky the law of identity is only overcome by the Truth of the consubstantiality of the '*one essence with three hypostases*'.⁸⁵⁶ Here the analogy of the Trinity is clearly used for the concept of person.

Instead of an empty, dead, formal self-identity $A=A$, in virtue of which A should selfishly, self-assertively, egotistically exclude every not-A, we get a real self-identity of A, full of content and life, a self identity that eternally rejects itself and that eternally receives itself in its self-rejection. If, in the first case A is A ($A=A$) because of the exclusion from it of everything (and of itself in its concreteness!), now A is A through the affirmation of itself as not-A, through the assimilation of everything and the likening of everything to itself.⁸⁵⁷

The self-provenness and self-groundedness of the Subject of the Truth, I, is the relation to He through Thou. Through Thou the subject I becomes the objective He, and, in the latter, I has its affirmation, its objectivity as I. He is I revealed. The Truth contemplates Itself through Itself in Itself. But each moment of this absolute act is itself absolute, is itself Truth. Truth is

⁸⁵⁴ Florensky, *Pillar*, 23.

⁸⁵⁵ Florensky, *Pillar*, 23.

⁸⁵⁶ Florensky, *Pillar*, 37.

⁸⁵⁷ Florensky, *Pillar*, 36.

the contemplation of Oneself through Another in a Third: Father, Son, and Spirit.⁸⁵⁸

There are a few concerns I have with this model. The analogy breaks down and raises some questions. If the human person is one that is freed from the necessity of the fractured individual human nature, can the same thing be said of God? I think not. First, it is assumed that the necessity of the human nature is something that an individual human needs to be freed from, to rise above, in order to be a complete human person, that is, to reengage the community of the one humanity. The nature needs to be transformed, by grace, into the divine nature. Even for Lossky there is no necessity in God having to rise above His nature. God does not need to be freed from His nature, for it is already in community. And if, as according to Revelation, God is Love, then there is already inherent in God's nature the necessity, if one may speak of necessity in God as in St. Athanasius, of personhood. Thus, for the Trinity, the kenosis of love is more the correct model of personhood and not a denial of the nature itself.

What may be helpful here is Louth's understanding (although it contradicts Lossky's understanding of person) of St. Maximus' concept of the person and the will.

Maximus sometimes, as we have seen, expresses this distinction of levels by distinguishing between existence (*hyparxis*) or subsisting (*hyphistanai*, from which the noun, *hypostasis*) and being (*ousia*, *einai*): persons exist, natures are. Whatever we share with others, we are: it belongs to our nature. But what it is to be a person is not something, some quality, that we do *not* share with others – as if there were an irreducible somewhat within each one of us that makes us the unique persons we are. What is unique about each one of us is what we have made of the nature that we have: our unique mode of existence, which is a matter of our experience in the past, our hopes for the future, the way we live out the nature we have. What makes the Son of God the unique person he is is the eternal life of love in the Trinity in which he shares in a filial way.⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁸ Florensky, *Pillar*, 37.

⁸⁵⁹ Louth, *Maximus*, 59.

And of Maximus' understanding of the exercise of the will and freedom Louth

continues:

The idea that Christ did not deliberate (which is what is meant by not having a 'gnomic will') seems very strange, since deliberating between different choices is what we are accustomed to think that freewill is all about. In the course of her criticism of moral philosophy in *The Sovereignty of Good*, Iris Murdoch at one point observes that 'freedom is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather the experience of accurate vision which, when this becomes appropriate, occasions action (Murdoch 1970, 67). From this point of view deliberation is what we fall back on when our vision is clouded or confused: it is a measure of our *lack* of freedom, not the signal exercise of freedom.⁸⁶⁰

Thus, in the Trinity, each person, out of the self-renouncing love for the others, freely, out of an accurate vision, *is* this love, which is the common will of the divine nature. Each possesses the will of the nature but each person of the Trinity makes the nature uniquely their own, their unique mode of existence. Ultimately, it is how each person shares in the *kenotic* love of the Trinity.

Although Thunberg sees in St. Maximus 'clear indications of the human *imago Trinitatis*', he also explains 'that it is dangerous to try to explain it or develop it beyond a certain limit. At the same time it is fundamental, and it can be applied generally to all aspects of life: to creation, to the constitution of man, and to soteriology in all its phases and perspectives'.⁸⁶¹ As the 'Trinity is Unity' is a mystery that we can never rationally enter, so also with the concept of kenosis in the Trinity. There can never be full rational comprehension of this mystery concerning the Trinity.

Here, I must admit, Lossky himself never states that kenosis is an analogy for person as modelled in the Trinity. One wonders why he never explicitly does. The only guess I might hazard is that the analogy breaks down too much. For man, a person consists in the self-denial of the necessity of the will of the nature. There is no need for the

⁸⁶⁰ Louth, *Maximus*, 62.

⁸⁶¹ Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos* (New York: SVS Press, 1985), 47-48.

denial of the nature in the Divinity. And perhaps, with Lossky's understanding of the self-renunciation of the Persons of the Trinity as mystery, he did not want to force the correlation of the analogy of the person as kenosis.

Nevertheless, the analogy, I think, still applies in his affirmation of person. With this said, we now turn to Lossky's concept of kenosis of the person in his anthropology. The definition that Lossky applied to the Trinity he now applies to humanity. To Lossky, following Florensky's schema above, a person always consists in self-renunciation to exist for the other. Here is Florensky's understanding.

Love of one's brother is a revelation to another, a passage to another, the inflow into another of that entering into Divine life which is in the God-communicating subject is perceived by this subject as knowledge of the Truth. The metaphysical nature of love lies in the supralogical overcoming of the naked self-identity 'I = I' and in the going out of oneself. And this happens when the power of God's love flows out into another person and tears apart in him the bonds of finite human selfhood. Owing to this going out of itself, I becomes in another, in not-I, this not-I. I becomes consubstantial with the brother, consubstantial (*homoousios*) and not only like-substantial (*homoiousios*). And it is this like-substantiality that constitutes moralism, i.e., a vain, inwardly insane attempt at a human, extra-Divine love.

Rising above the logical, empty, contentless law of identity and becoming identified with the beloved brother, I thereby freely makes itself not-I or, using the language of sacred hymns, it 'empties', 'exhausts', 'ravages', 'humbles' itself (cf. Phil. 2:7). It deprives itself of the attributes necessarily given and proper to it as well as of the natural laws of its inner activity according to the law of ontological egoism or identity. For the sake of the norm of another's being, I transcends itself, the norm of its own being, and voluntarily submits to a new image so as thereby to incorporate its I in the I of another being, which for it is not-I. Thus, the impersonal not-I becomes a person, another I, i.e., Thou. But in this 'impoverishment' or 'exhausting' of I, in this 'emptying' or 'kenosis', there occurs a reverse restoration of I in the norm of being proper to it. And this norm is now not merely given; it is also justified. That is, it is not merely present in the given place and at the given moment, but has universal and eternal significance. In another person, through its kenosis, the image of my being finds its 'redemption' from under the power of sinful self-assertion, is liberated from the sin of isolated existence, about which Greek thinkers spoke. And, in a third, this image, as redeemed, is 'glorified', i.e., is grounded in its incorruptible value.⁸⁶²

⁸⁶² Florensky, *Pillar*, 67-68.

Lossky takes Florensky's Trinitarian model and concept of person and uses it as the whole basis for his concept of person. And although this analogy is real, it has its limitations. First, Lossky reminds us, we have never known the human person 'in its true condition, free from alloy'.⁸⁶³ This brings us to Lossky's principle of the opposition of the individual to the person, parallel with Florensky, which is another important element in his theology. Here I quote Lossky's distinction.

We commonly use the words 'persons' or 'personal' to mean individuals, or individual. We are in the habit of thinking of these two terms, person and individual, almost as though they were synonyms. We employ them indifferently to express the same thing. But, in a certain sense, individual and person mean opposite things, the word individual expressing a certain mixture of the person with elements that belong to the common nature, while person, on the other hand, means that which distinguishes it from nature. In our present condition we know persons only through individuals, and as individuals. When we wish to define, 'to characterize' a person, we gather together individual characteristics, 'traits of character' which are to be met with elsewhere in other individuals, and which because they belong to the nature are never absolutely 'personal'.⁸⁶⁴

An individual is one of many of the same type. Thus, when we speak of characteristics, 'he is tall, she is thin, he is has blue eyes', we are speaking of characteristics shared by other individuals of the same nature. But when we speak of someone as a person, we no longer are speaking of characteristics shared by any other of the same nature. Thus, as we have seen, borrowing from Soloviev and Florensky, what is truly personal is indefinable, is irreducible to words. 'Finally, we admit that what is most dear to us in someone, what makes him himself, remains indefinable, for there is nothing in nature which properly pertains to the person, which is always unique and incomparable'.⁸⁶⁵

So, the one who sets himself as an individual, that is, individuates his nature and acts according to his natural character traits is the 'least personal'. As an individual he sets

⁸⁶³ Lossky, *MT*, 121, and *OT*, 125.

⁸⁶⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 121, and *OT*, 125.

⁸⁶⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 121, and *OT*, 126.

up his own fractured nature against and in conflict with others and, therefore, sees this individuation of nature as his ‘me’. The result is that he confuses person and nature. ‘This confusion proper to fallen humanity, has a special name in the ascetic writings of the Eastern Church—*autòtes*, *philautía* or, in Russian, *samost*, which can perhaps be best translated by the word egoism, or rather if we may create a Latin barbarism ‘ipseity’’.⁸⁶⁶ So, an individual as opposed to a person is one who does not surrender his will, does not empty himself for the good of the whole nature.

The problem most of us share is that we believe the will belongs to the person. Our conception is that the person asserts himself or herself by the will. But in the Christological dogma of St. Maximus it is clear that the will must belong to the nature and that the person possess it. In the Incarnation it was the divine person of Jesus who was free in respect to the nature. Thus, as we have seen, the person is the one that is free from the nature, ‘is not determined by it’.⁸⁶⁷ Lossky, following Soloviev and Florensky, believes the person must renounce the will of the nature.

If, thus, human personality is something greater than the nature, and nature’s power over it depends on the personality itself; i.e. [if it is] man’s own will, when turned toward nature, [that] ties man with the latter and leads toward evil, deceit, and suffering: then the emancipation or redemption from the power and domination of nature is in the emancipation from one’s own will—in the renunciation of it.⁸⁶⁸

Thus the human person, hypostasis, can only ‘realize itself by the renunciation of its own will’, thereby eliminating the determining power of the necessity of nature. This is analogous to the kenosis in the Trinity. And so the opposite, the individual, the one who individuates the nature and asserts the self-will, in which ‘person is confused with nature, and loses its true liberty, must be broken’.⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 122, and *OT*, 126.

⁸⁶⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 122, and *OT*, 126.

⁸⁶⁸ Soloviev, *Lectures*, III, in Zouboff, *Solovyev*, 115.

⁸⁶⁹ Lossky, *MT*, 122, and *OT*, 126.

It is this renunciation of the necessity of the nature that is the basis of asceticism. As one renounces the will of the individual liberty, a ‘mere simulacrum’, the liberty of the person is recovered, which is the image of God. This is the kenosis. By doing this, one is detached from the limitations of the individual nature and as a result rediscovers ‘the nature common to all, and to realize by so doing his own person’.⁸⁷⁰ And thus a person of another will appear as the image of God. And Lossky adds that a ‘perfect monk “will after God, count all men as God Himself.”’⁸⁷¹

Lower degree of beings, such as animals, are only individuals, their hypostases only individuates the nature. It is only in spiritual beings that the hypostases take on the character of persons, thus man, angels and God. Thus, analogous to the Trinity, who is not three Gods but one, the human person, as opposed to the individual, ‘does not divide the nature’. So, if it is true that the plurality of human persons does not divide the human nature, why does it now appear to be fractured? Again, because of sin we know of no other experience than what appears. Because humanity has lost its likeness to the divine nature we know only the division of the nature.

This is why, as above, both St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Maximus needed correction concerning the creation of Eve as an act of God’s foresight in respect to sin. Again, from Lossky’s perspective, Eve was created as a consubstantial nature with Adam. She was ‘a new human person’ who ‘completed the nature of Adam’.⁸⁷² As a result of sin the two human persons became ‘two separate natures’. Elsewhere he does say it only ‘appears’ this way. So, perhaps, it is more accurate to say, ‘two individuated natures:’ for they do become just that, individuals. And as such, they no longer relate to each other from the interior, but from the exterior: ‘the desire of the woman being for her husband, and exercising rule over him (Gen. 3:16)’.

⁸⁷⁰ Lossky, *MT*, 122, and *OT*, 126.

⁸⁷¹ Evagrius, *On Prayer*, ch. 123, P.G. 79, col. 1193C; this quote is attributed to Evagrius in Lossky, *MT*, 122, and in *OT*, 126, it is attributed to St. Nilus of Sinai, in actuality it is Evagrius, but ch. 121.

⁸⁷² Lossky, *MT*, 123, and *OT*, 127.

After original sin human nature became divided, split up, broken into many individuals. Man now has a double character: as an individual nature, he is a part of a whole, one of the elements which make up the universe; but as a person, he is in no sense a part: he contains all in himself. The nature is the content of the person, the person the existence of the nature. A person who asserts himself as an individual, and shuts himself up in the limits of his particular nature, far from realizing himself fully becomes impoverished.⁸⁷³

It is obvious that Lossky affirms that the person is in opposition to the individual.

As was said above, this issue is much discussed recently. There are some that would apply Zenkovsky's critique of N. O. Lossky to Vladimir: 'Lossky sets up an artificial distinction between being and existence (*esse* and *existere*)'.⁸⁷⁴ Thus, we can see that this concept is found in much of Russian philosophy and theology. And this concept is found throughout Lossky's understanding of person. But is it Orthodox? Neither Florovsky nor Verkhovsky attack or question this concept in their critiques of Lossky's *Mystical Theology*.⁸⁷⁵ Nor is it criticized by any Eastern Orthodox Christian of Lossky's time. But were these theologians blinded because the error is so ingrained in the Russian theological understanding of the person? This is a very complex and important issue, which cannot be dealt fully with here. But, what is of importance here is whether or not this is resolvable in Lossky's works? I think it is a mistake to attribute error to Lossky's understanding of the person. Lossky is in obvious contradiction to the generally accepted Western understanding that the person is the individual existence of the nature. But since the human nature is created 'out of nothing', then there is the necessity to transcend it to partake in the divine nature. Lossky's notion of the person is also consistent with Chalcedonian and St. Maximus' Christology, and consistent with Orthodox theology as a whole. There would be much to surrender in Orthodox theology if we deny Lossky's understanding of the person. I believe that Lossky is not in error here. But Lossky is in

⁸⁷³ Lossky, *MT*, 124, and *OT*, 128.

⁸⁷⁴ Zenkovsky, *History*, 667.

⁸⁷⁵ S. Verkhovsky, 'Review of *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, by V. N. Lossky', in *SVSQ*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring 1958), 52-54 and G. Florovsky, 'Review of *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, by V. N. Lossky', in *The Theology of the Eastern Church*, 38 (3)(1958), 207-208.

error in the fact that he juxtaposes his concept of person, which is opposed to the individual, to the Western concept of person, which is the individual existence itself. In other words, this obvious rational contradiction can be easily resolved by appealing to the rule of all divine Truth—antinomy. If we accept the antinomic rule, then the person is the individual existence of the nature, yet, at the same time, the person is other than the individual existence: both are paradoxically true simultaneously. Lossky's failure to recognize that both concepts of the person are true at the same time; his failure to make his concept of person antinomic is, I believe, his fundamental error concerning the person. Resolving this contradiction by the use of antinomy ensures the vitality of both truths.

Nevertheless, for Lossky the person finds its full realization in the common human nature by giving itself freely, by freely sacrificing the good of its own individuated part of the nature. 'In giving up its own special good, it expands infinitely, and is enriched by everything which belongs to all'.⁸⁷⁶ The person is the image of God, yet the fullness of the image is acquired only by the assimilation to the likeness of God, and this is only by the self-renunciation. And since man was created for this end, it is the perfection of the human nature; it is man's deification. This is the analogy of the divine life of the Trinity.

We also see this final aim in Soloviev's works. But can his understanding truly be compared to Lossky's final aim of assimilating the divine likeness, and thus participation in the Divine nature as a result of self-renunciation? Soloviev claims that that '[human personality] is able to possess the whole content, the fullness of being is not a mere fantasy, a subjective phantom, but a real, pregnant with forces, actuality'.⁸⁷⁷ But this union is only brought about by the free act of each person out of love for God and each other.⁸⁷⁸ And this union with the divine is only possible because the person himself participates in the divine. 'The human personality can unite with the divine beginning freely, from within itself, only because it is itself in a certain sense divine, or more exactly, participant of

⁸⁷⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 124, and *OT*, 128.

⁸⁷⁷ Soloviev, *Lectures*, II, in Zouboff, *Solovyev*, 98.

⁸⁷⁸ N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 99. Speaking of Soloviev's *The Critique of Absolute Principles*, II, 305.

Divinity’.⁸⁷⁹ And this is so, because, as he says elsewhere, ‘Divinity belongs to man as well as to God—with this one difference, that God possesses it in eternal reality, where as man can only attain to it, to him it is granted; and that in the given state [of man], for him it is only a possibility, only an aspiration’.⁸⁸⁰ All along Lossky has shared this schema of Soloviev’s.

Since the person is the image of God in man and that image is indestructible, man always remains a person. The person always retains the ability to accept or reject the will of God. And, as we have seen in the section on the image, no matter how much a person rejects the will of God, and is therefore as far from the likeness of God as possible, the person still remains a personal being. St. Basil says that man is a creature who has received the commandment to become God.⁸⁸¹ But this command is directed to human freedom, which man must always retain to be able to fulfil it. Thus whether man chooses good or evil, pursues ‘likeness or unlikeness, man possesses his nature freely, because he is a person created in the image of God’.⁸⁸²

c. The Will of the Human Being

Throughout all this discourse Lossky attributes will to both the nature and the person. This is an example of his dual concept of freedom. In this section, we will see, that Lossky uses Christological theology for his conception of the will in man. We start by considering, again, Lossky’s understanding of freedom. St Gregory of Nazianzus speaks of why God gave man freedom, ‘in order that goodness should properly belong to him who chooses it’.⁸⁸³ And St. Gregory of Nyssa states that the image is, read here for Lossky

⁸⁷⁹ Soloviev, *Lectures*, II, in Zouboff, *Solovyev*, 92.

⁸⁸⁰ Soloviev, *Lectures*, II, in Zouboff, *Solovyev*, 98.

⁸⁸¹ Words of St. Basil reported by St. Gregory of Nazianzus in his Oration 43, ‘Funeral Oration for St. Basil’, 48, P.G. 36, col. 560A, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 124, and *OT*, 128.

⁸⁸² Lossky, *MT*, 124-125, and *OT*, 128-129.

⁸⁸³ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, ‘On Holy Pascha’, Oration 45, 8, P.G. 36, col. 632C, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 124, and *OT*, 128.

person, principally ‘the fact that he is freed from necessity, and not subject to the domination of nature, but able freely to follow his own judgment’.⁸⁸⁴

So, for Lossky the person is the one who denies the will of the necessity of the nature, and the person always retains this freedom to ‘follow his own judgment’. But if the will of the nature is denied, who then is doing the willing? Is there two wills that exist? Does the person possess a will as well as the nature? And, is it not true that St. Maximus speaks of the will as only belonging to the nature? Well, yes and no.

Here Lossky follows St. Maximus’ Christology very closely. And it is the theology of the Incarnation that helps Lossky work out his theology of the will of the person. In Maximus’ theology Christ incarnate had two wills, but each will belonged to each respective nature. But does not a will belong to the person? Here, I wish to make use again of Louth’s understanding of Maximus’ Chalcedonian logic:

According to this logic there is a clear distinction to be drawn between the natural level and the personal level. So far as activity and will as process are concerned, they belong to the natural level: activity, and in the case of rational creatures, will – as a process – proceeds from the nature, it is bound up with the movements that belong to the nature. But so far as result is concerned, activity and will are an expression of the personal, they express a particular way or mode (tropos) in which a nature moves in relation to other natures.⁸⁸⁵

This is exactly how Lossky understands the Fathers concerning the freedom of the person. This is his solution to the problem of the person versus the will of the nature.

Indeed, if freedom belongs to us as persons, the will by which we act is a faculty of our nature. According to St. Maximus, the will is ‘a natural force which tends towards that which is conformed to nature, a power which embraces all the essential properties of nature’. (*Opuscula Theologica et Polemica, Ad Marinum*, P.G. 91, col. 45D-48A.) St. Maximus distinguishes this natural will (*thélema phusikón*) which is the desire for good to which every reasonable nature tends, from the choosing will (*thélema gnomikón*)

⁸⁸⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XVI, P.G. 44, col. 184, as quoted in Lossky, *MT*, 119, and *OT*, 123.

⁸⁸⁵ Louth, *Maximus*, 57.

which is a characteristic of the person. (*Opuscula*, P.G. 91, col. 48A-49A.)
The nature wills and acts, the person chooses, accepting or rejecting that
which the nature wills.⁸⁸⁶

So it is this ‘choosing’ that is the ‘judgment’ that remains free in the text of St. Gregory of Nyssa. The nature wills but the person possess the will. This is of course why Lossky views the image of God as the person, for it is the theology of St. Maximus that is reflected back upon St. Gregory. And it is the freedom of the person that chooses after the likeness of God that is the second freedom of Berdiaev: ‘a rational freedom, a freedom in truth and good, a freedom as a goal and highest attainment, a freedom in God and from God’.

But the person does not always choose to follow after the likeness of God. But this in itself is not the problem, or rather, not the original problem. For according to Lossky, following St. Maximus, it is this freedom of choice that is the problem in the first place.

However, according to St. Maximus, this freedom of choice is already an imperfection, a limitation of our true freedom. A perfect nature has no need of choice, for it knows naturally what is good. Its freedom is based on this knowledge. Our free choice (*gnomé*) indicates the imperfection of fallen human nature, the loss of divine likeness.⁸⁸⁷

And this is the problem we face. Our nature was originally designed by God to know its true good and pursue it. But because of sin, because of the fall our nature tends towards that which it was not originally designed for, it tends to that which is ‘against nature’.⁸⁸⁸ Thus, our nature hesitates towards the good because it is faced with the necessity of choice. Because of ‘free will’ our nature ‘goes forward gropingly’. ‘The person called to union with God, called to realize by grace the perfect assimilation of its nature to divine nature, is bound to a mutilated nature. Defaced by sin and torn apart by

⁸⁸⁶ Lossky, *MT*, 125, and *OT*, 129.

⁸⁸⁷ Lossky, *MT*, 125, and *OT*, 129.

⁸⁸⁸ Lossky, *MT*, 125, and *OT*, 129.

conflicting desires'.⁸⁸⁹ But it is according to this marred nature that the person knows and wills and, therefore, in all practicality, it is 'blind and powerless'. The person no longer knows how to choose well, because it wills according to the nature, which has become a slave to sin. And therefore the person often follows the nature's impulses. So, the person, who is the image of God, 'is dragged into the abyss, though always retaining its freedom of choice, and the possibility of turning anew to God'.⁸⁹⁰

So, a person is one who is always capable of loving some other more than his own individuated nature, capable of self-renunciation. But because of weakness man usually acts under the impulses of the nature. Lossky notes some of the psychological and behavioural influences on man: such as conditioning by temperament, character, heredity, environmental and psychosocial surroundings and history. But man's true dignity is beyond all of these, 'his dignity consists in being able to liberate himself from his nature, not by consuming it or abandoning it to itself'.⁸⁹¹ Lossky mirrors Soloviev's understanding of how the person is conditioned by external forces but is not determined by them. Here we see Soloviev is in agreement with Lossky not only in his view of outside conditioning but, again, in his understanding of person.

Every human personality is first of all a natural phenomenon, subjected to external conditions and determined by them in its acts and perceptions. Insofar as the manifestations of this personality are determined by the outside conditions, insofar as they are subjected to the laws of external or mechanical causality, in that measure the properties of the acts or manifestations of this personality—properties which form what is called the empirical character of this personality—are but natural conditional properties. Together with this, however, every human personality has in itself something absolutely unique which defies all external determination, which does not fit any formula, and yet imposes a certain individual stamp upon all the acts and perceptions of this personality. The peculiarity is not only something indefinable, but also something unchanging: it is completely independent of external direction of the will and action of this person; it remains unchanging under all circumstances and in all the conditions in which this personality may be placed. Under all these circumstances and conditions the personality will manifest that indefinable

⁸⁸⁹ Lossky, *MT*, 125, and *OT*, 129.

⁸⁹⁰ Lossky, *MT*, 126, and *OT*, 129.

⁸⁹¹ Lossky, *OT*, 72.

and elusive peculiarity, that its individual character, will put its imprint upon every one of its actions and perceptions.⁸⁹²

d. Risk and the Two Wills for Deification.

As we have seen, the goal of this freedom is possession of the good for oneself. It is in the assimilation to the likeness of God. It is in the responding to God's call to become, by grace, what He is by nature. But God did not want a blind response based entirely on being created. No, God wanted and still wants 'man consciously to assume his nature, to possess it freely as good, to recognize with gratitude in life and in the universe the gifts of divine love'.⁸⁹³

For this to be accomplished God created man as a free personal being who was capable, like God in the Divine Council of Genesis, to decide and choose. This was a 'radical "intervention"'. God created the other, and this other was a free personal being who could become God by free choice and grace. This personal being is the 'peak' of God's creation. But it must be said, God in so creating such a being incurred, according to Lossky, a great 'risk'.

But these beings can decide against God: is this not the *risk* of destroying His creation? This *risk*, it is necessary to reply, must paradoxically, register its presence at the very height of omnipotence. [Creator], truly to 'innovate', creates 'the other', that is to say, a personal being capable of refusing Him Who created him. The peak of all-powerfulness is thus received as a powerlessness of God, as a divine *risk*. The person is the highest creation of God only because God gives it the possibility of love, therefore of refusal. God *risks* the eternal ruin of His highest creation, precisely that it may be the highest. The paradox is irreducible: in his greatness, which is to be able to become God, man is fallible; but without fallibility there would be no greatness.⁸⁹⁴

This concept is incredible. How can one speak of God as taking a risk? But ultimately one can see that Lossky is correct, if our freedom is real. This seems to be a

⁸⁹² Soloviev, *Lectures*, IV, in Zouboff, *Solovyev*, 126.

⁸⁹³ Lossky, *OT*, 72.

⁸⁹⁴ Lossky, *OT*, 54, and 73.

unique and original thought of Lossky's. But is it? There are three places where Lossky speaks about the 'risk' of God. Two, including the above quote, are from Lossky's lecture notes from his class on 'Orthodox Theology'. Then the only other place is in his 1954 article, 'Dominion and Kingship: An Eschatological Study'. Lossky states that the God

of the Bible reveals Himself by His very wrath as He who undertook the *risk* of creating a universe whose perfection is continually jeopardized by the freedom of those in who that perfection ought to reach it highest level. This divine *risk*, inherent in the decision to create beings in the image and likeness of God, is the summit of almighty power, or rather a surpassing of that summit in voluntarily undertaken powerlessness.⁸⁹⁵

This risk is a very powerful concept that makes our freedom absolute, for without absolute freedom there would be no risk. But this idea of risk is not original to Lossky. This can be seen in one of Bulgakov's texts speaking of the creation of man. 'Temptation was *possible*, since it was immanently implanted in the very nature of creatureliness and in its freedom... Creatureliness in its untested and un-overcome state is ontologically unstable; in this sense it bears within itself a certain *risk* of failure, which God's love takes upon itself in its sacrificial kenosis'.⁸⁹⁶ And, although it is not clear if the concept originated with Bulgakov, his point is the same as Lossky's, although Lossky defines this risk more completely. There is a theological sharing between the two. Bulgakov's perspective is the same as Lossky's concerning the risk, but Lossky's point is to certify that man's freedom is absolutely real. This is different for Bulgakov, as we have already seen.

The liberty of the creature cannot stand up to the end against the compelling attraction of Wisdom, and its evident efficacy. This forms, so to speak, an 'ontological argument' for the existence of Sophia... The

⁸⁹⁵ Lossky, 'Dominion and Kingship: An Eschatological Study', originally published in *Messenger*, no. 17, 1954, in *Image*, 214, 220, and 223. He also speaks of 'spiritual risk', but this is concerning man, *MT*, 226.

⁸⁹⁶ Bulgakov, *The Lamb*, 147.

acceptance of this principle of sophianic determination by no means involves the denial of those torments ‘prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matt. 25) or of the freedom unto evil of those who will still persist in self-assertion. *But freedom unto evil has no substantive foundation, no resource to endure to eternity*, and sooner must inevitably wither before the radiance of Wisdom.⁸⁹⁷

But what exactly does Bulgakov mean when he says that ‘*The liberty of the creature cannot stand up to the end against the compelling attraction of Wisdom, and its evident efficacy*’. Well, this is where Bulgakov’s concept of man’s freedom is different from Lossky’s, being limited by Sophia’s power. This type of freedom for Lossky is not real freedom at all. Not the type of freedom that can actually frustrate and thwart God’s will. Bulgakov’s concern is to demonstrate God’s power to reconcile all things in the end according to Sophia. And this is Lossky’s exact counterpoint.

Both the absolute freedom of man and the absolute power of God are both true at the same time. It is indeed a paradox, an antinomy, God does remain almighty while giving real freedom to the creature. In fact this antinomy actually demonstrates ‘the summit of almighty power, or rather a surpassing of that summit in voluntarily undertaken powerlessness’. Thus, the almighty Triune God of the universe condescends His will, empties Himself, for the will of the other. God so engages Himself with His love that He runs ‘the risk of being frustrated in His love’.⁸⁹⁸ For man’s freedom to be real he must be able to reject God’s command to become, by grace, god himself. And so, ‘God becomes powerless before human freedom; He cannot violate it since it flows from His own omnipotence’.⁸⁹⁹ One wonders here why Lossky did not use this to demonstrate the kenosis of the Father. Since it is the Father who is creator of all things, would this not be a good example of His self-emptying? Perhaps because Bulgakov does, Lossky does not.⁹⁰⁰ I must also add here, to be fair to Bulgakov, that this antinomy exists in Bulgakov’s works

⁸⁹⁷ Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 147. Italics mine

⁸⁹⁸ Lossky, ‘Dominion’, *Image*, 220, and 223.

⁸⁹⁹ Lossky, *OT*, 73.

⁹⁰⁰ Bulgakov, *The Lamb*, 384.

as well. One might think of the differences between Bulgakov and Lossky on this subject as each emphasizing the different aspects of the antinomy.

Anyway, this is why for man's deification two wills are necessary: God's will and man's will.⁹⁰¹ God's will is necessary for man's creation, but man cannot be deified by it alone. A single will posited the image, but two are necessary to make the image into a likeness.⁹⁰² On one hand, there is God's 'divine and deifying will granting grace through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the human person'.⁹⁰³ Then, on the other hand, there is the human person, by denying the will of their nature, choosing instead to submit to the will of God. The person receives 'grace and making it its own, and allowing it to penetrate all its nature'.⁹⁰⁴ Thus the nature participates in grace and the likeness is restored. And the human person 'contains the parts of this natural complex, and finds expression in the totality of the human being which exists in and through it'.⁹⁰⁵

6. Summary

Lossky shares many of the same concepts with Florovsky: God created freely, the creation is absolutely distinct from the Creator, and creation is absolutely free. This is so mainly because they both take their ideas from the Fathers, but also because Florovsky had some influence on Lossky. But Lossky, following more Florensky and Bulgakov, has a more Trinitarian aspect to his creation theology. Lossky follows Dionysius for his concept of the divine ideas. They are the very method of participation in the divine energies. They are the 'point of contact' of each individual creature with God. But, because of the intentionality of the ideas, it does not stop there, it continues and is the end, the vocation of its very being: all creatures all called to perfect union with God

⁹⁰¹ Lossky, *MT*, 127, 146, *Image, Darkness and Light*, 42, 'Dominion', 215, and *OT*, 73.

⁹⁰² Lossky, *OT*, 73.

⁹⁰³ Lossky, *MT*, 127.

⁹⁰⁴ Lossky, *MT*, 127.

⁹⁰⁵ Lossky, *MT*, 127.

In Lossky's cosmic order he considers the six days of creation. He follows the *Hexameron* of St. Basil. Here we also saw his understanding of the 'geocentrism' of Christianity. Lossky follows very closely St. Maximus' belief of the five divisions of creation, from which are concentric spheres of being, with man being at the centre, incorporating them all within himself. In God making man male and female, Lossky, following Bulgakov, sees a one to one correspondence of the single nature in diversity of persons of man with the single nature in diversity of persons of the Trinity. Lossky, following the Trinity analogously, believes that the very fact that humanity is personal demands a diversity of persons. For Lossky, to be a person means to be not in 'solitude', but in 'communion', that is, a diversity of persons bound to one another in love. This is the basis of Lossky's personalism. Thus, as in Bulgakov and Florensky, Eve is seen to be 'consubstantial' with Adam.

Although Richard Saint-Victor never applied his remark to the human person, Lossky sees the truth of it. Lossky paraphrases his perspective, 'that substance answers the question *quid*, person answers the question *quis*. Now, to the question *quis* one answers with a proper noun which alone can designate the person'.⁹⁰⁶ For Lossky the image of God in man, freedom, and the person are different aspects of the same thing. These concepts are, again, analogous in the Trinity and are based on his Trinitarian theology. But he also borrows from Soloviev and Florensky. These anthropological concepts are brought about because of the antinomic and apophatic method applied not only to the Trinity, but also to humanity. This is why Lossky sees the concepts that are found in the Trinity analogously in man. But Lossky fails to achieve antinomic success in his understanding of the person as opposed to the individual. His concept of person stands in contradiction to the understanding of person as the individual. I think this is resolved by accepting both notions as true at the same time, as antinomy, which Lossky fails to do.

⁹⁰⁶ Lossky, *Notion, Image*, 119.

There can be no doubt as to the similarities in conceptual terminologies between Lossky and the Russian religious philosophers and theologians. And, as I have said above, though their metaphysics may be completely different, they do share the same structural framework, the same contours. Also, as we have seen, Lossky's concepts of the person are not unique to him. His understanding of the following concepts, which he clearly shares, are found throughout the works of Soloviev, Florensky and Bulgakov: the will of the nature struggling to individuate itself in distinction of all others, the person being irreducible to the nature, and of the necessity of the person to renounce the will of the nature, and thus rising above the nature in order to reunite it and transform it to the likeness of the divine. Lossky, although there are some inconsistencies, brings together comprehensively the pertinent texts of the Fathers and the works of previous Russian Orthodox thinkers and philosophers. Then Lossky addresses them to the main issues of his day and thus creates a real neopatristic synthesis. The principles that legitimize this are the understanding that all truth is about the Truth, and the rule of consistency with ecclesial consciousness. The first principle is a matter of faith. The second principle is accomplished by Lossky to be the foundational presupposition of personalism in the Fathers. Lossky does contradict the Fathers in places, but is fundamentally consistent with their personalism. So, although there are inconsistencies in Lossky's details, the general points are valid.

What then is Lossky's contribution? Namely this: Lossky took the conceptual frameworks of Soloviev, Florensky and Bulgakov and gave them patristic content and, by so doing, made them acceptable to those opposed toward Russian religious philosophy. He removes the metaphysics of the All-Unity and replaces it with a Traditional Orthodox metaphysic. Lossky bridges and corrects the Russian religious ideas of the Sophiologists and breathes the breath of ecclesial consciousness into them.⁹⁰⁷ Lossky was not influenced by the idealism of Sophiology. But he did as the Fathers throughout the ages have done:

⁹⁰⁷ Clément mentions that Lossky clarifies the 'intuitions des Pères', but does not mention anything about Soloviev or others. Clément, Lossky, 159.

he used its conceptual terminology to convey the deep truths of Christianity. In other words, Lossky accomplishes a true neopatristic synthesis.

Conclusions

Florovsky and Lossky were very different theologians. Each desired to ground his theology in patristic sources. Yet each wanted to accomplish a different agenda. We have seen how this was carried out in their life experiences, views of Tradition, and methodology. This affected their theology throughout, as was demonstrated in their doctrine of creation. They shared similarities, but there were obvious differences as well.

Florovsky's theology of freedom in his doctrine of creation provided the personalism that was the foundation upon which Lossky built. Though Lossky did not follow the neopatristic synthesis as consistently and programmatically as Florovsky, there was much in Florovsky that Lossky was indebted to. Though Florovsky never explicitly rejected Sophiology, Lossky followed his consistent rejection of the Sophiological principles: its metaphysics and determinism. He also agreed with Florovsky's views of the creation as contingent and man as absolutely free. Lossky also used Florovsky's concept that Tradition and Scripture are not to be divided and that it is through Tradition that all external authorities are to be rejected.

Florovsky, as compared to Lossky, had very little development of Trinitarian theology. Lossky, on the other hand, following Florensky and the Trinitarian theology of the Church, used the Trinity as foundational for all his theology. Lossky followed Florovsky on the importance of Chalcedonian Christology and the term *hypostasis*. But Florovsky did not stress them as Lossky did in connection with a correct understanding of anthropology. For Lossky, these concepts, linked together with Russian religious philosophy and theology, were the foundation of the ruling principle in his work: the person.

Their basic views on Tradition were the same. Tradition is the Holy Spirit leading and guiding persons in theology that is apostolic, patristic and liturgic. But because Florovsky heavily emphasized and sometimes absolutised his historical method, he fell into error. Florovsky used Hegel's self-critical empirical-historical method as a tool against the Idealism inherent in Russian religious philosophy and Sophiology. He programmatically applied this historical method of citing the Fathers to every concept. But because of this, a rationalistic historical empiricism arose in Florovsky's works. In the end, although Florovsky was unaware of this, both his method and the Russian Idealist's were a type of Rationalism. Yet this allowed him, as was his purpose, leverage to determine what was consistent or inconsistent with patristic Tradition, and thus, according to him, what was Orthodox. But this of course raises the problem of allowing just another type of rationalism into the Church.

Lossky also tried to follow this rationalistic historical method. He attempted the same type of consistency, but sometimes failed. This was because Lossky in his methodology is fundamentally an antirationalist, like Florensky. This is the tension that one finds in Lossky as his attempts at consistency with the neopatristic synthesis failed: he wanted to be patristic, but because of his commitment to his theology, could not always be so. In fact, there are obvious places in his works where he struggles to be consistent with the Fathers (e.g., the image not being in the human nature, whether or not the individual existence of the nature is really separate from the person, and the concept of *enhyposstasis*), and there are other places where there is no evidence in the Fathers at all (e.g., the theological notion of the human person, which he himself admitted). There is even one specific place where he intentionally rejects the Fathers (St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Maximus on the reason for the sexes).

Yet Lossky never explicitly stated the necessity of finding proof-texts in the Fathers. What he did emphasize in his theological method was the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit for arriving at 'true theology'. Moreover, he accepted as true any idea that is

consistent with the revelation of Jesus Christ. This always allowed him to be consistent with the theological premises of the Church—consistent with the ecclesial worldview. Lossky consistently took this antirational position, which followed hard on Florensky. Thus Lossky, as opposed to Florovsky, was free to borrow and use the works of the Russian religious philosophers and theologians, considering them as useful for the Church.

Both Florovsky and Lossky were personalist theologians. Yet one significant difference in their doctrine of creation was Florovsky's lack of discourse concerning the person and Lossky's consistent thematic appeal to it. Lossky's doctrine of creation is inundated with this personalism. This is demonstrated first and foremost in Lossky's Trinitarian theology, in which the Persons of the Trinity exist as self-renouncing love. More importantly, following Soloviev and Florensky, the person cannot be explained: the person is irreducible. Thus, the human person is not the individual existence of the nature, but must rise above and be other than the nature.

But there is in Lossky's works a problem with his concept of person: it is not antinomic. Lossky, instead of making his concept of person antinomic, opposed his concept of the person to the generally accepted understanding of person as the individual existence of the nature. My antinomic solution to this problem in Lossky is to understand the person as both the individual existence of the nature and the one who, by loving self-denial, transcends the individual existence of the nature.

The Sophiological controversy produced two unique responses and approaches to the neopatristic synthesis. Florovsky adopted the empirical historical method to combat Russian Idealism. His theology was a complete rejection of all Russian religious philosophy and theology, especially as found in Sophiology. Lossky adopted Florensky's antirationalism. His theology was a corrective to Russian religious philosophy and its intuitions, while still standing specifically against the metaphysics of Sophiology. In the final analysis, Florovsky's works are a reiteration of patristic sources and thus remain consistent with Orthodox Tradition. Lossky's works, while attempting to be consistent

with patristic sources, are a reiteration, with correction, of Russian religious philosophy and theology while remaining consistent with Orthodox Tradition.

Though Lossky is consistently grouped together with Florovsky as a neopatristic theologian, this is not their most important commonality. Referencing the Fathers, not only their words but also their spirit, is not distinct to Florovsky and Lossky. This can be seen in others as well, for example in Florensky and Bulgakov. The most important commonality between Florovsky and Lossky was their stance against the metaphysics of Sophiology, not their methodological use of patristics.

**GEORGES V. FLOROVSKY AND VLADIMIR N. LOSSKY:
AN EXPLORATION, COMPARISON AND DEMONSTRATION OF THEIR
UNIQUE APPROACHES TO THE NEOPATRISTIC SYNTHESIS**

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