

«Destined Before the Foundation of the World»: Creation and Incarnation in Georges Florovsky and John Zizioulas

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“The Christian message was from the very beginning the message of salvation”, wrote Florovsky in one of his earlier articles, an article that reflects foundational themes found in a number of his works on protology and cosmology.¹ The larger pericope containing the heading of the title of this essay, which Florovsky also quoted, reads that Christ “was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake” (1 Pet. 1.20)². Ephesians likewise affirms that God “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love” (1.4). Both these passages indicate that God had foreseen the events of creation and the destiny of humanity, and both are used as the basis for developing a theology as to the motive of the Incarnation. Two modern Orthodox writers which one could single out as explicitly dealing with the motive of the Incarnation are the abovementioned Fr. Georges Florovsky as well as Met. John Zizioulas.

Florovsky, the elder of the two, was born in Odessa, in the south of modern Ukraine, while Zizioulas was born in Kozanis, Greece, with the two places of origin being no more than a 1,500 km apart. One direct link between the two prominent theologians, apart from their being Orthodox, the one a Russian and the other a Greek, is that Zizioulas initially studied in North America under Florovsky. In fact, Zizioulas dedicated his book *Communion and Otherness* to

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1. FLOROVSKY G., “*Cur Deus Homo?* The Motive of the Incarnation” in *Creation and Redemption*, in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont: Nordland; Vaduz: Buechervertriebsanstalt, 1972-1989) 3: 163 [The series is hereafter referred to as CW].

2. FLOROVSKY G., “Creation and Creaturehood,” in *Creation and Redemption*, CW, 3:71.

Florovsky³. Both have a strong rootedness in the early church Fathers, and both have a zeal for addressing modern concerns or crises of their own times, not to mention their commitment to modern ecumenical dialogue. This essay will show the many similarities in the protologies of the late Fr. Georges Florovsky and Met. John Zizioulas and their reflections on the motive of the Incarnation, and will end by briefly relating these to the context and influences in which each theologian formulated his theology of creation.

Being Modern “Fathers”

Florovsky is often spoken of as formulating a neo-patristic synthesis, that is, as being rooted in the mind of the Fathers. In his “Patristic Theology and Ethos of the Orthodox Church”, he spoke of the importance of the appeal to the Fathers, not through a simple repetition of their statements, but by an acquisition of the “mind” of the Fathers. He wrote:

It is utterly misleading to single out certain propositions, dogmatic or doctrinal, and to abstract them from the total perspective in which they are only meaningful and valid. It is a dangerous habit just to handle “quotations,” from the Fathers and even from Scripture, outside of the total structure of faith, in which they are truly alive. “To follow the Fathers” does not mean simply to quote their sentences. It means to *acquire their mind*, their *fronêma*⁴.

And in this the Church seeks to be apostolic, not simply through reiterating the narratives of the Scriptures or the Fathers, but by living in the “abiding presence of the Holy Spirit”⁵ — a Spirit that guides the Church into a fuller understanding of the divine mystery⁶.

In connection with this, Florovsky also spoke of Christianity as being a historical religion. “Christianity is not primarily a system of beliefs, nor is it just a

3. ZIZIOULAS J., *Communion and Otherness*, ed. Paul McPartlan (NY: Continuum/T&T Clark: 2006) xiv. The dedication to Florovsky reads: “the great Orthodox theologian of the last century [who] was my teacher and exercised a profound influence on my thought.”

4. FLOROVSKY G., “Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” in *Aspects of Church History*, CW, 4:18.

5. *Ibid.*, 16.

6. *Ibid.*, 16.

perfect code of morality. Christianity is first of all a vigorous appeal to history, a witness of faith to certain particular events or facts of history”⁷. Florovsky points to the mighty deeds of God, of God’s “intimate interventions” in history, as being rooted in the covenantal relationships God establishes with the Chosen People:

The Old Testament was truly a Covenant, a sacred fellowship, not primarily the Law and the doctrine. True, it was a but a provisional fellowship, a shadow and figure of the good things to come. It was a covenant of hope and expectation, a Covenant of prophecy and promise. The consummation was ahead. Yet, it was a real Covenant indeed. And in due course it was fulfilled and thereby superseded; perfected and accomplished, and thereby abrogated⁸. The new Covenant was made manifest in God’s “personal and ultimate revelation” in the Incarnation of the Word⁹. These historical events are subsequently subsumed into the Creedal affirmations of a Creator God who sends his Son, who becomes incarnate “for us and our salvation,” dies and rises, and who will come again as we await the resurrection of the dead. This, for Florovsky, also shows that Christian faith is not solely historical, but it is also personal since these events relate not to some abstractions, but to personal encounters of created beings with a Living God¹⁰.

Zizioulas uses similar language in referring to the mind and spirit of the Fathers. He is critical of attitudes that simply repeat the Fathers without also appealing to the particular contexts and needs of the various communities. In his affirmation of the importance of personhood and relation with the other, Zizioulas affirms that “living in the Church in communion with the other means, therefore, creating a culture. The Orthodox Church has always been culturally creative”¹¹. In an address to an Orthodox Congress in Western Europe, Zizioulas stated:

7. FLOROVSKY G., “The Lamb of God,” *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 4 (1949) 13.

8. *Ibid.*, 13. One notes here the language that Florovsky used to speak of the Covenant being abrogated, though one could likewise affirm God’s continued fidelity to this Covenant despite the advent of the new revelation in Christ.

9. *Ibid.*, 13.

10. *Ibid.*, 14.

11. ZIZIOULAS J., “Communion and Otherness,” *Sobornost* 16/1 (1994) 18. Here Zizioulas uses the analogy of art, in which the person creates an “other” as an act of freedom and communion.

The great Church Fathers, including those who fled to the desert, addressed themselves to the challenges of the culture of their time. Instead of preaching an esoteric religion they strove to transform the Greco-Roman culture of their time. And they succeeded in remarkably doing so. Western Orthodoxy, more than any other part of the Orthodox Church, is called to do just that: to relate Tradition to the problems of modern western man, which are rapidly becoming the problems of humanity in its global dimension¹².

And in this sense, both he and Florovsky speak of the existential character of patristic, and thus by extension, modern theology, of its having a bearing on the life, experiences and faith of the communities to which it is called to witness, whether that be in the encounter with Hellenism in the early Church or with philosophies or sciences in the modern age¹³. So what follows next will be a brief exposition of each theologian's neo-patristic protologies, particularly noting the religious and philosophical milieu in which these early Fathers wrote. I will return to the relevance of these approaches to the modern world in a final section of this essay.

The Beginning

Florovsky and Zizioulas share virtually the same theological bases for their protologies and soteriologies. The starting point in speaking about soteriology invariably leads one to speak about the creative fiat of God in the Genesis creation accounts. In these accounts we hear of God creating the world, both the heavens and the earth, of all the living creatures and plants in this world. There are numerous affirmations by God that what is created is good. The light is good (Gen. 1.4), the earth and seas are good (1.10), vegetation, such as plants and

12. ZIZIOULAS J., "Communion and Otherness," 8.

13. See for example, FLOROVSKY G., "Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church," in *Aspects of Church History*, CW, 4: 17, 22. In Zizioulas, one could cite "Christologie et existence: La dialectique créé-incréé et le dogme de Chalcedonie [Christology and existence: The created-uncreated dialectic and the dogma of Chalcedon]," *Contacts* 36 (1984) 154. See also the summary in MCPARTLAN PAUL, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri De Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993) 127-138. In his *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's, 1985) 26, Zizioulas hopes his work contributes to a "neo-patristic synthesis."

trees are good (1.12), the light of day and night is good (1.18), the creatures in the sea and air are good (1.21), so are those on the earth (1.25), and “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (1.31). One may note that in these instances quoted above, there is an immediate judgement by God that what was created was good. However, what is interesting to note is that we do not have an immediate judgement in this first chapter of Genesis that man and woman are good (1.27-30). We do, however, find that God creates man and woman in the “image and likeness” of God, with the added uniqueness that in this creative process man and woman are the only ones whom God blesses. The final judgment by God, nevertheless, is all that has been created up to the sixth day is not simply “good,” but God says that it is “very good.” This inherent goodness is what underlines both Florovsky’s and Zizioulas’ positive theological anthropologies.

Much of Florovsky’s concern for cosmology is contained in his works on the idea of creation in Christian philosophy and in Athanasius’ concept of creation¹⁴. For him, the initial context for speaking about creation was in the Christian opposition to ancient Greek ways of seeing the cosmos as an eternal, immutable and dynamic reality. The datum for the biblical revelation was that God willed to create something other than the Divine Life itself and that this world had a beginning, and was created solely by God “from nothing”. The traditional phrase used to express this is *ex nihilo* – the Latin for “out of nothing”¹⁵. The *ex nihilo* doctrine effectively rejected Greek philosophical streams that upheld the eternity of creation or matter by countering that this creation was contingent upon God. In Florovsky’s words:

Thus there was actually 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”¹⁶.

14. FLOROVSKY G., “The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy,” *The Eastern Churches Quarterly* 8 (1949) 53-77, which was revised from an earlier version in “L’idée de la création dans la philosophie chrétienne,” in *Logos: Revue Internationale de la Synthèse Orthodoxe* 1 (1928) 3-30; and, “St. Athanasius’ Concept of Creation,” in *Aspects of Church History, CW*, 4:39-62. Here one needs to be careful in correlating Florovsky’s own modern Orthodox appropriation of this cosmology with that of the authors he analyses. Nevertheless, many of the themes of Florovsky’s cosmology are contained in his “Creation and Creaturehood,” in *Creation and Redemption, CW*, 3:43-78, and are echoed in his analysis of patristic authors.

15. FLOROVSKY G., “St. Athanasius’ Concept of Creation,” 40-41.

16. *Ibid.*, 40. Cf. FLOROVSKY G., “Creation and Creaturehood,” 57.

What is also a key principle here was a belief in a God who Created out of freedom, and not out of some necessity or determinism. God was not necessitated to be a Creator by reason of the divine nature, or of any other external forces acting upon the divine Being. One can contrast this to some of the gnostic myths which spoke of creation being the result of either a war between gods or the death of a god, etc. In each of these latter examples creation was the product of something not under the direct control of the gods – creation was thus an “accident.” And something that is an accident necessarily eliminates any notion of freedom in the acting agent.

Early Christianity, in rejecting such determinism or necessity, affirmed the complete freedom of God in creating and sustaining all of creation. All creation was dependant upon God for its existence. This was the basic context for Florovsky’s explication of Origen’s cosmology. In Florovsky’s summary, Origen’s basic premise was that one could not think of God without also thinking of this God as Creator¹⁷. He wrote of Origen:

God could never have become anything that He has not been always. There is nothing simply “potential” in God’s Being, everything being eternally actualized. This was Origen’s basic assumption, his deepest conviction. God is always the Father of the Only-Begotten, and the Son is co-eternal with the Father: any other assumption would have compromised the essential immutability of the Divine Being. But God is always Creator and Lord¹⁸.

This basic principle, for Origen, was a creedal affirmation that God was “always Creator and Lord,” which in turn implied an “eternal actualization of the world”¹⁹. God as Pantokrator, existing as such from all eternity, must also have been eternally exercising the divine eternal relations of “generation” and “creation.” Affirming anything else would be to admit change in the Divine Being, which Origen rejected. “In this way, Origen concluded that all existence is eternal and that everything coexists with God, a dogma which is similar to Aristotle’s doctrine of the eternity of the world”²⁰. For him, both generation and creation were part of the immutable Divine Being.

17. Ibid., 44.

18. Ibid., 43.

19. Ibid., 43.

20. FLOROVSKY G., “The Basic Features of Theology in the Fourth Century,” in *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century*, CW, 7:19.

What Florovsky points to as a weakness in Origen's theology is that speaking of generation and creation by the Father seemed to lump creation and the Son in the same categories. This meant, according to Florovsky:

The crucial philosophical problem at the bottom of that theological controversy was precisely that of time and eternity. Within this system itself there were two opposite options: to reject the eternity of the world or to contest the eternity of the Logos²¹.

The latter, contesting the eternity of the Logos, was the option that Arianism pursued, in its belief in the creaturely existence of the Son, who was somehow a lesser being than the Eternal God. Arianism saw the generation of the Son as threatening divine immutability. Arianism, of course, was rejected by the subsequent tradition from the Council of Nicea. What was left to formulate then was a cosmology that rejected the eternality of creation. And this is where Florovsky turns to Athanasius.

Florovsky's analysis of Athanasius begins primarily with a discussion of the distinction, a radical distinction, between the "absolute being of God and the contingent existence of the world"²². Juxtaposed, on the one hand, is the eternal, immutable and incorruptible God against the finite, mutable and corruptible cosmos. By their own nature, all created things were "intrinsically unstable, fluid, impotent, mortal, liable to dissolution"²³. Athanasius includes the person in this conception, who was by his very nature mortal and corruptible, and who could not escape the condition of his existence save by the grace of God²⁴. Athanasius constructed such a cosmology as the basis of a rejection of Arianism, which for him threatened the distinction between the eternal Word and creation. There was a difference in the language one used to describe the eternal being of God as compared to the activity of God in creation. This distinction is commonly expressed in triadology in order to differentiate between the "theological (immanent)" Trinity and the "economic" Trinity.

What this distinction implied in terms of Trinitarian theology was that there was a unity of will and of being of God, of the Father, Son and Spirit. "God does

21. FLOROVSKY G., "St. Athanasius' Concept of Creation," 46-47. Cf. also FLOROVSKY G., "The Basic Features of Theology in the Fourth Century," 19.

22. FLOROVSKY G., "St. Athanasius' Concept of Creation," 49.

23. *Ibid.*, 49.

24. *Ibid.*, 50.

not ‘choose’ His own Being. He simply is”²⁵. This is distinguished from God’s creative activity, which is a manifestation of God outside (*ad extra*) of the divine Being. In creating, God creates by an act of will, not of necessity. In terms of christology, Athanasius used this distinction to affirm that the generation of the Son was from the Father, and was particular to the very nature of God. Generation was proper to theology, which simultaneously affirmed the consubstantiality of the Father with the Son. Generation is not something external to God’s Being, like creation, which is from God, though distinct from God²⁶. This position of Athanasius also inserted a cleavage between Creator and creature, and ensured that creatures were not considered as eternal, but as contingent and dependant upon the will of God²⁷. This distinction, for Florovsky, became classic in Eastern theology, from John of Damascus to Gregory Palamas, who forcefully maintained the differences between the “essence” of God, in terms of being Creator and in terms of the relationship between the Father’s generation of the Son, and the “energies” of God, through which God creates and sustains creation²⁸.

Florovsky’s analysis of Maximus the Confessor also contains such distinctions between the Creator and what is created. The eternal will of God concerning the world is actualized in the creation of the world. The origin of creation is the realization of God’s eternal plan for it²⁹. Florovsky quotes Maximus thus: “We say that he is not only the Creator of quality, but also of *qualitized* nature. It is for this reason that creations do not co-exist with God from eternity”³⁰. The distinction then becomes formulated in the “uncreated-created” dialectic, which is also affirmed in Zizioulas’ theology.

25. *Ibid.*, 53.

26. *Ibid.*, 54-55; 58ff.

27. Similar creation themes are also found in FLOROVSKY G., “St. Athanasius of Alexandria,” in *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century*, CW, 7:45ff.

28. FLOROVSKY G., “St. Athanasius’ Concept of Creation,” 61.

29. FLOROVSKY G., “St. Maximus the Confessor,” in *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eight Centuries*, CW, 9:228.

30. *Ibid.*, 222.

Dualism and Freedom

Zizioulas contextualizes his cosmology within the context of the controversies in the early church, particularly within Gnosticism³¹. Gnosticism believed in a dualistic world, of a tension between that which is good and that which is evil. For the early Gnostics, God is seen as good, but since there was evil in this world God could not have possibly created the world. This was an attempt to preserve God's transcendence. However, for Zizioulas, this approach isolated God from the world:

If the Church had conceded that God had had no involvement in the creation of the world this would put God's omnipotence in doubt. It would also have cast doubt over the love of God, because it would mean that God had no personal relationship with the world. Then there would be the issue of whether the world would ever be rid of evil, or whether evil was an inseparable part of creation³².

The Church rejected this dualistic approach, and affirmed that God indeed had created the world, provided and cared for its destiny, and that evil is not part of creation's true essence. Like Florovsky, Zizioulas also raises the issue of whether or not the world is an extension of God by dealing with the eternity of creation put forth by Origen. Zizioulas interprets Origen as speaking of "two" creations, the original one, which eternally existed in the *logoi* of God, and the second related creation of a material and historical world, which fell away from the perfection of the eternal creation³³. And like Florovsky, Zizioulas will appeal to Athanasius using the same quote above as Florovsky: "the person is mortal since he came out of nothing [or non-existing]"³⁴. In this same article, one should add that Zizioulas refers to Florovsky's "magnificent study" of the analysis of the problematic of creation in Origen³⁵.

31. ZIZIOULAS JOHN, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (NY: Continuum/T&T Clark, 2008) 83.

32. *Ibid.*, 84.

33. *Ibid.*, 86. This topic is also treated in ZIZIOULAS J., "Christologie et existence," 155-161.

34. ZIZIOULAS J., "La réponse de Jean Zizioulas [The response of John Zizioulas]," *Contacts* 37 (1985) 60-72. The appeal to Athanasius is on p. 66. This is a rejoinder to comments made about his "Christologie et existence," and his initial reference to Athanasius, p.163 in that article.

35. Cited in "La réponse de Jean Zizioulas," 65, and later on p. 68. The study in question is in ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥ ΦΛΩΡΟΦΣΚΥ, *Ἀνατομία προβλημάτων πίστεως* (Θεσσαλονίκη, 1977).

The third dimension of Zizioulas' cosmology, again comparable to Florovsky's, is his reliance on the thought of Maximus the Confessor. Like Origen, Maximus spoke of the creation of the world as eternally willed by God, though this did not at all imply, as in Origen, that creation was co-eternal with God. Maximus differentiates between the will of God and the existence of the world. Volition and its realization are necessarily different activities so that creation can not be eternal with God's will since it was a product of the divine will. This also means, for Zizioulas, that volition does not imply the necessity of God having to create³⁶.

Zizioulas engages the same line of reasoning in discussing creation *ex nihilo*, which follows from his distinction between the eternity of God and the contingency of creation³⁷. The *ex nihilo* doctrine first of all means that prior to creation nothing existed apart from God, not even some form of pre-existent matter. A second facet of this is that since creation has a beginning, it will also have an end since nothing created is eternal:

Death amounts to the extinction of particular beings precisely because the world having come out of nothing and being penetrated by it does not possess any means *in its nature* whereby to overcome nothingness³⁸.

This is related to Zizioulas' understanding of the Fall of Adam, which he says has generally been understood as introducing death into creation as a punishment for Adam's "original sin." Zizioulas is emphatic in rejecting this:

This [conception of the fall], however, implies a great deal of unacceptable things. It would mean that God Himself introduced this horrible evil which he then tried through his Son to remove. Also, it would seem to imply that before the arrival of man in creation, there was no death at all. This latter assumption would contradict the entire theory of evolution in creation, and would make it cruel and absurd on the part of the Creator to punish all creatures for what one of them did³⁹.

36. ZIZIOULAS J., *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 87.

37. *Ibid.*, 88ff. See also Robert Turner, "Eschatology and Truth," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (Burlington, VT: 2007) 15-34, esp. 18-19.

38. ZIZIOULAS J., "Preserving God's Creation: Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology (II)," *Kings Theological Review* 12 (1989) 44.

39. ZIZIOULAS J., "Preserving God's Creation (III)," *Kings Theological Review* 13 (1990) 4. Cf. ZIZIOULAS, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 102.

According to Zizioulas, Adam did not act as a “priest of creation” as a vehicle of communion between God and creation, and so was unable to overcome the mortality inherent in creation. This vision places man and woman at the centre of Zizioulas’ cosmology and soteriology. The analogy of being a “priest of creation” is, of course, to the Eucharist — in a proper relationship to creation, and its offering to God, creation acquires a sacredness and becomes truly a bearer of life⁴⁰. Adam’s failure to do this was undone by the *anakephalaiosis* (recapitulation) of all of creation in the New Adam, Christ Jesus, in whom all of creation is saved. The relational identity of the person is fulfilled in the person’s relation to an other — to God, as well as the rest of creation.

The Motive of the Incarnation

The above discussion principally emphasized the freedom of God in the act of creating as well as the finiteness of the created order. These theological bases form the foundations of Florovsky’s and Zizioulas’ approaches to the theology of the Incarnation, which itself provides the crucial link between the eternal God and the created order.

In his summation of Florovsky’s views of the atonement and Incarnation, George Williams raises the issue of the distinction between the Creator God and creatures by noting the asymmetrical relationship between divine grace and creaturely freedom. He wrote:

Father Florovsky saw the Incarnation and hence its consummation, the atonement, in the largest possible context, that of creation. He suggested as possible that God decreed the Incarnation of the Son quite apart from the fall of Adam as a means of perfecting creation⁴¹.

In his work on Athanasius’ cosmology, Florovsky wrote “the meaning of the redemptive Incarnation could be properly clarified only in the perspective of the original creative design of God”⁴². The reader is left somewhat in suspense as to

40. *Ibid.*, 5.

41. WILLIAMS G., “The Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky,” in *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman*, ed. Andrew Blane (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993) 303.

42. FLOROVSKY G., “St. Athanasius’ Concept of Creation,” 59.

what this statement fully signifies, and it is only when one reads his works “*Cur Deus Homo? On the Motive of the Incarnation*” and “The Lamb of God” does one get a clearer sense of this link between the creative act of God and the Incarnation.

In the “Lamb of God,” the context of Florovsky’s discussion of the motive of the Incarnation centres around redemption and salvation wrought by Christ⁴³. There is thus a two-fold expression of this reality — in the incarnate Christ, God redeems humanity, and unites man and woman to God. Often the classical phrases used to express this salvific act come from Irenaeus and Gregory Nazianzus. Irenaeus speaks of God becoming man “so that man might become God⁴⁴” while in Gregory we hear “that is saved which is united to God.⁴⁵” Florovsky concluded that the Fathers saw the Incarnation, as the lifting up of human nature through the hypostatic union of the Word with human nature into an eternal communion with God, as the essence of salvation⁴⁶. This soteriological principle lay at the basis of all the Christological disputes. In the Incarnation God saves humanity, an event which culminates in the death of Christ on the cross. In this same article Florovsky then adds:

The death of Christ is to be regarded as an organic moment of the Incarnation itself. It is implied in its redemptive purpose. There are certain theological reasons for regarding the Incarnation as an integral part of the original plan of Creation. That is to say that the Son of God would have been incarnate even if man had not fallen at all.... It seems to be more coherent to regard the Incarnation as an organic consummation of the primordial creative purpose of God and not to make it essentially dependent upon the Fall, i.e. upon the disruption of this purpose by the revolt and depravation of the creature⁴⁷.

It is true, wrote Florovsky, that the Fathers had never formally raised this issue in the patristic period, save Maximus the Confessor. Indeed, one may not go beyond the witness and experience of the Tradition in which Christ is spoken of as

43. FLOROVSKY G., “The Lamb of God,” esp. pp.17-21.

44. *Against the heresies*, III, 19.1.

45. *Epistle* 101, to *Cledonius*.

46. FLOROVSKY G., “The Lamb of God,” 17. See also Florovsky’s, “Redemption,” in *Creation and Redemption*, CW, 3:95-159.

47. *Ibid.*, 21.

Saviour and Redeemer of a fallen humanity⁴⁸. Nevertheless, Florovsky insists that we not see redemption as the only reason for the Incarnation⁴⁹.

A fuller treatment of the primordial reason for the Incarnation is contained in Florovsky's, "*Cur Deus Homo*"? Again, Florovsky repeats that the heritage of the early Church primarily spoke of Christ as Saviour, and thus constructed its faith along the lines of a theology of salvation. The early christological controversies threatened to erode the reality of how Christ, in his divinity and humanity, could be Saviour. This hypostatic union of two natures was at the basis of affirming that the communion between God and humanity was restored or renewed by the incarnate Word⁵⁰. Approaching the issue from another dimension, Florovsky comments:

On the other hand, it would be unfair to claim that the Fathers regard this redeeming purpose *as the only reason* for the Incarnation, so that the *Incarnation would not have taken place at all, had man not sinned*⁵¹.

Nevertheless, Florovsky once again returns to his conclusion that the idea of an Incarnation independent of the Fall was never directly raised by the Fathers.

The only Father, however, that directly raised this issue was Maximus the Confessor. Florovsky summarized:

[Maximus] stated plainly that the Incarnation should be regarded as a *an absolute and primary purpose of God in the act of Creation*. The nature of the Incarnation, of this union of the Divine majesty with human frailty, is indeed an unfathomable mystery, but we can at least grasp the reason and purpose of this supreme mystery, its *logos* and *skopos*. And this original reason, or the ultimate purpose, was, in the opinion of Maximus, precisely the Incarnation itself and then our own incorporation into the body of the Incarnate One⁵².

The passage that is at the core of this belief is Maximus' commentary on 1 Peter 1.19-20, which proclaims Christ as the spotless and blameless lamb "destined before the foundation of the world"⁵³. The primary purpose of the Incarnation,

48. *Ibid.*, 21.

49. *Ibid.*, 21.

50. FLOROVSKY G., "*Cur Deus Homo*"? 163.

51. *Ibid.*, 164.

52. *Ibid.*, 168.

53. *Questions to Thalassius*, 60th Q.

despite the reality of sin and the fallenness of humanity, was prefigured as integral to the economy of salvation. This was the providential plan of God which called forth the recapitulation of created things through the Incarnate Word, and inaugurated the true mystery of the beginning of all created existence. Quoting Maximus, Florovsky noted that:

One has to distinguish most carefully between the eternal being of the Logos, in the bosom of the Holy Trinity, and the “economy” of His Incarnation. “Prevision” is related precisely to the Incarnation: “Therefore Christ was foreknown, not as He was according to his own Nature, but as he later appeared incarnate for our sake in accordance with the final economy.” The “absolute predestination” of Christ is alluded to with full clarity. This conviction was in full agreement with the general tenor of the theological system of Maximus...⁵⁴.

The whole history of creation thus centres around two periods, which find their pivot point in the Incarnation. The first period coincides with the economy of salvation up to the point of the Incarnation, of the divine condescension or *kenōsis* into salvation history. The second period, post-Incarnation, coincides with the victory of Christ over death and our human ascension through our divinization (theōsis)⁵⁵.

Florovsky is careful to point out, however, that Maximus in no way ignores the reality of sin and fallen existence, which call forth repentance and conversion, of the healing of the human will and overcoming of the human passions. “But [Maximus] views the tragedy of the Fall and apostasy of the created in the wider perspective of the original plan of creation”⁵⁶. Despite such affirmations, Florovsky concludes that the primary motive of the Incarnation remains a *theologoumena*, and that it is possible to accept such an “hypothetical” answer within the tradition of Orthodox theology, not to mention, that such an approach also corresponds to the general tenor of patristic teaching⁵⁷.

54. FLOROVSKY G., “*Cur Deus Homo*”? 169. In this passage, Florovsky cited Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Liturgie Cosmique: Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Aubier, 1947), as well as Polycarp Sherwood, “The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor,” in *Studia Anselmiana* fasc. 36/4 (Rome, 1955) in support of this interpretation.

55. FLOROVSKY G., “*Cur Deus Homo*”? 169.

56. *Ibid.*, 170.

57. *Ibid.*, 170. One should note here that Florovsky also cites western sources in favour of the

Zizioulas too speaks of the primary motive of the Incarnation as being that of communion with God, and he also follows Maximus the Confessor in this area⁵⁸. Of course, Zizioulas too recognizes the reality of the sinfulness of humanity, as exemplified in the Fall in Genesis, though he places the emphasis in these biblical narratives on the desire of God for relationship to something other than the Divine Being itself. This is often expressed in Zizioulas' works as "being in communion," which not only describes the will of God for creation, but is also a statement about the ontology of the person. "Being in communion" or relationship with the other is the essence of being a person in the fullest sense⁵⁹. Nevertheless, the created person is subject to death. This Zizioulas characterizes as the "tragedy of creation" – of God creating something destined to seek eternal life, but by its own volition not being able to transcend its own finite limits⁶⁰. The created-uncreated dialectic means that "the world is so created that it cannot exist by itself, but is so loved by God that it must live. Death, the 'final enemy' of existence must be overcome"⁶¹. And this is where Zizioulas locates the primordial reason for the Incarnation — as the event allowing for the possibility of the person to freely transcend mortality through Christ. Zizioulas writes that "we would still be talking about the Incarnation even without Adam's fall, but Adam's fall determined the form that the Incarnation had to take"⁶². Christology in this conception, apart from a fall, would have referred

motive of an Incarnation apart from the Fall, though they come much later in the history of the church. Two prominent authors he cites are Rupert of Deutz (d.1135), and Duns Scotus (d.1308), the latter affirming that the doctrine of an Incarnation apart from the fall was "an indispensable doctrinal position," in "*Cur Deus Homo*?" 165.

58. In ZIZIOULAS J., *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, p. 103; "Preserving God's Creation (III)," 5.

59. One needs to look no further than Zizioulas', *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1985) for his theology of communion and personhood. Cf. his "Communion & Otherness." See also the comments by FARROW DOUGLAS, "The Person and Nature: The Necessity-Freedom Dialectic in John Zizioulas," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 109-123, esp. 122-123.

60. ZIZIOULAS J., "Preserving God's Creation (III)," 2. On the notion of "tragedy" and human freedom, one could also consult Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism and Divine-Human Communion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2006) esp. 142-148.

61. ZIZIOULAS J., *Communion and Otherness*, 259.

62. ZIZIOULAS J., *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 105.

to the transformation of the person into Christ. Zizioulas holds that this “Christ would have existed in time and space, as St. Maximus assures us”⁶³. Christ is the indispensable focal point of this economy of salvation. Zizioulas, perhaps a bit more emphatically than Florovsky, affirms communion with God as the prime motive of the Incarnation.

Conclusion: The Antidotes

While it is beyond the scope of this essay to deal in depth with the entire system of theology of both Florovsky and Zizioulas, one should mention a few of the ideas that are related to their cosmologies and protologies. What is quite relevant to the discussion in this study are some of the modern existential preoccupations of both theologians. Florovsky, though deeply imbued with the spirit of the Fathers, was nonetheless also writing within a particular historical context – that of German Idealism, Russian Slavophilism, Marxism and what he termed modern Gnosticisms (not to mention a great Orthodox theological renaissance in the émigré communities). Florovsky worked out key emphases or counter-measures to what he saw as exaggerations or errors on the part of these movements or philosophies. In his “Ways of Russian Theology,” commenting on the contemporary culture of Russia at the time, Florovsky wrote:

For the first time in history, so it seems, the revolt against God is unleashed with unheard of violence. All of Russia is aflame with this anti-God fire and exposed to this fatal precipitation. Generation after generation is dragged into this deadly temptation ... all men are faced with the choice: faith or unbelief, and this *or* has become a burning issue⁶⁴.

In his works, Florovsky rejected any fatalistic determinism, particularly that leading to persecution or violence, and panentheisms, which turn inward on man and thereby obviate the need for God. Florovsky affirmed the possibility of liberation from historical determinism or fatalism, while affirming the importance of history:

The theologian must discover and experience the history of the Church as the “process of God-manhood,” as a departure from time into grace-filled eter-

63. Ibid, 105.

64. FLOROVSKY G., “Ways of Russian Theology,” 204.

nity — the formation and creation of the Body of Christ. Only in history can one feel the actual rhythm of ecclesiasticity and discern the structure of the Mysterious Body. In history alone can one be fully convinced of the mystical reality of the Church and be liberated from the temptation to twist Christianity into abstract doctrine or moralism⁶⁵.

In much the same way as the early Fathers, Florovsky's stress on the "created-uncreated" dialectic allowed him to affirm the transcendence of God and the freedom of God and the person, while also affirming the ultimate *telos* of the created order as eternal life in God.

Zizioulas too was working out of a particular context, that of the modern ecological crisis. The most succinct explication of his theology here is found in his "Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution"⁶⁶. Zizioulas has characterized the ecological crisis as a great "spiritual crisis" of our modern times⁶⁷. Zizioulas attributes the root causes of this modern crisis in part to both science and religion. Science for its part has turned inwards to affirm the absolute sovereignty of man over creation, and promoted a sense of individualism and greed⁶⁸. He faults religion also, in that in counter-acting the postulates of science to be "masters and possessors" of nature, religion had done the same in the name of the Bible, leading to an exalted affirmation of the human over and above all of creation to "dominate the earth"⁶⁹. Here too is Zizioulas' rejection of the dichotomy between religion and science. Science and religion should

65. FLOROVSKY G., *Ways of Russian Theology (II)*, CW, 6:296. See also his critique of German Idealism in: "The Crisis of German Idealism I: The 'Hellenism' of German Idealism," 23-30, and "The Crisis of German Idealism II: The Crisis of Idealism as the Crisis of the Reformation," 31-41. One can also add here "The Slyness of Reason," 13-22. All are found in *Philosophy: Philosophical Problems and Movements*, CW, 12.

66. ZIZIOULAS J., "Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution," *Sourozh* 67 (Feb. 1997) 22-25.

67. This is emphatically stated in the opening and closing sentences of Zizioulas, "Ecological Asceticism," 22, 25.

68. ZIZIOULAS J., "Science and the Environment: A Theological Approach," a presentation at the Black Sea Symposium (1997) on Religion, Science and the Environment, "Theme I: Searching for Common Ground," located at: http://www.rsesymposia.org/themedia/File/1151676874-Sc_Environment.pdf. Accessed Oct. 26, 2010.

69. ZIZIOULAS J., "Ecological Asceticism," faults religion, and very little mention is made of science as the root cause. Cf. "Searching for Common Ground." See also his "Preserving God's Creation (I)," *King's Theological Review* 12 (1989) 1-5 for an extended discussion.

move towards a “creative cooperation,” particularly in the preservation of creation⁷⁰. He wrote:

If science moves consistently from the traditional fragmentation of knowledge towards a holistic approach, religion (Christian theology in particular) must revise its views about the human being and admit humans are inconceivable without their organic relationship to the rest of creation. Christian theology would have to accept the basic claims of the evolutionary ideas of biology, and understand Man as an organic part of the family of animals⁷¹.

For him, there is no problem in accepting the basic tenets of evolution, since the Bible speaks of the creation of the person out of material elements previously brought into existence by God. For its role in this “cooperation,” Christianity would need to affirm that “the human being is indispensable to creation”⁷². Here too Christianity can be the source for ethical behaviour, and remind science that the world is part of a larger reality. “We must stop taking it for granted that theology and religion are about ‘spiritual’ and ‘metaphysical’ realities while science is about ‘material’ realities. The environment is both a spiritual and material reality”⁷³. Once again, the dialectic between created-uncreated emerges in Zizioulas’ links between the spiritual and material.

There is a great affinity in the responses to the controversies or crises Florovsky and Zizioulas were both facing. In addition to their theologies of creation and redemption, each also advocated a particular spiritual attitudes to the problems of their day. Florovsky often spoke of an ascetic achievement and “a spiritual return to the patristic sources”⁷⁴. In his concluding chapter to *Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovsky advocated his neo-patristic synthesis as a renewal in modern Orthodox theology, and the need to promote a “catholic consciousness.” The Fathers spoke from: “the depth of the [Church’s] catholic fullness. Their theology evolves on the plane of catholicity, of universal communion. And this is the first thing we must learn. Through asceticism and concentration, the

70. ZIZIOULAS J., “Science and the Environment.”

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. In FLOROVSKY G., “Western Influences in Russian Theology,” *Aspects of Church History*, CW, 4:181, Florovsky uses the term “antidote” in this regard.

theologian must learn to find his bearings *in the Church*⁷⁵. This “new Orthodox synthesis”⁷⁶ remains a task of the church, of “the mysterious way of asceticism, of the secret, silent work of acquiring the Spirit”⁷⁷.

Zizioulas, in a similar fashion, advocates an “ecological asceticism”⁷⁸. This would counter attitudes of consumption, recognize the limits of our natural resources, and uphold the integrity and goodness of creation. The Orthodox response should be one of respect for creation, which also includes the human body, and that we are called to be “priests of creation,” that is, as vehicles of communion of creation with God:

Nature is the “other” that Man is called to bring into communion with himself, affirming it as “very good” through personal creativity. This is what happens in the Eucharist where the natural elements of bread and wine are so affirmed that they acquire personal qualities (the Body and Blood of Christ) in the event of communion in the Spirit. Similarly, in a para-eucharistic way, all forms of true culture and art are ways of treating nature as otherness in communion, and these are the only healthy antidotes to the ecological crisis⁷⁹.

This shift from consumerism to one of qualitative growth, for Zizioulas, would entail no less than a “cultural revolution”⁸⁰.

What I have tried to show in the above concluding analysis is the complementarity between Florovsky and Zizioulas, first in what is best termed *martyria* (witness) or evangelization. This they do by responding to the signs of the

75. FLOROVSKY G., “The Ways of Russian Theology,” 192.

76. *Ibid.*, 202.

77. *Ibid.*, 209.

78. ZIZIOULAS J., “Ecological Asceticism,” esp. 24. For a lengthier analysis of Zizioulas’ thoughts on ecology see my “The Ecological Bishop: Metropolitan John Zizioulas’ Theology of Creation,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 19/2 (2003) 199-213; and, Patricia Fox, *God as Communion: John Zizioulas, Elizabeth Johnson and the Retrieval of the Symbol of God* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001) 53-70.

79. ZIZIOULAS J., “Communion and Otherness,” 18. In the French, in “Communion et alterité,” *Contacts* 2/166 (1994) 122, the word “personal” is emphasized. For a treatment of his cosmology, in relationship to the Eucharist and ecclesiology, see BAILLARGEON GAËTAN, *Perspectives orthodoxes sur l’église communion: l’oeuvre de Jean Zizioulas*, [Orthodox Perspectives on the Church as Communion: The Work of John Zizioulas] (Montréal: Éditions Paulines, 1989) 167-205.

80. ZIZIOULAS J., “Ecological Asceticism,” 25.

times, and both responses can be deemed as reactions against materialistic atheisms, the one being against communism, and philosophical and national chauvinisms, while the other against ecological abuses and scientific and consumerist chauvinism. In each of these Orthodox authors, one sees a commonality in the affirmation of human dignity and freedom, as well as an affirmation of the goodness of creation. This is pre-eminently indicated in their addressing the issue of the motive for the Incarnation, a motive which is based on God's creating the person out of love, despite his or her failings, for communion with the Divine — which the Triune God “foreordained before the foundation of the world.”