

«Theology Reasons» – in History: Neo-Patristic Synthesis and the Renewal of Theological Rationality

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In his study of Bukharev, Soloviev, and Bulgakov, Paul Valliere criticizes the neo-patristic movement in Orthodox theology for establishing an equation of Orthodoxy with the dominance of the apophatic approach¹. It was thus, Valliere argues, that neo-patristic theologians effectively closed down the philosophical engagement with modern culture attempted by the Russian religious school. Speaking of Florovsky's role, Valliere notes that “Florovsky rejected the notion Orthodox theology required any sort of alliance with modern philosophy,” but then adds this misleading dichotomy: Florovsky, he says, “championed tradition-based patristic Orthodoxy, not philosophical Orthodoxy”².

Valliere's viewpoint is echoed in a number of recent critiques; yet it is not only the critics of the neo-patristic “turn” who reflect this reading. Tradition or philosophy, “experiential, *not* rational”: these are common tropes in contemporary Orthodox thought, and often employed to polemical intent. What both sides share, however, is precisely the characteristic modern opposition between reason and history – one which Florovsky, who first articulated the neo-patristic program, did not espouse.

Florovsky's work contains a profound emphasis upon the task of theology as an ecclesial exercise in *fides quaerens intellectum*, a reasoning from the divine economy apprehended in faith and within tradition towards a cognitive apprehension of revealed Truth, constitutive of true *philosophy*. This essay uncovers

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1. VALLIERE PAUL, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (T & T Clark, 2000), 299-300.

2. *Ibid.*, 5.

the concept of theological rationality inherent in Florovsky's understanding of neo-patristic synthesis, and suggests that a renewed assimilation of this perspective is a necessity today, overcoming both the shortcomings of the neo-patristic approach as currently received, and the temptations of liberal theology hazarded by its critics.

The Critique of Rationalism

Florovsky's earliest philosophical essays of the '20's register a strong critique of the rationalism of European philosophy, the crisis of which he describes, quoting Schelling, as *die Selbstersetzung und Verzweiflung der Vernunft* [self-disintegration and despair of reason]³. In these essays, Florovsky rejects both the possibility of apodictic certainty in logical judgments and the existence of Kantian *a priori* categories, and underscores on the primacy of existence over essence⁴. With a notably Pascalian, even Kierkegaardian accent, he insists:

It is impossible to build up a universally recognized system of religious philosophy. There could not ever be a *philosophia perennis*. For true reality is not in knowledge but in the religious test⁵.

Florovsky stresses the total discontinuity between human reason and the divine. The sharpest opposition exists between “faith” and “knowledge,” “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” and “the God of the philosophers”; in the words of Tertullian: *Credo quia absurdum*⁶. Divine truth is known by Revelation

3. FLOROVSKY, “The Slyness of Reason,” in FLOROVSKY, *Philosophy: Philosophical Problems and Movements* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), p. 13; original publication: “Хитрость разума,” *Исход к Востоку* [Exodus to the East], Book 1 (Sofia, 1921), 52-70.

4. See the essays, “On the Metaphysics of Judgment,” and “On the Substantiation of Logical Relativism,” in FLOROVSKY, *Philosophy*, 66-74, 143-169.

5. “Religious Experience and Philosophical confession” manuscript, 36pgs, Georges Florovsky Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, with permission; unpublished translation in Florovsky’s own hand of Florovsky, “Náboženská zkušenost a Filiofické vyznání” *Ruch filosofický*, 3/9-10, 1923 pp. 298-306 [in Czech]. Later, at least as early as 1931’s “Offenbarung, Theologie, und Philosophie”, Florovsky will reverse this view, identifying Christian dogmatics as explicated by the theology of the Fathers precisely as such a *philosophia perennis*.

6. “Human Wisdom and the Great Wisdom of God,” in FLOROVSKY, *Philosophy*, 118.

alone and is inaccessible to human reason, which left to its own devices can only resolve in skeptical negation or suspended judgment⁷. Faith is an incomprehensible “antinomy,” a paradox for thought⁸. If one may speak of true knowledge, it is only as “true life,” an act of *becoming true* in a grace-filled movement of the will in faith and devotion⁹.

This early emphasis on “life” over “thought” also carries over into Florovsky’s first strictly theological article. In “*Dom Otchi*” (1926/1927), Florovsky remarks that the “striving for a logical exhaustion of faith, as if a striving for a substitution of the living communication with God by religious and philosophical speculations about the Divine”, is a distinguishing mark of the “erring Christian consciousness. Rather, he insists, “Theologizing in its roots must be intuitive, defined as the *experience of faith, vision*, and not as a self-satisfying dialectic of inert concepts”; for, above all, “dogmas are the truths of experience, truths of life”¹⁰. In the desire to replace the open-endedness of history with a closed “system,” Florovsky sees “historical docetism”¹¹.

In his later, mature formulations, Florovsky stresses the strictly revealed basis of divine knowledge¹², and rejects any notion of a natural theology formulated independently of Revelation and the experience of faith¹³. “The theological system cannot be solely the fruit of a learning born in philosophical reflection. The experience of prayer, spiritual concentration, and pastoral care are also

7. *Ibid.*, 117.

8. *Ibid.*, 118-119.

9. *Ibid.*, 119.

10. “The House of the Father,” in FLOROVSKY, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 75.

11. *Ibid.*, 78.

12. “Revelation, Philosophy, and Theology,” in FLOROVSKY, *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont: Nordland Press), 21.

13. FLOROVSKY, “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation,” *The Christian East*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (1932), pp. 49-64: “Strictly speaking theology grows possible only through Revelation. It is the answering speech of man to God, as man’s witness of God who had spoken to him; whose voice he had heard and remembered, and whose words he had kept and was repeating. So-called “natural theology” is no theology in the true sense of the word... For the first time in answer to Revelation true prayer is poured out in words of testimony, words of adoration, of thanksgiving and of petition. Again it is an answer to the Word of God”. Accessed here: http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/holy_spirit_revelation_florovsky.htm.

needed”¹⁴. “Only love has a genuine capacity for synthesis”¹⁵, and further, “no final theological system has yet been granted or is possible”¹⁶. “The content of the faith is and remains a mystery”; thus, “one is forced always to control *cataphatic* theology with *apophatic* theology”¹⁷. As late as 1950, Florovsky repeats these themes: “Theology is bound to be ultimately... an 'apophatic theology', *just a symbol* of the unfathomable mystery of God, as much as it has actually been revealed to man by God himself”¹⁸.

Florovsky's critique of rationalism is rooted in an acute apprehension of historical contingency of human thought, grounded in the radical difference between God and creation. Man is a historical being, whose existence is in becoming; the formation of human knowledge depends upon *events* – personal encounters. Thus, Florovsky opposes any phenomenological reduction which would exclude temporality from thought in the attempt to arrive at knowledge of the Absolute or ideal forms of the world through a transcendental subjectivity (e.g. as in the later Husserl): there is no natural continuum between the human mind and the divine¹⁹. Understood in this idealist (neo-Platonic or neo-Kantian) sense, philosophy must be renounced and sharply distinguished from theology:

For both theology and doctrine are not philosophy. It is not a speculation on religious topics or problems but does not exclude the theological use of rea-

14. FLOROVSKY, *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. II (Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 306.

15. *Ibid.*, 288.

16. *Ibid.*, 52.

17. FLOROVSKY, “Le corps du Christ vivant,” in Jean-Jacques von Allmen (ed.), *La Sainte Église Universelle: Confrontation oecuménique* (Neuchâtel, 1948), 9-57, at 48. All citations from this text are my own translation.

18. FLOROVSKY, “Religion and Theological Tensions,” *The Bostonian*, April, (1955), 3-6; *Ecumenism I*, 11. George Williams calls Florovsky's theology “profoundly apophatic” but notes that “Florovsky did not himself frequently use this much invoked Greek Orthodox term for the *via negativa* in the approach to the Godhead. Florovsky was definitely not apophatic with respect to the *deus pro nobis*, Jesus Christ”: “The Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky,” in Andrew Blane, ed., *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual, Orthodox Churchman* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 239, 340, n172.

19. See especially “Náboženská zkušenost a filiofické vyznání” (citation above). For the best published analysis of Florovsky's early philosophical engagements, neo-Kantianism included, see SHAW F. LEWIS, “The Philosophical Evolution of Georges Florovsky: Philosophical Psychology and the Philosophy of History,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 31, 1992, 237-255.

sons. But it begins, earnestly and emphatically, with revelation – not with an innate “revelation” of the truth in the human mind, but with a concrete Revelation in history, with a true encounter²⁰.

Athens and Jerusalem

That this opposition between philosophical rationality and Christian theology is not, however, the last word, is inscribed clearly in Florovsky's much-misunderstood notion of Christian Hellenism. Florovsky first developed this concept of Christian Hellenism at length in a distinctly *philosophical context*: in his “Die Krise des deutschen Idealismus” (1931-32), a two part essay whose heading very significantly bears a dedication to the Ukrainian-Jewish existentialist, Lev Shestov.

Taking inspiration from Kierkegaard, Shestov's major work of the same period, *Athens and Jerusalem*, had answered Tertullian's famous question, *Quid Athenae Hierosolymis?*, with an emphatic oppositional negative. The work's concluding words could easily have been written by the Florovsky of the early 1920's: “Philosophy is not *Besinnen* but struggle. And this struggle has no end and will have no end. The kingdom of God, as it is written, is attained through violence”²¹. Florovsky agrees with Shestov's attack on Greek and German rationalism, seeing in these systems a philosophical monism which provides no adequate ground for free and significant action in history. Yet against Shestov's Jerusalem/Athens dichotomy, Florovsky offers a more subtle dialectical unity.

Florovsky's thesis traces the roots of the 20th century “crisis” of European thought back behind the breakdown of the great German idealist systems of the 18th and 19th centuries to the Reformation. The Reformers aimed to reject scholastic metaphysics; yet “what was repudiated in the Reformation was actually Philosophy itself”²². Nevertheless, “the Protestant world could not do with-

20. “Theological Tensions”, *Ecumenism I*, 11.

21. SHESTOV LEV, *Athens and Jerusalem*, Bernard Martin, ed., trans. (Ohio University Press, 1966).

22. FLOROVSKY, “Ad lectorem”, unpublished preface to *In Ligno Crucis: The Patristic Doctrine of the Atonement*, typescript, 1939/1948, 6-7. Georges Florovsky Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, with permission.

out philosophy”²³. It is no coincidence that Idealism arose in the Protestant milieu: having rejected the tradition of Christian-Hellenic philosophy (albeit in the form of debased scholasticism), Protestant thought was eventually thrown back onto pre-Christian Greek metaphysics, of which German Idealism was a kind of atavism: “The fact that the Reformation had renounced the Christian initiative in philosophy... alone rendered possible the revival of de-Christianized Hellenism”²⁴.

In Florovsky’s view, the new “Hebraism” of the religious existentialists and dialectical theologians (Shestov, Brunner, Bultmann, early Barth) is an attempt to overcome the Idealist revival (Husserl, Marburg Neo-Kantians) in “a new disengagement of the European consciousness from Hellenism”²⁵. Yet behind this stands an older opposition: “Christianity or philosophy, Christianity or metaphysics”²⁶ – an essentially Protestant dichotomy, foreign to the tradition of the historical Church:

history proves that the Church... justified the metaphysical impulse for searching, that it strove from the beginning to show and to explain the truth of apostolic prophecy as a rational truth, as a truth also for the *ratio*. The Church never claimed that no relations existed between Jerusalem and Athens, between the “school” and the Church. There is deep meaning in the fact that only the Greek language became the privileged language of Christianity, that it still is and will always remain so, because it is the language of the New Testament. In a sense, the Hellenic element, the ways of Hellenic thought, were sanctioned by this²⁷.

Florovsky agrees with Kierkegaard and neo-orthodoxy in their critique of idealism and their emphasis upon the need for Christian thought to begin with the event of the Incarnation²⁸. However, he objects, the new rejection of philosophy reduces historical man to passivity. Alternatively, the neo-scholastic solution of an “unchanged Aristotle” is an unworthy compromise. The philosophizing of

23. “The Crisis of German Idealism (II),” FLOROVSKY, *Philosophy*, 40.

24. *Ibid.*, 40.

25. “The Crisis of German Idealism (I),” FLOROVSKY, *Philosophy*, 24.

26. “The Crisis of German Idealism (II),” 38.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, 37-38.

the flesh must die, but a baptismal death; to “philosophize about God” is in itself no sinful aberration, no “audacious curiosity,” but “man's religious calling and duty” – not an “*opus superogatorium*”, but a necessary moment in the Christian vocation²⁹. Between the Scylla and Charybdis of Hellenized Christianity and irrationalist fideism, the only way forward lies in return to the Christianized Hellenism of the Fathers³⁰.

More than a few critics have cast Florovsky's defense of Christian Hellenism as a kind of conservative rearguard against Bulgakov's sophiological speculations. In context, however, its earliest formulation appears as a vindication of Christian *philosophy* based on the truth of revelation, against both the “rigorism”³¹ of Protestant neo-orthodoxy and the irrationalism of Shestov. Very simply,

Hellenism means philosophy.... The Fathers... attempted a new philosophical synthesis on the basis of the Revelation. Certainly, they linked the Divine message they had with the aspirations of the Hellenic mind. They vindicated the right of the human mind to ask questions. But it was the revealed truth they were interpreting and commending. ... The new and Christian mind emerges from this philosophical quest. ... the kernel, the very system of this new Philosophy... is Christian Dogmatics³².

As Florovsky would clarify in his article on Hellenism for the 1960 *Weltkirchenlexikon*, at the heart of his concern for the relationship between Christianity and Hellenism were the “fundamental questions of the role and authority of 'reason' within Christianity, the fundamental relationship of 'faith' and 'doctrine,' and the importance of history in matters of salvation”³³.

This concern with theological reason forms a crucial dimension of Florovsky's program, distinguishing his particular vision of neo-patristic synthesis from that of Vladimir Lossky and from much of the pure experientialism of

29. “Revelation, Philosophy, Theology,” 30-31.

30. “The Crisis of German Idealism (II)”, 40.

31. *Ibid.*, 39. See also FLOROVSKY, Review of Emil Brunner, *Der Mittler*, in *Путь*, No. 13, Oct., 1928, 112 -115.

32. “Ad lectorem”, 5-6.

33. FLOROVSKY, “Hellenismus: Hellenisierung (des Christentums)”, in *Weltkirchenlexikon: Handbuch der Oekumene*, (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1960), 540-41, at 541; my translation.

Orthodox theology since. “The sad conflict between faith and reason is not a final solution. The human intellect can not be condemned to remain always mute and blind to the only real truth which is revealed to faith in the Christian experience”³⁴. As Florovsky reflected in his review of *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Lossky:

raises the basic problem of theological knowledge. Is an 'intellectual' knowledge of God, i.e. a knowledge which is expressed in strict and rigid logical concepts possible at all? In other words, is a 'non-symbolic' knowledge of God possible? Lossky's answer is rigidly negative. One knows God only by 'unknowing.' The answer may be true and correct. And yet it seems to need a careful qualification.... The ultimate knowledge of God is available 'by faith' only, in an 'experience' which transcends 'logical reason.' And yet even the vision of faith is a 'noetic vision', according to the tradition of the Greek Fathers themselves. Obviously, 'life in God' is a more adequate description of the ultimate goal and purpose of human existence than just 'knowledge.' But 'knowledge' is still an integral part of this beatific 'life.' This was the firm conviction of the Cappadocian Fathers and of a long line of their successors. The whole problem of 'Christian intellectualism' is still open.

The experience of faith itself has its own inherent reason, which cannot however be reduced to human logic. While borrowing language from eclectic sources, the patristic articulation of the faith in the language of philosophy proceeds not from any extrinsic rationality, but from a *logos* inherent in faith. In the “apophatic vision” of faith, “the entire fullness of truth is already contained.” Yet “the translation of Revelation into the language of philosophy, the language of human reason, while adding nothing to the truth of Revelation itself, is a necessity for faith”³⁶. Already by the late 1920's, Florovsky had come to understand Christian theology as a true philosophy, a metaphysics founded upon the historical self-revelation of God in Christ, in which the believing mind is illumined by the light of divine reason:

34. “Le corps du Christ vivant,” 47.

35 FLOROVSKY, Review of *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, in *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 38, no. 3, July 1958, 207-8. There are signs, however, that Lossky began to correct this one-sidedness in his later thought: see LOSSKY VLADIMIR, *Orthodox Theology* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 15-23, at 38.

36. “Revelation, Theology and Philosophy”, 30.

For the Christian thinker there is no separation whatsoever between faith and reason. Christian philosophy *begins* with the truths of faith, and finds therein the light of reason. One can say that the Christian dogma contains by way of premises the entire metaphysics, metaphysics true and certain. The Christian philosopher has to find, define and explain these premises. Christian philosophy is a speculative exegesis of the Christian fact. There is a certain asceticism of knowledge a preliminary ascetic teaching, which is more than methodology. In practical piety, the experience of the philosopher is transformed and this transformation is *qualitative*. And since Jesus Christ is the principal object of dogmatic experience it is possible to say that the entire Christian philosophy is a speculative interpretation of Christological dogma, the dogma of Chalcedon.^{36a}

In this metaphysics of faith, reason searches, not “for the truth, because the truth has already been revealed in its entirety by the person of the Incarnate Word,” but rather for “an intellectual tunic’ for the truth”³⁷. Here Florovsky borrows the famous formula of Anselm's *Proslogion*: “Faith illumines the intellect as well, it searches also the reason, *fides quaerens intellectum*”³⁸.

As the above emphasis upon Chalcedon suggests, Florovsky conceives of the great dogmatic decisions of the Church as intrinsically tied to this inquiry of faith seeking understanding, “this transition – from *kerygma* to *dogma*”³⁹, which Florovsky does not hesitate to call a “speculative search”⁴⁰. Dogmatic definitions are not merely anti-heresiological, “but aim also to resolve certain *aporiae* and philosophical problems”⁴¹. Patristic dogmas established “the concepts

36a. FLOROVSKY, “The idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy” unpublished translation/revision in Florovsky’s own hand of “L’idée de la création dans la philosophie chrétienne” *Logos: Revue internationale de la synthèse Orthodoxe* No1, 3-30; Georges Florovsky Papers, Manuscripts Division Department of Rare Books and special collections, Princeton University Library, with Permission. Dated 1949 but not the same as the published 1949 article of the same name.

37. “Le corps du Christ vivant”, 47.

38. *Ibid.*

39. “St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers,” FLOROVSKY, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Orthodox View* (Belmont: Nordland Press, 1972), 107.

40. “Le corps du Christ vivant”, 47.

41. FLOROVSKY, “Révélation, Expérience, Tradition (fragments théologiques)”, in Constantin Andronikof, ed, *La Tradition: La Pensée Orthodoxe*, Institute St. Serge, 1997, 62; original Russian: “Богословские отрывки”, in *Лумь*, no. 31, Dec 1931, 3-29.

and even the new categories which could constitute the conceptual framework proper to the presentation of unadulterated Christian truth⁴². Church history is characterized by growth from “a pre-dogmatic period” in which “the language chosen is one of images and symbols”, to a period of “dogmatic witness”, wherein the “truth of faith” is made articulate as “the truth of reason as well, and thought ... enter[s] 'into the knowledge of truth’⁴³. This was “the Christianization of the human intellect”⁴⁴. Viewed from this angle, theology “is a kind of Christian Philosophy”⁴⁵, and one may speak of a certain progress in its history, not in the sense of evolutionary growth (*Entwicklung*), but of *epigenesis*: a pattern of unexpected radical leaps in rational insight under the impact of revelation⁴⁶, reflecting the mystery of *synergeia* between grace and free will in the realm of thought⁴⁷.

Likewise as the reference to *synergeia* suggests, this transformation of human rationality is, finally, *Christologically grounded*. Florovsky placed great

42. “Le corps du Christ vivant”, 47.

43. “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation.”

44. “Le corps du Christ vivant”, 47.

45. “Author’s Preface (1978)”, FLOROVSKY, *Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), xiv-xiv.

46. As Florovsky would write as early as 1921, “all of history is comprised of ‘leaps.’ Only he continues the cultural succession who renews it, who transmutes tradition into his own property, into an inseparable element of his personal existence and, as it were, creates it anew”: “About Non-Historical Peoples (The Land of the Fathers and the Land of the Children)”, in Ilya Vinkovetsky, ed and trans., *Exodus to the East* (CA: Charles Schlacks, Jr. Publisher, 1996), 58.

47. Florovsky is generally critical of theories of doctrinal development due to his opposition to evolutionary models of history: see FLOROVSKY, “Два завета [Two Covenants]”, *Россия и Латинство* (Berlin, 1923), 157; “Книга МСлера о церкви [Moehler’s Book on the Church]”, *Путь*, No. 7 April 1927, 128-130; “The House of the Father”, 73; “Evolution und Epigenesis: Zur Problematik der Geschichte”, *Der Russische Gedanke* 1/3 (1930), 240-252; “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology”; “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation”; “Le corps du Christ vivant”, 45-46, and “The Predicament of the Christian Historian”, *Christianity and Culture* (Belmont: Nordland Press, 1974), 48. Nevertheless, in chapter VII of *Ways of Russian Theology* – a work otherwise withering in its criticism of Soloviev – Florovsky defends Soloviev’s theory of doctrinal development (развития догмата): see *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. II, 156-161; Прот. Георгий Флоровский, *Пути Русского Богословия* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1988), 379-. The language of “synergy” is drawn from Soloviev, at least as its immediate source. See also WILLIAMS GEORGE H., “George Vasilievich Florovsky: His American Career”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, no. 11, 1965, no. 11, pp. 7-107, at 99-100.

weight by the Church's condemnation of the Apollinarian heresy as testimony to the healing of human reason in Christ:

Apollinarianism is the negation of human reason, the fear of thought... And that means that human reason is incurable – ἄθεράπευτον ἔστι – that is, it must be cut off. The rejection of Apollinarianism meant therefore... the fundamental justification of reason and thought. Not in the sense, of course, that “natural reason” is sinless and right by itself but in the sense that it is open to transformation, that it *can be healed*, that it *can be renewed*. And not only that it *can* but that also *must* be healed and renewed. Reason is summoned to the knowledge of God⁴⁸.

This restoration of human *logos* by the *Logos* of God incarnate is especially evident in the Fathers, theologian-saints whose catholic witness exemplifies a unity of “both speculation and the assimilation of experience”, by which “apostolic tradition was elaborated and recognized as the highest form of wisdom and philosophy, as the reason of truth and the truth of reason”⁴⁹. Profound experience of the life in Christ entails also the renewal of thought: even in the Fathers' ascetic texts, one finds not simply practical instruction but also “the metaphysics of human life”⁵⁰. Without this unity, ascetic experience itself can become misdirected: “It is not surprising that Pelagianism and Origenism — and even the heresy of the Eutychians — disturbed monastic circles... The problems of asceticism could be resolved only in a precise dogmatic synthesis”⁵¹. As a counter-example, Florovsky notes how “dogmatics and ascetics are organically and inseparably brought together in the system of St. Maximus”⁵². The crucial “experiential” element here is not so much “the personal spiritual intuition” of the saints as individuals, as rather their sharing “in the fullness of the spiritual experience of the Church itself”⁵³, enabling them to speak with catholic authority. It is to this unity of ecclesial experience and theological speculation – active reflection

48. “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology”, 31.

49. FLOROVSKY, *Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century*, 35.

50. FLOROVSKY, *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 136.

51. *Ibid.*, 136.

52. *Ibid.*, 136.

53. “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation”, see citation above.

of the mind into the truth apprehended by faith – exemplified in the great Fathers, that Florovsky would re-call Orthodox thought and culture.

Neo-Apollinarianism? The Heresy of Modern “Gnosomachy”

Much of Florovsky's 1937 masterwork, *Ways of Russian Theology*, consists of a diagnosis of the failures of modern Russian theology and piety to achieve precisely this unity. Florovsky criticizes the tendency towards “nervous distrust and even downright hostility” towards theology amongst the pious – “the dangerous habit of dispensing with theology altogether, replacing it with the *Book of Rules* or the *Typikon*, with ancient tradition, customary ritual, or lyricism of the soul”:

a sort of theological aphasia... a heresy of modern “gnosomachy”... endangered a healthy spiritual life. Psychologism in devotional practices always remains a temptation and a danger, both in private prayer and in liturgical communion. The temptation remains to pass off piety as genuine spirituality. Such a temptation can take the form of ritual, canonical formalism, or a tender sensitivity, but in every case it proves to be a mirage. Only a disciplined, clearly conceived, intelligible theology can guard against such a mirage – custom and canons cannot⁵⁴.

Florovsky observes this romantic obscurantism, “the required style of fervent Orthodoxy”⁵⁵, at work still in his contemporaries. Even in Antony Khrapovitsky's return to the Fathers, there is an aftertaste of pietism, a lack of “metaphysical perspective”⁵⁶. In the dogmatics of Sergius Stragorodskii (later Patriarch of Moscow), Florovsky notes a tendency to equate the experiential element in theology with “a psychologically interpreted asceticism”, at odds with the characteristic “metaphysical realism” of the Fathers. The temptation to “substitute asceticism for dogmatics”, or “dissolve dogmatics in asceticism” is, Florovsky says, “always an indication of theological decline”⁵⁷.

54. FLOROVSKY, *Ways of Russian Theology* Vol. II (Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 290-291.

55. *Ibid.*, 291.

56. *Ibid.*, 210.

57. *Ibid.*, 214.

Florovsky's critique of theological "gnosomachy" is motivated precisely by a belief in the Fathers' "metaphysical realism," and a conviction that "exaggerated emphasis on the incommensurability of human knowledge with fullness of being necessarily yields relativism"⁵⁸. The crisis of modernity had brought a situation in which "evasion of theological learning and knowledge becomes a mortal sin, a sign not of love, but of self-satisfaction, cowardice, and deceit," in which "simplification" and "distrust for an inquisitive reason" are exposed as "diabolical"⁵⁹. Florovsky strenuously rejects the romantic and pietistic opposition between "doctrine" and "life": the claim that the "Orthodox way" is "not through the mediation of an intellectual understanding, but through the mediation of the heart," not in "systems", but in liturgy, iconography, and hagiography. Patristic *doctrine* is "the spring of Orthodoxy in life"; to divide it from life "only distorts the 'life' itself":

our modern confusion in life comes directly from the contemporary neglect of 'sound teaching', from the lack of 'sound learning' in the matters of faith. ... We praise the Three Hierarchs, who were, above all ecumenical teachers, the teachers of right faith, but we are strangely indifferent to their perennial contribution to the life of the Church: this was their teaching, their theology, their interpretation of the Christian truth "in the words of reason". And do we not need, first of all, an illumination of our reason by the "Light of Reason" in the present days of intellectual confusion? Without sober teaching, without a red thread of sound doctrine, our feelings would but err and our hearts would be blinded⁶⁰.

Indeed, patristic theology was not only rational, but also *systematic*: "It is really embarrassing that there is so little concern for 'dogmatic systems'... in various circles and quarters of the Orthodox society in our day... It is so often forgotten that the Councils were engaged precisely in the formulation of Christian Doctrine, in the elaboration of 'dogmatic systems'".

58. *Ibid.*, 272.

59. *Ibid.*, 307.

60. FLOROVSKY, "Vessels of Clay", *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, vol. 3, No. 3-4, 1955, 3-4; republished as "A Criticism of the Lack of Concern for Doctrine Amongst Russian Orthodox Believers", in FLOROVSKY, *Ecumenism I*, 168-170.

“Theology Reasons”

A clue into Florovsky’s understanding of the rational and “systematic” character of theology is found in his treatment of St. Philaret Drozdov (1782-1867)⁶² – in Florovsky’s estimate, “the first person in the history of modern Russian theology for whom theology once more became the aim of life, the essential step towards spiritual progress and construction”⁶³. Against the pietism of his age, in which “renunciation of proud Reason led to agnosticism (sometimes practically aphasia) in theology”⁶⁴, Florovsky credits Philaret for having restored a sense of the necessity of engaging theology as a “*labor of the mind*” and the “immutable foundation for a complete religious life”⁶⁵.

Philaret’s significance as the hero of the anti-hagiographic *Ways* is best summed up in the words Florovsky cites as Philaret’s favorite aphorism: “theology reasons” [богословие разсуждаеть]⁶⁶. Philaret stressed the fact that, all Christians, being “first of all ‘disciples’... have a duty to learn”⁶⁷. “Theology reasons”, observes Florovsky, was “a commandment ‘to reason’ given to everyone and not to the few.” Behind it lay a recognition that the “Christian personality is shaped only through such reasoning and understanding; only in this manner is the ‘perfect man of God’ shaped and formed”⁶⁸.

The significance of the aphorism, “theology reasons”, is borne out in Florovsky’s reading of Philaret’s sermons, in which his mature theology was expressed. “As a theologian and a teacher,” Philaret “was above all a Biblicist,” and one with “a lively sense of history”. Contrary to the method then commonly employed, Philaret

61. “Vessels of Clay”, 3-4.

62. An “autodidact” like Florovsky, Philaret seems to have been something of a personal model for Florovsky, with whom he identified and even compared himself in personal conversation: see BLANE, 153, 165-166, 215.

63. FLOROVSKY, *Ways of Russian Theology*, Vol I (Nordland Press, 1979), 212.

64. *Ibid.*, 171.

65. *Ibid.*, 208.

66. *Ibid.*, 208; *Пути Русского Богословия*, 172.

67. FLOROVSKY, “The Duty to Learn”, *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly*, vol.2, no. 1, 1953, at 2.

68. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol I, 207-208.

did not consult Holy Scriptures for proofs: he proceeded from the sacred texts. In Bukharev's apt phrase, for Filaret Biblical texts "were the thoughts of the Living and All-Wise God emanating from his unknowableness for our understanding." His thoughts lived in the Biblical element. He pondered aloud while sifting the nuances of a Biblical story. Filaret, notes Bukharev, never allowed his theology to become a "legal investigation governed by a dogmatic code of laws", as was usually the case before Filaret's time⁶⁹.

The mention of the Biblical story here is crucial, pointing up the narrative and historical basis of "systematic theology" which Florovsky identifies as the significant point in Philaret's understanding: "A theological system, a 'systematic theology' (*theologia constitutiva*) should begin with 'a historic theologizing' which 'considers the Word of God as it has been suggested in the prophecies, in the icons, in the church symbols, or in the confession of faith and the writings of the Holy Fathers'"⁷⁰. In describing Philaret's own "historic theologizing", Florovsky particularly emphasizes Philaret's sense of the sweep of Creation as the history of the Covenant of divine love – i.e, the multiform history of the Church – having its center the mystery of the Cross, upon which "the fate of the world is suspended"⁷¹.

Florovsky's description of how Philaret's "theological speculations" "always proceeded from the facts of Revelation and moved among them", not hurrying to ascend by abstract theology, but remaining "conscious of the Divine Mysteries in their historical manifestations and actions"⁷², describes well his own approach. Florovsky's theology contains no independent chapter on "Trinitarian theology", but dwells heavily upon the historically-oriented themes of *Creation and Redemption*⁷³. "Patristic theology", he insists, "is always a 'theology of facts'; it returns us to the events of salvation history"⁷⁴. For Florovsky as for Phi-

69. Ibid., 212.

70. FLOROVSKY, "Филарет, митрополит Московский", in *Путь*, no. 12, August, 1928, 3-31. Accessed at http://www.holytrinitymission.org/books/russian/metrop_philaret_drozdov_florovsky.htm; my translation.

71. *Ways of Russian Theology* vol I, 215-217.

72. Ibid., 217.

73. Thus, in his interventions in the WCC, Florovsky personally resisted the attempt of some other Orthodox participants to change the terms of membership from a Christological to a Trinitarian basis: see BLANE, 119, 292.

74. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. II, 297.

laret, “A ‘system’ of theology was something fully dependent and derivative. History came before system, for Revelation was given in history and events”⁷⁵.

In what sense then is theology “systematic”? “How, and to what extent, can history be framed into a system?”⁷⁶. Florovsky's reading of Philaret provides two crucial points in response:

First, “In Filaret’s view, the aim of a theological system was to ‘link in their proper order’ the individual facts and truths of Revelation”⁷⁷. Theological reasoning finds its home in *exegesis*. Here Florovsky's passing comparison of Philaret's theology to that of Gregory of Nyssa⁷⁸ is perhaps significant: in Gregory's terms, the theologian explicates the train (ἀκολουθία) of the Biblical narrative in its inner connections, disclosing through them the order of the divine economy itself⁷⁹. “Theology, according to Metropolitan Filaret, in its essence and its method should be a 'theology of interpretation', a coherent holistic disclosure of the doctrine of Divine Revelation”⁸⁰. “Dependent and derivative”, the rationality of the “system” lies in its success in epitomizing, in an open-ended way, the *skopos* of Scripture, disclosing the divine reason mysteriously at work in the history recounted therein.

Second, dogmatic systems are no substitute for the Bible⁸¹; and further, the Bible must not be “algebraized”, viewed simply as a book of parables symbolic of eternal truths⁸². Only on the basis of God's saving *acts*, witnessed by Scripture, is it possible to proceed *beyond* history to say anything of God in himself:

[Philaret's] theological system, with all its reticence and fragmentariness, is soteriological and ecclesial in its nature and structure. This is a "theology of

75. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. I, 212.

76. “Revelation and Interpretation”, in FLOROVSKY, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, 28.

77. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. I, 212.

78. *Ibid.*, 217.

79. Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Inscr.*, GNO V, 24-45, 108:9; *Ref. Eum.* GNO II, 387:20; *Hex. PG* 44,117C; also, DANÉLOU J., “Akolouthia chez Grégoire de Nysse”, *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 27 (1953), 217-249.

80. “Филарет, митрополит Московский.”

81. “Revelation and Interpretation”, in FLOROVSKY, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, 28.

82. “Predicament of the Christian Historian”, 59; cf. “Revelation and Interpretation”, 29-30; also, BLANE, 25. “Revelation is a system of divine words but also a system of divine acts; and precisely for this reason it is, above all, history, sacred history or the history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*), the fullness of the covenant of God with man. Only in such a perspective does the fullness of Scripture disclose itself to us”: “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology”, 24.

relativity" (*theologia relativa*), as Filaret called it, ie a theology that comes from the fact of God's living revelation and relationship to the world and man. Only through this "relative theology" does a "detached theology", ie the doctrine of God in Himself, become possible⁸³.

Theology and the knowledge of God are thus indissolubly bound to the mystery of redemption and the Church. In a later essay of 1949, Florovsky explains this "*theologia relativa*" by the fact that "we know God only through His revelation... only in His *relation* to us... only in his 'economy'":

Our theological vocabulary is inevitably "relative", i.e., presupposes our own existence. Therefore, 'theology' in the strict sense is inevitably apophatic and analogical. All theological terms are anthropomorphic, and we can transcend this anthropomorphic limitation only by a combined use of negation and sublimation, by a double way of *negationis* and *eminentiae*"⁸⁴.

Thus, it is only by analogy and *apophasis* that reason, proceeding humbly from faith, can arrive at theology proper. In doing so, however, the *positive* content of *revelation* remains at the forefront:

The example of the Holy Fathers encourages a speculative confession of faith. Metropolitan Philaret once said, "We must by no means consider wisdom, even that hidden in a mystery, as alien and beyond us, but with humility should edify our mind towards the contemplation of divine things". Only, in our speculation we must not overstep the boundaries of positive revelation, and must limit ourselves to the interpretation of the experience of faith and the rule of faith, presuming to do no more than discern and clarify those inherent presuppositions through which the confession of dogmas as intelligible truths becomes possible. And it must be said that the whole structure of the doctrine of faith encourages these distinctions⁸⁵.

The distinctions of which Florovsky speaks are those between terms predicating God's action *ad extra* and those which speak of God *in se*. While the starting-point remains ever "the Person of the *Incarinate Word*", in confessing the Trin-

83. "Филарет, митрополит Московский."

84. FLOROVSKY, "The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy", *Eastern Churches Quarterly*, vol 8, 3 (1949), 53-77, at 69.

85. "Creation and Creaturehood", *Creation and Redemption*, 62.

ity, “abstraction... of all 'economic' motifs, whether cosmological or soteriological” – “any relation to the creature, preconceived, realized, fallen into sin, saved, or sanctified” – is necessary. Precisely in view of the divinity of Christ manifested in the economy, economic terms must be bracketed in affirming the Son's eternal generation⁸⁶. In this sense, theological reasoning proceeds by *negation* and *affirmation* of terms derived from Scripture⁸⁷. The “system” remains open, to history, and to all that transcends it – precisely as history itself has been opened by God who utterly transcends it, in order that man might know and love him in history.

In sum, *theology reasons*, never from an independent “*realm of ideas*”, but from historical Revelation, in twofold dependence upon “historical sources – the Bible”, and “historical events – the Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection”⁸⁸, the first mediating the second – epitomizing these in a orderly manner so as to bring out their objective inner connections, and, through analogy and negation, to arrive at the clear confession of the Trinity in an exercise of faith seeking understanding. In Florovsky's words:

The mystery of the Incarnation could never be understood by the finite mind. Still, *credo, ut intelligo*. Faith brings illumination to human intellect too. And this *fides quaerens intellectum* is the driving power of all theological inquiry and research⁸⁹.

86. “The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy”, 71-72; see also “St. Athanasius' Concept of Creation”, *Aspects of Church History*, 39-62.

87. Florovsky's insistence on the combination of analogy and negation brings him close to certain Thomistic treatments of this question. This may help to clarify his criticism of Lossky: “Lossky dismisses the Thomistic versions of the 'negative theology' probably too easily. One may profit, for his own clarification, from comparing Lossky's book with the recent treatment of the problem from the Thomistic point of view by CHARLES JOURNET, *The Dark Knowledge of God*”: FLOROVSKY, Review of *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 207-08.

88. FLOROVSKY, “The Renewal of Orthodox Theology – Florensky, Bulgakov and the Others: On the Way to a Christian Philosophy”, unpublished manuscript of a lecture given in March 1968 at a Symposium on ‘Idealist Philosophy in Russia,’ held in Aix-en-Provence, France, page 2. Georges Florovsky, Papers Manuscripts Division Department of Rare Books and special Collections, Princeton University Library, with permission. For details of the conference and Florovsky's participation, see KEMBALL R.J., “La Philosophie Idéaliste en Russe”, *Studies in Soviet Thought* VIII (1968), 188-193.

89. FLOROVSKY, “The Message of Chalcedon”, *Ecumenical Review*, 4, no. 4, July 1952, 396.

“In the Historical Element”

Florovsky characterized Philaret's “philosophical” Biblicism as “a return to the patristic style”⁹⁰. In Florovsky's view, it was an “historisation profonde de l'intellect”⁹¹ under the impact of Scripture that distinguished patristic philosophy from the ancient Greek: “Christian, transfigured Hellenism became thoroughly historical”⁹². Florovsky's characterization of Philaret's method illustrates this patristic-style: not a logical-deductive ratiocination from a-historical first principles or transcendental categories internal to the mind, but a *contingent rationality*, an *a posteriori* reasoning⁹³ from *events*, which are themselves mediated by historical *witnesses*. For Florovsky as for Philaret, the central witnesses of the events with which theology is concerned – the history of revelation and redemption – are to be found in Scripture, interpretation of which Florovsky regards as the very heart of the theological task⁹⁴.

See also “The Lamb of God”, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1951, 13-28, at 15: “only after Pentecost could the mystery of the Incarnation be apprehended in the Church, though it can never be comprehended by a finite mind. It is, and is ever to be, a mystery. It is available not by the joy of metaphysical speculation, but by faith only, in the communion and spiritual conversation with the Lord Himself. Still, *credo ut intelligam*. Faith brings light and illumination to the intellect too”. Also “The Ever-Virgin Mother of God” (1949) *Creation and Redemption*, 186. “Fortunately, the Catholic theologian is not left alone with logic erudition. He is led by faith; *credo ut intelligam*. Faith, illuminates the reason. And erudition, the memory of the past, is quickened in the continuous experience of the Church”.

90. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. II, 214.

91. “Le corps du Christ vivant”, 47.

92. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. II, 297.

93. See “The Lamb of God”, 21: “We may not deal with abstract possibilities, actually unrealized and frustrated, nor build the doctrinal synthesis on the analysis of possibilities, in fact of a *causa irrealis*... we have to deal with the *fact* of the Incarnation, and not with its *idea*”. See also the essays, “On the Metaphysics of judgement” and “On the substantiation of Logical Relativism” in FLOROVSKY, *Philosophy* 66-74, 143-169.

94. Cf. “Revelation and Interpretation”, 28. See also “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation”: “a true explanation will be one that proceeds from the realities described in the Scriptures... here we do not so much speak of the personal spiritual intuition of every separate expounder, as, above all, of the living of the fullness of the spiritual experience of the Church itself. For in this experience the Scriptures become vivified by the same Spirit who had once inspired them. When the Church expounds Scripture it bears witness to *that* of which the Scriptures testify... 'Preaching' and 'Dogma' are the two ways in which the Church bears witness... Dogma is *thought witnessing* to Revelation... And this witness is expressed in definitions and

However, “the Church is itself part of revelation – the story of the ‘Whole Christ’”⁹⁵ and “the sacred history of redemption is still going on... in the history of the Church”⁹⁶. Thus, for Florovsky, the *historic body of ecclesial responses* to Scriptural testimony forms also an integral dimension of that sacred history whose truths it is the task of the system to “link in their proper order”. Indeed, “our interpretations are also facts of history, and in them the depicted events continue their historical existence and participate in the shaping of historical life”⁹⁷. Theology reasons, not only from the testimony of Scripture, but also *from within patristic tradition* – its movement of “uninterrupted fruition from the past”. “To theologize in the Church means to theologize *in the historical element*”⁹⁸.

Florovsky's sense of theologizing “in the historical element” was indebted to late 19th century Russian theological scholarship, whose historical method he once calls “the most important achievement of the Russian theological heritage”⁹⁹. While otherwise critical, Florovsky credits Idealism with encouraging a certain *metaphysical* interest in history, so that along with historical patrology grew an awareness of “the task of 'philosophical Dogmatics’”¹⁰⁰. As Florovsky quotes Archimandrite Sil'vestr Malevanskii (1828-1908) of the Kiev Academy: “Reason cannot create new dogmas, but through its independent activity it can grasp the prepared data of dogma and convert it into its own private possession, into its own nature and life'. ... 'Dogmas, now confronted by a reason that studies them, appear not in the pure and original form they had when first contained

conceptions.” As Sergei Horuzhy states, in his article, “Neo-Patristic Synthesis and Russian Philosophy”, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 3/4 (2000), 318: “For Florovsky... Truth makes itself accessible to thought only through witness. Further, since Truth is personal (it is Christ Himself, Jn 14:6), witness to Truth must also be personal, i.e. provided by witnesses, and these *testes Veritatis*, are none other than the Church Fathers. A turning to the Origen is necessarily a turning to the Fathers: neo-patristic synthesis”.

95. “Revelation and Interpretation”, 26.

96. *Ibid.*, 37.

97. “Predicament of the Christian Historian”, 49.

98. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. II, 296; my italics.

99. “Western Influences in Russian Theology”, in FLOROVSKY, *Aspects of Church History* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 174; original publication: “Westliche Einflüsse in der Russischen Theologie”, in *Kyrios* 2, 1937, 1-22.

100. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. II, 176; see also “The Crisis of German Idealism (II)”, 31-32.

in divine revelation, but in a form more or less developed and shaped as they passed through a long and quite complex process of consciousness during the many centuries of the Church's existence"¹⁰¹. Employing the “historical-genetic” method, the theologian traces the history of each dogmatic “disclosure”¹⁰² from “the polemical or 'agonistical' sense of the new definition” to the “positive confession” “disclosed in a creative and speculative theological synthesis”¹⁰³. Here Florovsky gives special priority to the *question*:

behind every dogma one must search spiritually for that question to which the dogma responds. ... Then dogma comes alive and discloses itself in its entire speculative depth – as a divine answer to human questions, as a divine Amen and as a witness of the Church. ... In such a presentation of the speculative problems of theology the philosophical and historical methods go hand in hand. The historical method, for its part, leads back to the speculative faith of the Fathers¹⁰⁴.

By retracing the steps from answer to question and back again, one learns to think with the Church and recovers evangelical foundations for answering the problems of the present. However, Florovsky insists, one must not separate Church dogmas from the “philosophical system” inherent the Fathers’ “elaboration of theological *doctrine*”¹⁰⁵, which makes the language and concepts of the dogmas legible. “The task of theology lies not so much in translating the Tradition... into the terms of the most recent philosophy, but lies rather in discovering in the ancient patristic tradition the perennial principles of Christian philosophy... not in controlling dogma by means of contemporary philosophy but rather in re-shaping philosophy on the experience of faith itself”.

Hence, we can say that *theology reasons* “in the historical element” through tracing “the underlying Reason (*logos*) in the development of the Church con-

101. *Ibid.*, 154.

102. *Ibid.*, 159-160.

103. FLOROVSKY, *Byzantine Fathers of the 5th Century* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 299.

104. “Western Influences in Russian Theology”, 176.

105. “Le corps du Christ vivant”, 48; my italics.

106. “Western Influences in Russian Theology”, 177. See also “Patristics and Modern Theology”, *Diakonia*, vol. 14, No. 3, 1969, 230-231; original publication: *Procès-verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie orthodoxe à Athènes*, H. Alivisatos, (ed) (Athens, 1939).

sciousness, the Reason which forms its *telos*¹⁰⁷. This is the first crucial step from Philaret's patristic-style Biblicism to Florovsky's hermeneutic of neo-patristic synthesis. And the second is like unto it: extension of the Fathers' theological reasoning into new historical situations and inquiries, new creative acts of witness.

Florovsky's Hermeneutic of Neo-Patristic Synthesis: Reasoning from the Crucified *Logos*

Given this evidence, the contemporary map of Orthodox theology must be somewhat re-drawn. It is a mistake to conflate, as Valliere as well as numerous self-identified neo-patristic thinkers do, Florovsky's hermeneutic with the apophaticism of Vladimir Lossky¹⁰⁸, whose denigration of reason's role in theology Florovsky openly criticized¹⁰⁹. The readings given both by liberal critics and conservative admirers are challenged by deeper acquaintance with Fr. Georges' actual views:

We have to distinguish carefully philosophies and Philosophy. Clement of Alexandria was very strict about that. ... Ancient Philosophers may have

107. NESTERUK ALEXEI, *The Universe as Communion: Towards a Neopatristic Synthesis of Theology and Science* (T&T Clark, 2009), 13.

108. Here I have in mind Valliere, but also an unpublished paper offered by Prof. Sergei Horuzhy at the international colloquium in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of Florovsky's repose, *Le père Georges Florovsky et le renouveau de la théologie orthodoxe au 20e siècle*, l'Institut Orthodoxe Saint-Serge, Paris, Nov. 28-29, 2009. In verbal remarks offered at the same conference, Prof. Michel Stavrou expressed the same view, refusing to acknowledge any significant disagreement between the thought of Florovsky and Lossky. Andrew Louth is one of few commentators to note the profound differences between Florovsky and Lossky in regard to epistemology: "Lossky's understanding of the neo-patristic synthesis seems . . . very different from Florovsky both in the prominence given to Gregory Palamas and in the related emphasis on the essentially apophatic nature of theology" – "an emphasis that has since become all but universal amongst Orthodox theologians": LOUTH ANDREW, "Review of A. Papanikolaou, *Being with God. Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion*", in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 51, num. 4, 2007, 445, and "The Patristic Revival and Its Protagonists", in Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theotokriff, *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 195.

109. FLOROVSKY, Review of *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 207-208.

erred, and have indeed most dangerously erred. Yet Christians must be philosophers themselves. For Philosophy means simply the vocation of the human mind to apprehend the ultimate truth, now revealed and consummated in the Incarnate Word. ... The break-away from the Patristic tradition in modern theology was motivated simply by a deep distrust of philosophy, by a desire to eliminate metaphysics from Christian doctrine¹¹⁰.

No salvo of “tradition” against “philosophy,” but a call to renewed theological reason stands at the heart of Florovsky's program of “synthesis” – a term synonymous with his defense of theological “system.” Here too, Valliere's simplistic oppositions will not fit: for though radically transformed in his hands, it is probable that Florovsky derived the formal notion of “synthesis” from Soloviev.

In an article published when he was 19 years old, still in his youthful enthusiasm for Soloviev, Florovsky defined the task of philosophy in Solov'evian terms as an integral knowledge, “a genuine synthesis” of “faith and understanding”, “reconciling theology, philosophy and positive sciences”¹¹¹. Florovsky later repudiated this synthetic ideal at its root: the claim of an ontological continuum and super-temporal unity between God and man realized from the beginning in the “eternal world” as Sophia, manifested in time through the process of Godmanhood (БОГОЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСТВО) in a kind of cosmic theogony, of which the historic God-man is the supreme exemplar.

Such monism renders all of existence a revelation of the *Logos* on an equal continuum, abolishing cosmological and historical singularities: humanity is the “eternal body of God,” and the incarnation of the *Logos* “only the last link in a long chain of other physical and historical incarnations”¹¹². As Valliere remarks, “One might have supposed Soloviev would begin his exposition of the humanity of God with Christian dogma. ... He begins instead with the history of religion, attempting to show that the idea of the humanity of God is the logical outcome of religious evolution”¹¹³. Valliere explains this striking neglect of histori-

110. “Ad lectorem”, 5-7.

111. “Из прошлого русской мысли” [From the Past of Russian Thought], in Г. В. ФЛОРОВСКИЙ, *Из прошлого русской мысли* (Moscow: Agraph, 1998), 8, 12.

112. “An Unpublished Essay by Vladimir Soloviev”, FLOROVSKY, *Theology and Literature* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 125, quoting the last of Soloviev's *Lectures on Godmanhood*.

113. Valliere, *op. cit.*, 149.

cal reference to the person of Jesus and to Scripture in Soloviev's *Lectures on Godmanhood* by reference to Soloviev's distinction between the "mystical" and the "traditional": Soloviev projected a future state in which the traditional principle – "a temporary phenomenon and not an unconditional necessity, for it has only a historical foundation" – would be "swallowed up" by the mystical in direct unmediated perception of God. Soloviev therefore understands "faith" in the broadest sense, as the integral element of experiential trust in any act of knowledge; for him, "faith in oneself, faith in human personality, is also faith in God... faith in God and faith in humanity, when pursued consistently and finally realized, come together in the one, full and all-inclusive truth of the humanity of God"¹¹⁴.

It was precisely this belief in the "*organic synthesis of the Divine and human*" which determined Soloviev's organic synthesis of faith and reason, both being understood as the outworking of Godmanhood which would lead to the "Great Synthesis" to unify all conflicting historic convictions and "truths". Florovsky's objection is that all this renders the historic Christ "more of a manifestation of a general idea than a true Person" – "the (eternal) Idea, which as he points out himself, is essentially the same in Philo or Plotinus, in Origen or Gregory of Nyssa". "Soloviev spoke much more about God-manhood than about the God-man. In his system the image of the Savior remains a pale shadow".

Yet Florovsky also notes how Soloviev's late work, "The Story of the Antichrist," "radically changes the approach". "The Story ends in a *double synthesis*: a false peace of the Antichrist and a true 'reunion of the churches', and the latter is based on a common confession of Jesus Christ who came in the flesh (I John 4.23)". In the "magnificent synthesis" offered by the title's main character, the author of a book entitled *The Open Way to Universal Peace and Prosperity*, "there was no room for Christ Himself, in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily... precisely what the Antichrist would not include in his all-embracing peace." Florovsky reads this parable as Soloviev's *Retractions*: what Soloviev "imputes now to the Antichrist has a striking resemblance with certain dreams of his own... all-inclusive 'Great Synthesis'". But the lesson drawn points beyond Soloviev:

114. VALLIERE, 165-67, quoting Soloviev's *Critique of Abstract Principles*.

Soloyov's contention is perfectly clear. No "synthesis" is possible except it is built on the belief in the "Historic Christ," the God Incarnate and made Man, Crucified and Risen. Any other synthesis is a lie, even if it succeeds in including all "Christian" ideas and values... And in this new perspective the whole problem of "faith" and "reason" had to assume a radically new content. But Soloviev did not live long enough even to start this revision¹¹⁵.

Florovsky's synthesis in fact begins where Soloviev finally leaves off: "This brings us to the concept of a *Neopatristic synthesis*, as one of the task and aim of Orthodox theology today. ... The synthesis must begin with the central vision of the Christian faith: Christ Jesus, as God and Redeemer, Humiliated and Glorified, the Victim and Victor on the Cross"¹¹⁶. And indeed, here "in this new perspective the whole problem of 'faith' and 'reason'" does assume "a radically new content." As the knowledge of faith is given only through the unique revelation of the Word of God *incarnate*, so also faith, in the apprehending the rationality of God as well as of creation in its relation to God, is bound to reason not from general laws of cosmological development, eternal Sophia or Godmanhood, but from historical *singularities*: the person and the work of the Godman, Jesus Christ. "Theological speculation", says Florovsky, must begin, not with consideration of the *Logos asarkos* or *Sophia* before the world's creation but rather (in "repentant consciousness of the weakness of... understanding"), with the "foolishness of God [which] is wiser than men". That is to say: the "*sophia*" with which theology must begin is the *wisdom of the Cross*¹¹⁷.

In essence, Florovsky's critique of Florensky and Bulgakov rests in the contention that they failed to grasp and carry out this foundational truth contained in Soloviev's final lesson. In Florensky's massive *Pillar and Ground of Truth*,

115. FLOROVSKY, "Reason and Faith in the Philosophy of Vladimir Solov'ev", *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought*, E.J. Simmons, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 283-297. Except where otherwise noted, I rely on this essay for this paragraph and the preceding three. It appears that here Florovsky may have again been influenced by Shestov, who read the parable as Soloviev's rejection of the whole project of religious-idealist philosophy: see SHESTOV LEV, "Speculation and Apocalypse: The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov", in *Speculation and Revelation*, Bernard Martin, trans (Ohio University Press, 1982), 18-88.

116. FLOROVSKY, "Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church", *Aspects of Church History*, 23.

117. See "Human Wisdom and the Great Wisdom of God", FLOROVSKY, *Philosophy*, 120-121, citing 1 Cor. 1:25.

there was not even a short chapter devoted to Christ. Florensky treats the dogma of the Trinity as a truth of natural reason, and “somehow bypasses the Incarnation and proceeds immediately from a discussion of the Trinity to the doctrine of the Spirit”¹¹⁸. “For Florensky, Christianity is the religion of the Logos and not that of Christ”¹¹⁹. Likewise, “Bulgakov dedicated a whole volume to the theme of 'The Lamb of God,' but he nevertheless begins with the periphery – the Virgin, John the Baptist, angels ... The point is not that they both occasionally do understand Christ, the point is that he does not stand at the center”¹²⁰. As Florovsky wrote to Bulgakov in the mid-20's: “I believe in your case, too, Solov'ev long hindered you in your search for the main thing. For the road to discovering it lies through Christology, not through trinitology [*sic*], since only with Jesus Christ did the worship of the trinity become reality”¹²¹.

But again, to re-draw the map: Florovsky offered a similar, though far more temperate, criticism of Lossky, whose prioritization of apophatic epistemology tended to blur the historical and Christocentric focus in his theology:

118. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. II, 278.

119. “The Weariness of Spirit: On Fr. Paul Florensky's *The Pillar and Confirmation of Truth*”, in FLOROVSKY, *Philosophy*, 126-127.

120. Florovsky, letter to Iuri Ivask, 3 June 1976; quoted in KLIMOFF ALEXIS, “Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy”, *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49:1-2 (2005), 97-8. Bulgakov and Florovsky agree on the centrality of Chalcedon as the cornerstone of theological “synthesis”, a recognition form Florovsky for which Bulgakov gave himself personal credit for eliciting: see EVHUTOV CATHERINE, “The Correspondence of Bulgakov and Florovsky: Chronicle of a Friendship”, *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 38 (1996), 37-49, at 40-41. Contrary to what Valliere alleges of neopatristic theologians in general, Florovsky does *not* resort to pure apophaticism in his interpretation of Chalcedon. Rather, while Bulgakov projects economic realities, shorn of their temporality, into God himself to locate the eternal “ground” of union in an eternal “divine humanity” in which human and divine natures find their *essential correlation* as Sophia, Florovsky insists on the need to interpret Chalcedon's discourse about Christ's “natures” asymmetrically and in light of his saving *work* as narrated in the Scriptures, locating the positive content as achieved only through these historical actualities, in which union occurs as a real temporal novelty fulfilled in the Cross and Resurrection, permanently fruitful in the eucharistic-ecclesial body of Christ. Cf. VALLIERE, 297-300; BULGAKOV SERGEI, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Eerdmans, 2008), 51-52, 195-96; FLOROVSKY, “The Message of Chalcedon” (op. cit.); “Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Eastern Orthodox Church” (op. cit.); “Christ and His Church: Suggestions and Comments”, in *1054-1954 L'Église et les Églises*, Vol II (Chevtagne, 1955), 159-170; “Togetherness in Christ”, *The Unity We Seek*, William Morris, ed (Oxford University Press, 1963), 17-27.

121. Quoted in Klimoff, 75.

If one wants, as Lossky obviously does, to develop a system of 'Christian philosophy', which is identical with Christian Dogmatics, should he not begin with Christ?... Indeed, what warrant may a Christian theologian have to speak of God, except the fact that 'the Only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father' has declared the unfathomable mystery of the Divine Life? Would it not be proper, therefore, to begin with an opening chapter on the Incarnation and the Person of the Incarnate, instead of following a rather 'philosophical' order of thought: God, Creation, Created Being, and Imago Dei, etc., so as to arrive at Christology only in the middle of the road?¹²²

And, on the other hand, a certain definite continuity between Florovsky and the Russian school in the *formal* goal of “synthesis” remains. It is no coincidence that Florovsky's first published use of the phrase “neo-patristic synthesis” (1949) appears in a context which follows after his *praise* of Soloviev, Bulgakov, Florensky and Berdyaev for their attempts “to restate the teaching of the Church as a complete philosophy of life”:

There is no need to endorse their findings and speculations. But it is high time to walk in their steps. ... The standing legacy of this school is not their peculiar conceptions, but precisely their 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. ... 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. This seems to be one of the immediate objectives of the Church in our age¹²³.

Florovsky's disagreement with this school was not about the *need* for philosophical synthesis, Church renewal or engagement with modernity, but rather about the *nature* of these. Whereas the Russian school thinkers tended to think that Church renewal would come as the *fruit* of engagement with modern culture, borrowing categories from secular philosophy in the construction of a new synthesis, Florovsky insisted that faithful engagement and creative synthesis could

122. FLOROVSKY, Review of *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 208.

123. FLOROVSKY, “The Legacy and Task of Orthodox Theology”, *Anglican Theological Review*, vol. XXXI, no. 2, 1949, 69,70.

only occur through in-depth re-appropriation of the Church's dogmatic and spiritual traditions: two conflicting responses to modernity¹²⁴, but equally two opposing conceptions of reason in history.

Soloviev's conception of the principle of tradition as "a temporary phenomenon and not an unconditional necessity, for it has only a historical foundation", to be "swallowed up" eventually in direct unmediated mystical perception of God¹²⁵, shows a fundamental difficulty with the reality of *contingent rationality*. Here the "broad ugly ditch," sensed by G.E. Lessing and the Enlightenment, between "accidental truths of history" and "necessary truths of reason" makes itself felt: historical events, insofar as they are singular, unique and unrepeatably, can never be the medium of the rational, except in the sense of a transient manifestation of a generalized timeless and necessary universal law¹²⁶. In the physics

124. See STÖCKL KRISTINA, "Modernity and its Critique in 20th Century Russian Orthodox Theology", *Studies in East European Thought*, 58, 2006, 253-254, and *Community After Totalitarianism: The Eastern Orthodox Intellectual Tradition and the Philosophical Discourse of Political Modernity* (European University Institute, 2007), 90, 94. If, as Stöckl observes, "Sophia... stands for the divine presence of God in the world and at the same time for human creativity", Bulgakov's sophiology being "an attempt to justify theologically Christian activity in the world" ("Modernity and its Critique", 252), it must be said that Florovsky also shares this same concern, but insists that "*only in history, in the realm of historical experience, are we capable of understanding the creaturehood of creation*" (Florovsky, letter to Bulgakov, quoted in KLIMOFF, 75) – that is, through the ontological novelty of the incarnate Christ and the historical experience of the Church, not a pre-existent or essential correlation between God and the world, the spirit of God and the human saint. Soloviev's expansive understanding of asceticism and *theosis* to include human beings as "creative agents engaged in the pursuits that fulfill humanity in the flesh, such as politics, science, education, the arts, technology, and so on" (Valliere, 161), is shared not only by Bulgakov, but also by Florovsky, expressed in the concept of *podvig* which both theologians use to denote the significance of creative cultural activity: see WILLIAMS ROWAN, *Sergei Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology* (T&T Clark, 1999), 65. Valliere is mistaken in calling Florovsky's asceticism merely "world-renouncing" (Valliere, 102). Florovsky holds in common with the Russian religious school a stress on the "churching" (*otserkovlenie*) of the world. The problem concerns rather the foundations and means of this churching, and whether some versions of it do not in fact entail rather secularization of the Church.

125. VALLIERE, 167, quoting Soloviev's *Critique of Abstract Principles*.

126. LESSING GOTTHOLD EP., *Lessing's Theological Writings*, Henry Chadwick, ed and trans (Stanford University, 1957), 53, 56; see 30-31. Florovsky himself would seem to be alluding to this statement of the problem in "Predicament of the Christian Historian", 32-33: "The historical pattern of the Christian message is obvious. But people are interested rather in the 'eternal truth'

of Newton, with its concept of absolute space and time defined on an abstract geometrical model without reference to real spatio-temporal events and identified with the divine *sensorium*, absolute cosmic singularities are ruled out of the fundamental rational structure of reality. Thus, we find, for Kant, who internalized to the *human* mind Newton's absolute time and space as a priori forms of intuitias, rational religion must take the form of timeless universal truths, derivable independent of historical events, tradition, and social institutions; any claim to unique revelation is contrary to reason. Although Soloviev and his disciples differ sharply from Kant in their historical orientation, reflective of later Idealism, the historical process and historical events are for Soloviev still but the outworking of an already pre-existent divine-humanity: Christ, as *Logos en-sarkos*, serves as but one example, albeit the greatest, of the *Logos* embodied in all historical existence. So also, the fruits of tradition, being marked with historical contingency, can have no *permanent* or constitutive place in the rationality of faith.

For Florovsky, creation is contingent and non-necessary, not only in itself, but also in its *logoi* as these exist in the will of God. Thus, rationality is not confined solely to the ontologically necessary. Further, creation, while having a beginning in time, has no end: the contingent rationality of creation is marked by both novelty and *permanence*. Whereas for Greek thought, “only that what was 'necessary' could claim a true and permanent existence... Now, the whole perspective has changed in the light of Revelation”¹²⁷. For at the heart of this Revelation stands the person of the incarnate *Logos*, Jesus Christ, the beginning and the fulfillment of creation, whose “manifold actions were not simply particular cases or instances of general law, but were singular events”¹²⁸. Thus, the rationality of faith is constituted from a specific history of *divine action in time*, which cannot be generalized in abstraction from that history, or turned into a

of this message, than in what they are inclined to regard as the 'accidents' of history... theological liberalism... at least from the Age of the Enlightenment, persistently attempted to disentangle Christianity from its historical context and involvement, to detect its perennial 'essence' (*das Wesen des Christentums*), and to discard the historical shells... this anti-historical attitude was itself but a particular form of an acute historicism, that is, of a particular interpretation of history, in which the historical has been ruled out as something accidental and indifferent”.

127. See “The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy”, 56.

128. “Predicament of the Christian Historian”, 59.

statement about human existence in general. While contingent, the events of this history are nevertheless permanently decisive: “*these facts* – Christ’s coming into the world, his Incarnation, his Cross and Resurrection, and the Descent of the Holy Spirit – are eschatological events: unique and ‘ultimate’, that is, decisive, ‘critical’, and crucial, wrought once forever, *ephhapax*”¹²⁹. Moreover, they are permanently at work in history of the Church, the body of Christ, making possible other permanent events in the history of tradition:

The sacred history of salvation does not consist of mere happenings that pass away and are irrelevant as such but of events that stay for ever. The history of salvation is still going on, is still enacted in the redeemed community, in the Church of God. There are here not only happenings, but events too, that are to stay. The formulation of Christian dogma was one of these permanent events or achievements. We have to take it in that concrete shape and form in which it had been first deposited or delivered to the Church¹³⁰.

Reasoning in theology then is (as in all other disciplines of knowledge) both tradition - constituted and tradition - constitutive. Tradition's finite relativities are not to be denied; yet permanent “words” arise precisely out of the contingent history of the Church¹³¹. “The teaching of the Fathers is a permanent category of Christian existence, a constant and ultimate measure and criterion”¹³². Faith, both in its objective content (*fides quae creditur*) and as an ecclesial act (*fides qua creditur*), carries in itself a history and an inherent conceptuality all its own, which cannot be subsumed into some other general history of the progress of human thought or under any particular philosophical school without damaging its very integrity; it is not thrown back on secular reason to make itself either rational or historical¹³³.

129. Ibid., 58.

130. FLOROVSKY, “The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement”, *Theology Today*, vol. 7, no. 1, April 1950, 68-79, at 76.

131. See “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation”, and “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology”.

132. “St Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers”, 107.

133. On this point, Florovsky in his article “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation” does not hesitate to cite Bulgakov: “Father Sergius Bulgakov expressed himself very adequately when he said: ‘He who has once met Christ, His Savior, on his own personal path, and has felt His Divinity, has, in that very moment, accepted all fundamental Christian dogmas — Virgin Birth,

In sum, the person of Jesus and his work, in all its absolute singularity, forms the keystone around which the whole rational structure of the cosmos and history is ordered and unified, the *Logos* in which all the *logoi* of creation subsist. The rationality of faith is a contingent one, the hypothesis or first principle of which is the crucified Word; its hermeneutical medium of understanding, Christ's body, the Church – her tradition of Fathers, Scripture and liturgy. Theological reasoning inevitably involves ever-new acts of interpretation, also contingent, such that every fresh appropriation must constitute a creative new synthesis; yet faithful reasoning takes place within the demonstrated continuity of the tradition, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in an attitude of humble listening to the witnesses of the past. Florovsky makes no allowance for the neo-scholastic *preambula fidei*, a purely natural rational demonstration of certain truths of faith apart from the particularities of Israel, Scripture, Revelation, Christ and the Church¹³⁴. *Theology reasons* in demonstrating from the actual deposit of faith the intrinsic order of its own internal relations, on the basis of the history of salvation witnessed in Scripture and received within the prior historical experience of the Church, disclosing the intelligibility and truth of divine

incarnation, Second Glorious Advent, the Coming of the Comforter, the Holy Trinity.' (S. Bulgakov: "The Undying Light". 1917, p. 57). To this I want to add: 'Or else he has not yet met Christ, or, at any rate, has not recognized him'". Florovsky's relation to Bulgakov (whom he never criticized in print) is a complex one, with many shared concerns: the need for "synthesis"; the centrality of Chalcedon in this synthesis and the positive interpretation of the Chalcedonian statement; the creaturehood of creation; historical activity; the recognition of sacraments beyond canonical boundaries, etc.

134. Although Florovsky speaks of certain *vestigium Dei* in the natural order, and of an analogical character to language based on man's creation in the image, he does not, however, consider the question of what place natural knowledge derived from the sciences might have in this Christocentric scheme of theology. This is an issue dealt with most profoundly and extensively by T.F. Torrance: see, for instance, TORRANCE T.F., *Divine and Contingent Order* (T&T Clark, 1981); *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelations of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984); and *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order, and Openness in Theology and Natural Science* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989). The work of the Orthodox philosopher-physicist Alexei Nesteruk demonstrates the basic agreement of Torrance's framing of this relation with Florovsky's neo-patristic approach, being equally indebted to both theologians: see NESTERUK, *Light from the East: Theology, Science and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), and *The Universe as Communion: Towards a Neopatristic Synthesis of Theology and Science* (cited above).

Revelation therein. There is no universal “pure reason” in the Kantian sense, upon which theology and secular reason might meet – only conflicting traditions with conflicting claims to rationality. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14)¹³⁵.

Inclusion in the Church can therefore only mean a change of mind and, thus, a crisis for secular reason; for “repentance is always a crisis, and 'crisis' means judgment”¹³⁶. Indeed, to be “rational” in any domain of knowledge requires a kind of *μετάνοια*: a turning outward of the in-turned mind towards objective realities, a movement from “bad” to “good” subjectivity¹³⁷. Not less so does apprehension of the *ratio fidei* lie on the far side of the *μετάνοια* which the apostolic Word is pitched to elicit. Theological address to the world must stand squarely on the inherent rationality of revealed faith and its “apodictic certainty”¹³⁸, demonstrating how the Gospel of Christ witnessed by the Scriptures and epito-

135. See “The Lamb of God”, 16: “Doctrinal formulae are instructive and convincing only in the living context of faith. They never help very much when taken *in abstracto*... Reasoning may help to remove certain prejudices – *intelligo ut credam*. But ultimate conviction springs only out of the evidence of faith... And decisive evidence, in the matters of faith, is precisely *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*”. This emphasis on the primacy of faith in theological rationality also informs Florovsky’s mature assessment of the crisis of secular modernity: “The real root of the modern tragedy does not lie only in the fact that people lost convictions but that they deserted Christ”: FLOROVSKY “Faith and Culture” in ED. FULLER (ed) *The Christian Idea of Education* (Yale University Press, 1957) 215.

136. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol II, 292; see also 302.

137. “The Metaphysical Premises of Utopianism”, FLOROVSKY, *Philosophy*, 77.

138. “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology”, 27, 36. One would not be wrong to detect in Florovsky’s invocation of *fides quaerens intellectum* – with his stress upon the foundation of theological reason in ecclesial faith, *theologia relativa* and the *positive* content of revelation – a certain concord with Karl Barth, whose book on Anselm, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, was published the same year (1931). Florovsky visited Barth’s seminar in Bonn to present his lecture, “Offenbarung, Philosophie, Theologie”. Barth defined *fides* as “knowledge or affirmation of the word of Christ” or the church’s creed, and the task of *intellectum* as “reflecting on what been said and affirmed beforehand by creed” – such that theology could only be a matter of a *posteriori* rational reflection within the Church on the basis of faith: see BARTH K., *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (John Knox Press, 1958). Crucial disagreement, however, lay in the nature and role of tradition and experience in defining this ecclesial faith, and in Florovsky’s willingness to identify this reflection with a revelation-based *philosophy* – a point upon which Barth criticized Florovsky: see BUSCH EBERHARD, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Eerdmans, 1994), 215.

mized in the historic creed of the Church provides the best, most truthful, most comprehensive and liberating account of reality in its varied dimensions. Faithful engagement with modern thought and culture can therefore only proceed, not from some imagined neutral zone of universal reason or human experience, but from the very heart of the Church, precisely in its radical singularities: “the impact of theology upon the ever-evolving reason of human history can only be achieved 'when theology shall return to the depths of the Church and lighten them from within, when reason shall find its centre in the heart, and when the heart shall mature through rational meditation’”¹³⁹.

Whose West? Which Rationality?

“Orthodox thought today perpetuates and re-accentuates the positions laid out in the debates of the 1930s”¹⁴⁰. With the current renaissance of interest in the Russian religious thinkers, the burden of proof lies with those looking to this school as a source for Orthodox cultural-political engagement to show how its profound Christological weaknesses do not in fact compromise the Orthodoxy of its basic approach to the Church/world relationship, contributing to a blurring of the difference between the Spirit of God and the corporate subjectivities of the age. No new evidence, no new social or cultural situation now appears which could absolve theology of the stricture, articulated by Florovsky, that “to begin with the world instead of the Word is the wrong method”¹⁴¹ – that is, the Word of God *incarnate*, Christ Jesus, known within the historical body of his flesh, the Church.

Trends have shifted; yet it must be asked whether what Florovsky wrote regarding attempts to re-interpret the Gospel message in the terms of Kant or Hegel does not apply equally to the “contextual theologies” (feminist, liberationist, post-colonial, religious-pluralist, etc.) widespread in many Western confessions today¹⁴², reflective as these often are especially of cultural-Marxist and

139. NESTERUK, *The Universe as Communion*, 13, quoting “The Ways of Russian Theology”, *Aspects of Church History*, 191.

140. STÖCKL, “Modernity and its Critique”, 250.

141. Florovsky, verbal remarks quoted in BLANE, 139.

142. In light of the title chosen for June 3-6 2010 Volos conference, “Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology? Can Orthodox Theology Be Contextual?”, one would like to ask: are such theologies being proposed as models for the Orthodox?

latitudinarian assumptions: “All those tentative transpositions or translations have never been anything else but betrayals, that is to say, new interpretations in terms thoroughly *inappropriate*... They satisfied less the needs of contemporaries than the fads of the day”¹⁴³. Certainly, as Florovsky also emphasized, theology must speak in a way attuned to the needs of its particular time and place, with a healing word – but no less so as “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Revelation itself, mediated in the form of Church tradition, provides the first, most determinative hermeneutical “context” – wider than this world, more temporally inclusive than the cultural contexts of any one age. The theologian's first task is to enter deeply into *this* context and its history; to have his reason renewed through repentance, ecclesial discipline and devout rational inquiry; to *guard the deposit* (1 Tim. 6:20): only then can he speak in a faithful, creative and prophetic way to the needs of his own time.

However, the “unexpected agreement” which Florovsky noted in 1936, between a theological modernism which would regard the patristic “speculation” as outmoded, and “certain conservative minds... who mistrust any theological speculation” – indeed any talk of reason in theology – remains also still with us¹⁴⁴. To speak now of passing beyond the neo-patristic synthesis¹⁴⁵ misses the

143. “The Ways of Russian Theology”, *Aspects of Church History*, 197.

144. “Patristics and Modern Theology”, 228: “Both disregard the traditional synthesis, the patristic doctrine. For some it is still a speculation, for others it is a speculation of the old days, and therefore antiquated”.

145. Fr. John Behr's June 2010 Volos Conference paper “Passing Beyond the Neo-Patristic Synthesis” appears to want to pass beyond what it has not first stopped at length yet to consider. Curiously, the paper criticizes “synthetic” readings of the tradition while also connecting the neo-patristic synthesis with the fragmentation of disciplines in contemporary academic theology. Fr. Behr's criticisms may accurately describe the reception and development of the neo-patristic idea since Florovsky; yet it is difficult to see how the synthetic method can be anything but at odds with fragmentation, or how such a synthetic method could be avoided if one is to uphold the unity and continuity of tradition. Like Behr, Florovsky himself criticized the separation between patristic and biblical studies, countering this by emphasizing the *interpretive* and *theological* nature of all divisions in historical epoch or field: see FLOROVSKY, “Types of Historical Interpretation”, *Anglican Theological Review*, v.50, no.2, April 1968, 144-155. Behr's apparent rejection of metaphysics conflicts sharply with Florovsky, and voices questions about the realism of Behr's approach. Yet far from passing beyond, Fr. Behr's own emphases upon the centrality

tragedy of this situation: the fact that Florovsky's own very open-ended formulation of this hermeneutic has hardly yet come to be understood or appropriated in any depth, even by its own professed adherents – least of all, in its account of theological rationality, its Scriptural-exegetical heart, and the sophisticated account of historicity and witness undergirding these. Does there not remain still a widespread tendency to “dissolve dogmatics in asceticism” – again, in an “exaggerated emphasis on the incommensurability of human knowledge with fullness of being”¹⁴⁶ perhaps even at times in an attitude of “gnosomachy”?

With the major exception of Staniloae¹⁴⁷, much of what passes as Orthodox and neo-patristic theology since Florovsky, in dealing with the question of reason in theology, repeats the 19th century Romantic appeal to a non-rational “experience” against Enlightenment *Vernunft*. In doing so, it allows precisely the same Enlightenment reduction of reason (conceived in opposition to tradition, transcendence, revelation, history mystery, and liturgy) to *define the terms* of what constitutes rationality for theology and culture alike. In a time when Christian souls desperately require, not simply *ethos* or discipline, but a discipline of *thought*, a healing and recovery of the mind “through the light of Christian rea-

of Christ and his Cross, the Christological - economic basis of Trinitarian doctrine and the exegetical and *martyric* character of theology, as well as his concern not to “algebraize” or eclipse the Scriptural narrative in all its specificity, in fact *agree* in large part with the core design of Florovsky's hermeneutic (if with a new “grammatical” slant), being drawn from the same biblical-patristic sources; his book *The Mystery of Christ* likewise employs a comparable synthetic method, which may be justly called “neopatristic”.

146. *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. II, 214, 272.

147. “In Staniloae's epistemology, reason and mysticism, or better to say reason and experience (mystical or ordinary) are in a continuum”: ROGOBETE SILVIU E., “Mystical Existentialism or Communitarian Participation? Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Staniloae”, in Lucian Turcescu, ed., *Dumitru Staniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Portland, Oregon: The Center for Romanian Studies), 167-206, at 191. See STANILOAE DUMITRU, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 95-124; *Orthodox Spirituality* (St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2003), 203-223; and *Theology and the Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 213-236. In a similar line, but with greater scientific interest, the work of the Romanian-French theologian Père Razvan Ionescu is also notable in this regard. The work of Nikolaos Loudovikos should perhaps be mentioned here also. For an overview of modern Orthodox thought on faith and reason, focusing on Lossky, Yannaras and Zizioulas, see PAPANIKOLAOU ARISTOTLE, “Reasonable Faith and Trinitarian Logic: Faith and Reason in Eastern Orthodox Theology”, in Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons, eds, *Restoring Faith in Reason* (SCM Press, 2002), 237-255.

son”¹⁴⁸, an evangelical philosophy, capable of informing and directing the whole cultural mind in subjection to the mind of Christ, such anti-intellectual romantic experientialism becomes a function of secularization, mimicking the pietism which these theologians themselves excoriate¹⁴⁹.

Hyperbolic and over-generalized animus against an ill-defined and poorly understood “scholasticism”¹⁵⁰ has blinded much of even the best contemporary Orthodox thought to the profound concern with divine and human rationality characteristic of the Greek Fathers, and the unity of thought and prayer, the λογική λατρεία, which marks the patristic standard¹⁵¹. As the work of Pierre Hadot should teach us, it is only the modern Western divorce of metaphysics from ascetical practice that misleads us into declaring the conflict between philosophy and spiritual experience a permanent one¹⁵². Florovsky's identification of Christianity as true philosophy and theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* returns us to the common tradition of both Greek and Latin Fathers, who drew from the word of Isaiah 7:9 (LXX), “If you do not believe, you will not understand”, an authentic theological realism, of reason restored by faith, faith made articulate in understanding¹⁵³. As such, rediscovery of his actual insights challenges both theological liberals tempted to subject or re-mold this tradition to the rival reasonings of Enlightenment ideals or of post-Nietzschean/Marxian ge-

148. “The Ways of Russian Theology”, 204.

149. As Florovsky notes (“The Predicament of the Christian Historian”, 32-33), both Enlightenment rationalism and Pietism worked towards the same end in shifting the focus away from historical events and onto the “inward’ experience of believers”: “Christianity, in this interpretation, became a ‘religion of experience,’... The person of Jesus Christ lost its cruciality in this interpretation, even if his message has been, to a certain extent, kept and maintained”.

150. For Florovsky's insistence on the need for constructive dialogue with Latin scholasticism, see *Ways of Russian Theology*, Vol. II, 303.

151. On the rational, even “systematic”, character of patristic theology, see A.N. WILLIAMS, *Divine Sense: the Intellect in Patristic Thought* (Oxford, 2009).

152. See HADOT PIERRE, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Blackwell, 1995), 126-146, and *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Harvard, 2002), 236-270.

153. See IRENAEUS, *Epideixis*, 3; CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromateis*, 1:1, 2:2, 4:4:21; CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Catech.* 5:4; AUGUSTINE, *In Ioannis Evangelium* 27:9, 29:6; 40:9. Florovsky's theological epistemology stands therefore in significant conflict with that of such writers as Met. Hierotheos Vlachos and Fr. Michael Azhoul, both of whom interpret *fides quaerens intellectum* as a departure from patristic Orthodoxy and a motto of theological rationalism peculiar to the post-Augustinian West.

neological critique¹⁵⁴, and those reactionary experientialists who, in the name of returning to the Fathers, divide this same common tradition in halves with integralist theories similar to that to which Florovsky objected in the cultural morphology of Toynbee, with its isolation of Eastern and Western Christendom into two separate “intelligible fields”¹⁵⁵.

There is some irony in the fact that, precisely as Florovsky's defense of Christian Hellenism now receives criticism from Orthodox for its supposed anti-Westernism and Eastern cultural chauvinism¹⁵⁶, the Latin church is now being led by a neo-patristic theologian of the *ressourcement* who has decried the modern de-Hellenization of Christianity and championed Christian Hellenism understood in terms remarkably close to those of Florovsky – as a call to the renewal of faith-inspired *reason* – and with the same emphasis on the historical locatedness of reason, the historical mediation of truth, and the priority of history over system¹⁵⁷. At the same time, while secular Western thought continues

154. See MACINTYRE ALASDAIR, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

155. Namely, those espousing the current of contemporary Greek politico-theology discussed in PAYNE DANIEL, *The Revival of Political Hesychasm in Greek Orthodox Thought* (Phd. diss., Baylor University, 2006). While noting Florovsky's lack of attention to politics, Payne still unfortunately gives the mistaken impression of a continuity between Florovsky and the theological theories of Romanides, Yannaras and Vlachos in this connection. For Florovsky's critique of Toynbee, which Payne has neglected, see “The Legacy and Task of Orthodox Theology, 65-67; “Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church”, 29; and “The Patterns of Historical Interpretation”, 150. Also relevant: FLOROVSKY, *Review of the Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 207; “The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement”; “The Problem of Ecumenical Encounter”, A.H. Armstrong and E.J.B. Fry, eds, *Rediscovering Eastern Christendom: Essays in Memory of Dom Bede Winslow* (London, 1963), 63-76.

156. See the essay of GALLAHER BRANDON, ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’: Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky”, forthcoming in *Modern Theology*, 2011.

157. See especially the Sept. 12, 2006 Regensburg University Address of Pope Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections”, as well as RATZINGER J., “Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today”, *Origins*, 26, October 31, 1996, 309–17, and “Pastorale Konstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute: Kommentar”, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 14 (Freiburg: Herder), 313-54; on the authority of the Fathers, see RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (Ignatius Press, 1987), 134-152. Like Florovsky, Ratzinger also conceives “the fundamental crisis of our age” as “understanding the mediation of history in the realm of ontology”: see *Principles*

to develop, as Florovsky noted in 1967, “in zig-zags” (“as soon as one thinks... he adjusted himself to modern man, so-called modern man is another”)¹⁵⁸, liberal theologians of both Roman Catholic and Protestant backgrounds, attempting to fit the Gospel to the spirit of the age, find themselves daily threatened with irrelevance by the very *zeitgeistlich* standards they so embrace.

In the contemporary discussion regarding the “clash of civilizations” and the future of the Christian roots of Europe, Orthodox hastening to affirmative engagement with Western modernity and its philosophical rationality – as well as those anxious to resist all exchanges with the West and its culture of reason out of concern for the integrity of Orthodox Christian-Hellenistic culture – would do well to note this double phenomenon closely, and to ask themselves: *whose* West? *which* rationality?

In answering that question, they can hardly do better than to follow Florovsky, for whom “there was no substitute for hard intellectual work, reasoned argument clarified by grace” – “a salutary corrective for any who would identify Orthodoxy with mystical or aesthetic vagueness”¹⁵⁹ – following behind and beyond him to rediscover and renew the profound apprehension of the rationality of faith in the *Logos* of God incarnate, the historical God-man, Jesus Christ, bequeathed us from the Fathers of both East and West, as a bar of judgment and a fecund source for any contemporary or future engagement.

of Catholic Theology, 160. For positive assessments of Florovsky's Christian Hellenism by Roman Catholic theologians, see DOM EMMANUEL LANNE, OSB, “Le mystère de l'Église dans la perspective de la théologie Orthodoxe”, *Irenikon*, 35/2, 1962, 203-204; and DANIELOU JEAN, *The Lord of History* (Longmans, 1958), 41-43.

158. Remarks given at a conference in southern Switzerland on the thought of Rudolf Bultmann: see BLANE, 204, n 220.

159. WILLIAMS ROWAN, “Georges Florovsky (1893-1979): The Theologian”, *Sobornost*, 2:1, 1980, 72.