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INTELLECTUS QUAERENS FIDEM:
GEORGES FLOROVSKY ON THE RELATION
BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY*

Once there was no real distinction between philosophy and theology. The difference was a matter of emphasis. Although philosophy started from the study of nature, and theology began from the listening to the revelation, they were moving to the same final end, which was the highest universal wisdom. The study of creature readily led to the discovery of its ultimate source, and the inquiry into the divinity cast a light on the whole universe. Modern times brought about the separation between them. As a result we arrived at the project of pure natural philosophy on the one hand, and the idea of pure revealed theology on the other. Interestingly enough, in both cases theology loses: in the former account it becomes needless, in the latter meaningless. There are however at least two different ways in which one can restore the link between theology and philosophy. First, philosophy may enter into the field of theology in order to provide it with some concepts and principles and attempts to justify its claims; second, theology may intervene in the domain of philosophy, suggesting to it some problems, categories and claims to be applied to the natural world. The first project might roughly be called a philosophical theology, while the other one could be named a theological philosophy¹.

It seems that the Western philosophical imagination was dominated by the first way of proceeding. The task of philosophy was usually seen as an independent inquiry not drawing on any revealed truth, ultimately culminating in

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¹ I proposed these terms in “Rosyjska filozofia teologiczna,” in *Rosyjska metafizyka religijna*, ed. Teresa Obolevitch and Wojciech Kowalski (Tarnów: Biblos, 2009), 23–44.

natural theology, that is a philosophical justification of some basic theological claims. There is, however, also that second way of doing philosophy, which starts with the revelation and then approaches the natural world. The possibility and the need for such philosophical enterprise was recently indicated by Alasdair MacIntyre: “Philosophical enquiry begins by considering what it would be to understand the order of things rightly and so moves in its enquiries toward affirming the existence of God. But philosophical enquiry finds a second beginning in considering how we need to understand the order of things in the light of God’s self-revelation. So philosophy and theology each need and complement the other.”² In the first case philosophy attempts a rational reconstruction of religious beliefs, it provides concepts and principles for theology. In the second one, conversely, the revelation suggests categories and principles by which the natural world might be described and explained. The former is the path of philosophical theology, the latter is the way of theological philosophy. Both moves constitute the integral program of Christian philosophy.

In this paper I would like to take a closer look at Georges Florovsky’s original view on the relation between philosophy and theology. It seems that he tried to formulate an approach based on patristic experience and opposed to the dominating secular paradigm of philosophy. As Teresa Obolevitch aptly suggested, he wanted to replace the principle *fides quaerens intellectum* by the rule *intellectus quaerens fidem*.³ It was the faith that usually sought the reason; for Florovsky the reason should seek the faith. In that first default case the faith needs to be justified or proved by the reason, in the second, unobvious one, the faith has an absolute priority and illuminates itself the natural thought. Philosophy should not attempt to ground the theology formulating arguments for the existence of God or proving the coherence of theism, but rather should accept theology as a fundamental premise and then develop a new, non-secular account for the old philosophical topics.

Father Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) was undoubtedly one of the most influential Orthodox theologians in the twentieth century.⁴ He is the main

² Alasdair MACINTYRE, *God, Philosophy, Universities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 166.

³ Teresa OBOLEVITCH, “Faith and Knowledge in the Thought of Georges Florovsky,” in *Faith and Reason in Russian Thought*, ed. Teresa Obolevitch and Paweł Rojek (Krakow: Copernicus Center Press, 2015), 210.

⁴ Teresa OBOLEVITCH, *Filozofia rosyjskiego renesansu patrystycznego: o. Gieorgij Florowski, Włodzimierz Łoski i inni* (Krakow: Copernicus Center Press, 2014), 63–87.

mover of the project of “neopatristic synthesis,” which became a dominant paradigm of the contemporary Orthodox theology. He started however, interestingly enough, as a religious philosopher and positive scientist. In Odessa, where he lived and studied for the first years, he was a secretary of both Philosophical and Scientists’ Association. At the age of seventeen he corresponded with the great philosopher Pavel Florensky; at the age of twenty four he published a piece of research in English on the reflex salivary secretion, praised by the famous psychologist Ivan Pavlov. Exiled from Soviet Russia, he engaged into the Eurasian movement seeking a cultural and political alternative both to the communist order and the *ancien régime*. After his breaking with the Eurasians he devoted himself entirely to theological studies. In 1932 he was ordained priest. In 1948 he moved from Paris, where he taught patristics, to the US, where he became dean of St Vladimir Theological Seminary, and afterwards a professor at Harvard and Princeton, being at the end of his life probably the most honored Orthodox theologian in the world.

I would like to focus here on two of Florovsky’s papers which brilliantly illustrate his way to theological philosophy. The first one, scarcely known and rarely cited, entitled “Philosophy and Religion,” was written in 1923 for a Russian émigré journal “Logos,” which unfortunately ceased to appear soon after the submission. Anyway, the paper probably would not be accepted by its editor Boris Yakovenko, who had completely different philosophical views. The forgotten text has recently been discovered in Yakovenko’s personal archive in Prague and published in Russian by Professor Oleg Ermishin.⁵

The second Florovsky’s paper, which is perhaps one of his most acknowledged and referred to texts, was presented (presumably in French) on June 29, 1931, at Karl Barth’s theological seminar at the University of Bonn and provoked a fierce discussion.⁶ Florovsky recalled that the debate with Barth “took two evenings, or rather one evening and a second night, because we parted at six in the morning, walking the streets, singing *Gaudeamus*.”⁷ However, despite this ecumenical spirit, Barth’s opinion on Florovsky’s paper was crushing. In a letter to Eduard Thurneysen he described it as “a formless Russian heap of thoughts, in which everything was allowed to

⁵ Georgiy FLOROVSKIY, “Filosofiya i Religiya,” *Filosofskie Nauki* 10 (2013): 100–105; for the history of the text see Oleg T. YERMISHIN, “Nieizvestnaya stat’ya G. V. Florovskogo v kontekste sovremennoy filosofskoy teologii,” *Filosofskie Nauki* 10 (2013): 93–99.

⁶ For details of the meetings see Matthew BAKER “Offenbarung, Philosophie und Theologie: Karl Barth and Georges Florovsky in dialogue,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68 (2015): 299–326.

⁷ *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman*, ed. Andrew Blane (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 69.

blur into everything else.”⁸ Nevertheless Barth advised to publish the text which appeared soon in German as “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology.” At the same time the journal *Put* published the Russian, extended version of the paper, entitled simply “Theological Fragments.”⁹

These two papers mark Florovsky’s personal path from philosophy to theology. As was noticed by Oleg Yermishin, there are various links between the two texts which indicate the development of Florovsky’s thought. “The last echo of the paper ‘Philosophy and Religion’ in later Florovsky’s works we hear in a text from 1931: ‘Theological Fragments.’ . . . His theological investigations show that he finally moved from philosophy to theology, which he presented here as a higher type of knowledge.”¹⁰ In 1923 Florovsky would still describe himself as a philosopher, even though he radically limited the possibility of rationally grounding the faith. In 1931 he clearly realized the need for a change of the whole existing paradigm of philosophy. He firmly called himself a theologian and moved toward a provocative project of theologically grounding philosophy. I will try to show that the two mentioned papers complement each other. The first one outlines an argument against old natural theology, the second one sketches the program of a new philosophy. Both papers together make, as it seems, one of the clearest expositions of the idea of theological philosophy.

1. AGAINST PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

The paper “Philosophy and Religion” is a hard attack on the traditional project of natural theology. Not only does Florovsky argue that the faith does not need to be justified by reason, he goes further to claim that any attempts to justify faith by reason are dangerous for the faith itself. It is so because religion is a matter of experience, not speculation. The paper starts as follows: “Religion is an experience, a revelation. God manifests and reveals

⁸ Barth to Thurneysen, July 2, 1931, in: *Karl Barth – Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel*, vol. 3: 1930–1935, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2000, 3: 160, cited after M. BAKER, “Offenbarung, Philosophie und Theologie,” 305.

⁹ Georgij FLOROVSKIY, “Bogoslovskiye otryvki,” *Put* 31 (1931): 3–29; Georgij FLOROVSKIY, “Offenbarung, Philosophie und Theologie,” *Zwischen den Zeiten* 9 (1931): 463–80. In this paper I will quote the English translation of the German version and occasionally refer to the Russian text. Notice that the German version is not a simple abridgment of the Russian paper, but contains some additional material. It remains undecided which of the two versions is the original one.

¹⁰ O. YERMISHIN, “Nieizvestnaya stat’ya,” 98.

Himself to a believer in religious perceptions. The believer perceives the Transcendence...directly, with obviousness and self-evidence.”¹¹ Religious experience has therefore the same nature as sensory one, the difference lies in the nature of the experienced object. Religious experience might also be compared with the experience of external things or other minds. Theology is only a description of religious experience. “The dogmatic statements—claims Florovsky—are the statements of experience, the descriptive expressions of the experienced.”¹²

If this is so, it becomes clear why religious faith does not need to be justified by any kind of reasoning. The case with religion is the same as with experience of the world itself or other minds. We simply accept the existence of external reality and other persons on the basis of our experience. No additional arguments are needed. Though some philosophers might still think that the lack of a proof of the existence of the external world is a perennial scandal of philosophy, nobody else is embarrassed by it. Similarly, a believer does not need to seek a justification for that what he or she sees and feels. If somebody does not experience the Transcendence, no arguments can fill that gap.

Florovsky argued, however, that attempts to find a justification of religion are not only unnecessary, but also dangerous. He wrote: “The rational justification of the faith is its destruction: the faith justifies itself.”¹³ The reason for that is the fact that natural theology has to postulate a kind of causal connection between the world and God. The world is usually thought of as an effect of God’s creative act. This way of thinking, Florovsky argues, involves God into the relation to the world and undermines his absolute character. Moreover, such natural connection between the world and God excludes divine freedom, which is the basis of religious experience. The science of creation is impossible since the act of creation was a voluntary act of God’s mercy. To claim otherwise is to deny God’s transcendence and make Him an element of an immanent causal network.

Florovsky concludes for a moment that the faith on the one hand and the reason on the other are two distinct and separate human abilities. He writes: “Religion and philosophy, faith and knowledge, are essentially different, and so they are mutually autonomous. The faith is the ‘evidence of things not seen,’ whereas the knowledge is the evidence of the visible things; the faith is the experience of the Transcendent, whereas the knowledge is the experi-

¹¹ G. FLOROVSKIY, *Filosofiya i religiya*, 100.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 102.

ence of the immanent.”¹⁴ This passage, as it stands, suggests a sharp distinction between faith and reason. From this perspective Florovsky would be close to the Protestant tradition of limited natural reason and autonomous faith. Some commentators of this text seem to notice only this negative claim and find difficulty in reconciling this claim with the author’s other statements.¹⁵

The point is, however, that it is not the end of Florovsky’s paper. Suddenly he makes an important turn towards a new direction. He continues: “But here we have to make a reservation. The separation of the faith and reason is not absolute, is not in all respects . . . The experience of faith, of the real communion with God, of the transgressing the borders, of the religious *transcensus*, is not isolated in an individual human soul. The believer perceives the world in another way . . . Both the primary experience, and the creative work of philosophical imagination are influenced by religious experience.”¹⁶ Religion, although unattainable for the natural reason, can nevertheless shape the philosophical view of the world. Florovsky suggests that the great philosophical systems, such as Plato’s theory of ideas, Aristotle’s metaphysics, or even systems of Descartes, Kant and Hegel, were all philosophical expressions of the primary experience of faith of their inventors. Even atheistic philosophies are influenced by religion, since “the negation of God is also a kind of religion, at least in the psychological sense.”¹⁷ Florovsky ends his short paper with the following summary: “The believing thinker should faithfully guard the border between the *divina* and the *humana*, between the Transcendent and the Immanent, but he could not, should not and in fact cannot look at the world, think about it and explain it as if there were no God. Since God really exists, religious eyes directly perceive Him everywhere, and the experience of religious freedom embraces all the nature of the believer. On the personal level, the faith . . . always enters into philosophy, and its banishing is impossible.”¹⁸ It turns out that faith and reason are distinct, but not wholly separate. Although faith is autonomous with respect to reason, reason is not autonomous with respect to faith. The experience of faith is therefore able to change one’s attitude to reality, but it is also

¹⁴ G. FLOROVSKIY, *Filosofiya i religiya*, 104.

¹⁵ O. YERMISHIN, “Nieizvestnaya stat’ya,”; T. OBOLEVITCH, *Filozofia rosyjskiego renesansu patrystycznego*, 155; *Georgija Florowskiego krytyka rosyjskiego renesansu religijno-filozoficznego; próba oceny*.

¹⁶ G. FLOROVSKIY, *Filosofiya i religiya*, 103.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

able to modify one's whole worldview, and penetrate one's system of philosophical beliefs. Indeed, such philosophy would not merely be a justification of religion, but rather an expression of one's faith.

Oleg Ermishin in his commentary to the "Philosophy and Religion" attempted to compare Florovsky's ideas with the views on religion that are current in analytical philosophy. He wrote: "It can be said without any exaggeration, that if Florovsky's paper was published nowadays, it would cause a great academic scandal, since his basic thesis denies in fact the very principles of the contemporary philosophy of religion, as well as its general tendency."¹⁹ It would be so, according to Ermishin, because the mainstream of analytical philosophy of religion tries to give a rational justification of faith, and Florovsky, as we have seen, radically criticized any attempts in philosophical theology. Ermishin regrets that the paper has not been published in English, for instance after Florovsky's move to the US. Unfortunately, the only existing copy of it was then closed in Yakovenko's folder in Prague.

I think that Ermishin is right, but not for the reason he actually gave. For sure, a great part of contemporary philosophy of religion still develops the program of natural theology and attempts to justify religious beliefs. But at the same time there is an influential group that put forward the thesis, exactly in Florovsky's spirit, that faith cannot and should not be justified in that way. John Hick in the seventies formulated an idea of "rational theistic belief without proofs," and Alvin Plantinga with Nicholas Wolterstorff in the eighties initiated the ambitious program of "reformed epistemology," holding that faith need not be grounded by reason.²⁰ Their argumentation, based on religious experience, seems to be close to Florovsky's line. Now, his old paper might be of interest nowadays, not as a groundbreaking point, but as an early expression of the same intuitions.

A real scandal, or at least confusion, which indeed could be started by Florovsky's paper, I believe, would be caused not by his claim on the experimental basis of faith, but rather by his final suggestion that religion might and should shape philosophy. His last word was not proclamation of autonomy of knowledge, but the idea of domination of theology over any other discipline of knowledge, including philosophy. This view, which breaks both with the stereotypical Catholic tradition of natural theology, as well as with

¹⁹ O. ERMISHIN, "Nieizvestnaya stat'ya," 93–94.

²⁰ John HICK, *Arguments for the Existence of God* (London: Macmillan, 1971), 101–120; *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

the conventional Protestant trend of independent theology, could indeed become a fresh inspiration for the contemporary philosophy of religion. As a matter of fact, Florovsky's proposal did inspire a great debate. The strict formulation of his conception of the new Christian philosophy was given in his famous paper written in 1931.

2. TOWARDS THEOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

Florovsky starts his "Revelation, Philosophy, and Theology" as if it was supposed to be a new version of his "Philosophy and Religion." The very first sentence of his second paper directly corresponds to the beginning of the earlier essay: "There are two aspects of religious knowledge: *revelation* and *experience* . . . Revelation is theophany. God descends to man and reveals Himself to man. And man sees and beholds God. And he describes what he sees and hears; he testifies to what has been revealed to him."²¹ Previously Florovsky was concerned mainly with the experience of faith, now he completes his account by the detailed analysis of revelation. These two categories are closely related. The revelation of God is not a series of remote events described in ancient documents, but an actual experience of the community of faith. Even the stories included in Scripture are not merely documents for inquiry but the present reality to be experienced by the believers. The revelation in the proper sense turns out to be a way of life of the religious community.

The revelation of God was completed in Jesus Christ. After the hearing of the words of prophets and seeing the actions of God in the history of Israel, we finally listened to and witnessed the Son of God, who fully revealed the mystery of God. In the incarnation God descended and revealed Himself to man. That was the fullest theophany. Now, to have a part in this revelation, one needs not only to hear the words of Christ, but first of all one has to live Christ's own life. The revelation is therefore accessible only in the Church, which is a mystical Body of Christ. The Church renews human nature and makes possible the experience of God. Here man can truly see and behold God. Again, it turns out that the knowledge of God is possible only within the living community of faith.

²¹ Georges FLOROVSKY, "Revelation, Philosophy and Theology," transl. Richard Haugh, in *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol. 3: *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), 21.

Now, Florovsky argues that man is called to be a witness of his faith. The revelation of God, which is the experience of the life in the Church, should be manifested, expressed and described. Man realizes this vocation in many different ways: writing down Scripture, preaching the Word of God or creating religious art. One of the important ways of testifying to the faith is the use of reason. Florovsky writes: "Reason is summoned to the knowledge of God. The 'philosophizing' about God is not just a feature of inquisitiveness or a kind of audacious curiosity. On the contrary, it is the fulfillment of man's religious calling and duty."²² All the human capacities, including the natural reason, are open for the operation of divine grace. To think otherwise, to ignore the call of reason for the expression of faith, is to fall into the heresy of Apollinarism. It was Apollinaris of Laodicea, Florovsky reminds, who denied in Christ human reason. The rejection of his teaching by the Church meant the fundamental justification of reason. It was acknowledged that human reason could be transformed so as to be able to grasp and develop the revealed divine truths.

The vocation of the reason is an expression of the experience of the faith. The spiritual vision given in the Church should be translated into the discursive form. The first step in this project is the formulation of the dogmas of faith. Dogmas are therefore first of all expressions of religious experience. "Dogma—writes Florovsky—is the testimony of thought about what has been seen and revealed, about what has been contemplated in the experience of faith, and this testimony is expressed in concepts and definitions. Dogma is an intellectual vision . . . the logical image, a 'logical icon' of divine reality."²³

The formulation of dogmas, however, is only the beginning of the full rational expression of the experience of faith. The principles of dogmatic theology concern primarily the divine reality only and the task of Christian philosophy is to develop theological dogmas into the complete philosophical system which could embrace every sphere of human experience. Florovsky claims: "Revelation must unfold within human thought, must develop into an entire system of believing confession, into a system of religious perspective—one may say, into a system of religious philosophy and a philosophy of Revelation."²⁴

Florovsky clearly picks up here the idea he sketched previously in the closing paragraphs of "Religion and Philosophy." He pointed out that a believer perceives the world in a new way. What was previously taken as

²² Ibid., 31.

²³ Ibid., 29.

²⁴ Ibid., 26–27.

a mere inevitable result of individual conversion, is now seen as an obligation for the community of faith. The aim of a believing philosopher is to elaborate a religious perspective on the whole world. The foundation of such a philosophical system should be the principles provided by theology. “Dogmatic theology, as the exposition and explanation of divinely revealed truth in the realm of thought, is precisely the basis of a Christian philosophy, of a sacred philosophy, of a philosophy of the Holy Spirit.”²⁵ The Russian version of this paper by Florovsky makes here some important clarifications. First, the bizarre expression “a philosophy of the Holy Spirit” turns out to be an unfortunate translation of the phrase: “a philosophy of the transformed spirit.”²⁶ Indeed, the system based on dogmas is a philosophy developed by a new creature, renewed and transformed by the life in Christ. Second, Florovsky adds in the Russian text a remark on the difference between the natural and Christian philosophies. He says: “Christian philosopher in his creative explorations should depart from the dogmas, that is from the concrete experience of faith in a determined absolute logical form, not from the problems of ‘natural thought.’ In some sense he would and should stay ‘on the other side’ of those ‘natural’ problems, arising from the limited, and now also outdated way of perceiving.”²⁷ This is perhaps the clearest formulation of the program of theological philosophy ever made. New philosophy should start from heaven and then descend to earth. This is the reversed way of the old philosophy, which took off from earth and was supposed to reach heaven. A philosopher whose intent is to search for the ultimate truth cannot ignore the revelation. Natural philosophy, that is pure philosophy or philosophical theology, remains true but plainly insufficient. Now we have a great philosophical upgrade given in the experience of the Church. The Christian philosophy should therefore start, and not end, with Christian dogmas.

The crucial question now is the relationship between the new Christian theological philosophy and the old natural philosophical theology. This is a true challenge for the Christian philosophy. The revelation, in order to be universally understood, must be expressed in an available language. At the same time, this revelation is something new and exceeds the existing conceptual categories. So the experience of faith both must, and at the same time cannot be expressed in the old language. The categories of natural philosophy must therefore be somehow modified, adjusted and transformed for the new theological purposes.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁶ G. FLOROVSKIY, “Bogoslovskiye otryvki,” 17

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17–18

Florovsky starts with a general remark on the relation between human words and the divine Word. He indicates that there is a kind of pre-established harmony between human capacities and the divine revelation. “The Word of God—says Florovsky—can be expressed precisely and adequately in the language of man. For man is created in the image of God.”²⁸ Man has been created in order to be able to accept and to express the revelation. So there is no surprise that the Word of God somehow fits the language of man. Father Georges admits however that human words might need to be adjusted for religious purposes. He says: “The Word of God is not diminished while it resounds in human language. On the contrary, the human word is transformed and, as it were, transfigured because of the fact that it pleased God to speak in human language.”²⁹ And further on: “When divine truth is expressed in human language, the words themselves are transformed. And the fact that the truths of the faith are veiled in logical images and concepts testifies to the transformation of word and thought—words become sanctified through this usage.”³⁰ It seems therefore that the pre-established harmony really means that although human categories in their current state are not quite suitable, they can, nevertheless, be adjusted and customized for expression of the experience of faith. Human words can be—as often repeats Florovsky—“transformed,” “transfigured,” and “sanctified.” In the Russian version of the paper he even spoke literally of “transubstantiation” (*presushchestvleniye*) of the natural language.³¹ Such expressions suggest that in the process of adaptation for theological purposes one part of the meaning, presumably the essential one, undergoes a change, while the other, which might be called accidental, remains the same. The revelation brings a fundamental change, but nevertheless preserves some previous natural content.

This general view is then applied to the particular case of the transformation of Greek natural philosophy by the Church Fathers. Florovsky makes here his most famous statement: “in establishing dogmas the Church expressed revelation in the language of Greek philosophy . . . That meant, in a certain sense, a ‘hellenization’ of revelation. In reality, however, it was a ‘churchification’ of Hellenism.”³² The “churchification” (Russian *votser-*

²⁸ G. FLOROVSKY, “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology,” 22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

³¹ G. FLOROVSKIY, “Bogoslovskiye otryvki,” 4; cf. also “Revelation, Philosophy, and Theology,” 31: “human thought changes, the essence of thought itself is transformed and sanctified.”

³² G. FLOROVSKY, “Revelation, Philosophy, and Theology,” 31–32.

kovleniye, German *Verkirchlichung*) means for Florovsky both a partial transformation and a partial preservation.

The transformation is necessary for the expression of the new kind of experience entailed by Christian faith, whereas the preservation is possible due to the great potency of the concepts and categories of Hellenic thought. Florovsky constantly highlights the double nature of this process. He writes: “particular themes of Hellenic philosophy are received and, through this reception, they change essentially; they change and are no longer recognizable. Because now, in the terminology of Greek philosophy, a new, a totally new experience is expressed. Although themes and motives of Greek thought are retained, the answers to the problems are quite different; they are given out of a new experience.”³³ Florovsky clarifies this place claiming firmly in the Russian version: “There was a rupture in the history of thought. Hellenism was churchified by its transformation.”³⁴ Then he proceeds in both versions: “Hellenism forged in the fire of a new experience and a new faith, is renewed; Hellenic thought is transformed. Usually we do not sufficiently perceive the entire significance of this transformation which Christianity introduced into the realm of thought. This is so, partially, because we too often remain ancient Greeks philosophically, not yet having experienced the baptism of thought by fire.”³⁵ The “churchification” of pagan categories is therefore neither their total replacement nor an adaptation without change. The experience of faith was neither expressed in entirely new language, nor fully covered by old concepts.

It is clear that Florovsky’s thesis was directly opposed to the influential, mainly Protestant, tradition of suspiciousness towards any philosophical influences on Christianity. Such theologians as Albrecht Ritschl, Adolph Harnack or Anders Nygren argued that the simple message of Jesus Christ had been distorted or corrupted by the intervention of Greek thought. This was considered a disastrous hellenization of revelation. Florovsky provocatively argues that it was rather the Christian faith that influenced and transformed the Hellenic culture and not the other way round. What we witness is not a hellenization of Christianity, but the christianization of Hellenism.

Yet it seems, that strictly speaking, Florovsky’s was not the exact opposition of Harnack’s view. Their views are usually rightfully contrasted, but the tendency to see only the points of difference between the two thinkers sometimes goes too far. Paul Gavrilyuk, for instance, recently claimed that their

³³ Ibid., 34.

³⁴ G. FLOROVSKIY, “Bogoslovskiye otryvki,” 16.

³⁵ G. FLOROVSKY, “Revelation, Philosophy, and Theology,” 33–34.

positions are “two opposite extremes” and “antipodes.”³⁶ “If Harnack demonizes the hellenization of Christianity—he writes—Florovsky idealizes the christianization of Hellenism, Harnack’s theological purpose was to de-hellenize contemporary Christian theology; Florovsky’s purpose was, in contrast, to re-hellenize Russian orthodox theology.”³⁷ It seems, however, that the true logical opposition to Harnack’s view would be a strict defense of Hellenism against Christian influences, to be found perhaps among some renaissance thinkers, not a vision of a transformation of the Hellenistic categories. Florovsky did not want to go back to pagan philosophy, but to the “christianized,” “baptized” and “churchified” Hellenism. Gavrilyuk obviously notices it, but nevertheless continues to speak as if both authors represented “two limiting cases,” and two different “ends” of the “spectrum.”³⁸ Harnack indeed occupies one of the extreme points of the logical spectrum, but Florovsky stays perfectly in its middle, not at the opposite end.

Florovsky in his paper gives no particular examples of the theological impact on philosophy, but simply refers to the general process of the transformation of Greek natural philosophy by Church Fathers. Apparently he had in mind the process of accommodation of some crucial philosophical concepts, such as nature, hypostasis or energy, in Christian dogmatic theology. Indeed, the concept of substance, invented first for the analysis of the mundane reality, was adapted and modified by Church Fathers to express the divine truth about the structure of the Trinity and the nature of the Incarnation. The concept of person, which was elaborated in this dialogue with theology, was presumably the most influential philosophical outcome of this process³⁹. The process of “churchification” of these philosophical concepts brought about their deep reconstruction. Aristotle would probably have been surprised to see his categories fit to cover the cases of the strict consubstantiality in the Trinity, the hypostatic union or the identity of energies in Christ, not to mention the Eucharistic transubstantiation developed by the Western Church. As for scholasticism, the very doctrine of *esse*, which was primarily an attempt to draw

³⁶ Paul L. GAVRILYUK, “Harnack’s Hellenized Christianity and Florovsky’s Sacred Hellenism: Questioning two metanarratives of early Christian engagement with late Antique culture,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 54 (2010): 323, 333.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 334.

³⁹ Joseph RATZINGER, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” trans. Michael Waldstein, *Communio* 17 (1990), 439–454; Nikolaus LOBKOWICZ, “Was ist eine Person?” In: *Sozialetik und politische Bildung; Festschrift für Bernard Sutor zum 65 Geburtstag*, edited by Karl Graf Ballestrem, Hans Buchheim, Manfred Hättich, Heinz Hürten (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995), 39–52.

metaphysical consequences from biblical sources, is probably the clearest example of theological philosophy. As Charles Kahn famously claimed, “the existence in the modern sense becomes a central concept in philosophy only in the period when Greek ontology is radically revised in the light of the metaphysics of creation; that is to say under the influence of biblical religion.”⁴⁰ A similar character has Aquinas’ theory of the soul. Joseph Ratzinger argued, that despite the appearances this theory had little in common with the ancient Greek concept of the soul and was an original philosophical answer to the challenge posed by the idea of man presupposed by the revelation⁴¹. All these examples show that the process of christianization of pagan categories, both in East and West, led to their deep transformation and resulted not in a philosophical theology, but rather in a theological philosophy.

3. RUSSIAN TRADITION AND POST-SECULARISM

Philosophy and theology differ merely in the point of departure. Philosophy starts from the natural world, theology begins from the revealed Word. Both disciplines have the same goal, namely the universal and ultimate truth. However, if there is God, if the revelation gave us some new truths, if the incarnation transformed our own nature, then theology has obvious priority over philosophy. In some sense theology turns out to be a true philosophy. There remains nevertheless great work to be done: the interpretation of the natural world in the light of the revealed Word. This is the proper task of Christian philosophy after the First and before the Second Coming.

In this paper I tried to sketch a project of theological philosophy proposed by Georges Florovsky, who clearly realized the difference between natural theology and Christian philosophy. I believe that the Russian project of theological philosophy, which Florovsky, despite his contestation of his own philosophical tradition, summarized and developed, is the clearest, the most elaborate and the most self-conscious version of theological philosophy. In my opinion, every attempt to develop theological philosophy must draw on the results achieved by the thinkers in that Russian tradition of it.⁴²

⁴⁰ Charles H. KAHN, *Essays on Being* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), 62–63.

⁴¹ Joseph RATZINGER, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, translated by Michael Waldstein (Washington DC, The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 146–149.

⁴² Cf. my attempts to develop theological philosophy: “The logic of Palamism,” in *Logic in Orthodox Christian Thinking*, ed. Andrew Schumann (Hausenstamm: Ontos Verlag, 2013), 38–80; “Onomatodoxy and the Problem of Constitution: Florenski on Scientific and Manifest Images

It seems that we are still not fully aware of the value of the Russian religious philosophy in contemporary context. Recently Artur Mrówczyński Van Allen and Sebastián Montiel argued for the importance of the Russian experience for contemporary post-secular philosophy and theology.⁴³ The greatest value of Russian philosophy lies in the overt rejection of the secular model of philosophy. Ivan Kireevsky, Vladimir Soloviev, Pavel Florensky, Sergei Bulgakov and finally Georges Florovsky did not do philosophy as if there were no God. They simply lived Christian life and let it shape their worldview, including philosophical views. They tried to express in an intellectual way their experience of faith. This is the most radical challenge, not only to the secular reason, but also to the secular faith. For Mrówczyński-Van Allen and Montiel it is the most important lesson we can learn from Russian religious philosophy. “We must accept as normal—they wrote—that the separation between theology and philosophy is superficial . . . This necessary assertion makes the development of Christian thought in the post-secular context possible—a development in the direction defined by Fr Florovsky as ‘the new Christian philosophy,’ which must grow with strong roots in the experience of faith and its dogmatic expression. It is only this type of philosophy that can free us from the curse of the ‘theology dwarf’ of the not-so-modern heresies, and freely leave the apparently neutral gaming table in order to return to its primary vocation of being the doxology of the History of Salvation, to being the story of the Icon.”⁴⁴ Georges Florovsky was not playing the allegedly neutral game with secular reason, but simply intended to change the rules of the game. Instead of shyly hiding their religious inspirations the Russian theological philosophers proudly made them explicit. Theology for Fr Florovsky was not a hidden “ugly dwarf” as in Walter Benjamin’s famous metaphor recalled by Mrówczyński-Van Allen and Montiel; he was rather standing on the shoulders of a giant.

of the World,” in *Faith and Reason in Russian Thought*, ed. Teresa Obolevitch, Paweł Rojek (Kraków: Copernicus Center Press, 2015), 127–159.

⁴³ Artur MROVCHINSKIY-VAN ALLEN, Sebast’yan MONTEL GOMES, “Aspekty russkoy traditsii filosofsko-teologicheskogo sinteza v postsekulyarnom kontekste: o. G. Florovsky, o. S. Bulgakov, A. Bad’yu i ‘karlik teologii,’” in *Sofitoloiya i neopatristskiy sintez: bogoslovskie itogi filosofskog razvitiya* (Moscow, Izdatel’stvo PSTGU, 2013), 211–224.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

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INTELLECTUS QUAERENS FIDEM:
GEORGES FLOROVSKY ON THE RELATION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY
AND THEOLOGY

Summary

In this paper I take a closer look at Fr. Georges Florovsky's original view on the relation between philosophy and theology. I argue that he tried to formulate an approach based on patristic experience and opposed to the dominating secular paradigm of philosophy. In some sense he wanted to reverse the traditional account. As Teresa Obolevitch aptly suggested, he wanted to replace the principle *fides quaerens intellectum* by the rule *intellectus quaerens fidem*. In that first default case the faith needs to be justified or proved by the reason, in the second, unobvious one, the faith has an absolute priority and illuminates itself the natural thought. According to Florovsky, philosophy should not attempt to ground the theology, formulating arguments for the existence of God or proving the coherence of theism, but rather should accept theology as a fundamental premise and then develop a new, non-secular account for the old philosophical topics.

INTELLECTUS QUAERENS FIDEM:
GIEORGIJ FLOROWSKI O RELACJI MIĘDZY FILOZOFIĄ A TEOLOGIĄ

Streszczenie

W artykule tym przyglądam się oryginalnym poglądom o. Gieorgija Fłorowskiego na relację między filozofią a teologią. Staram się pokazać, że próbował on sformułować podejście, oparte na doświadczeniu Ojców Kościoła, mające stanowić alternatywę dla dominującego sekularnego paradygmatu w filozofii. W pewnym sensie chciał on odwrócić tradycyjne ujęcie. Jak słusznie zwróciła uwagę s. Teresa Obolevitch, chciał on zastąpić zasadę *fides quaerens intellectum* przez regułę *intellectus quaerens fidem*. W tym pierwszym, domyślnym wypadku, wiara ma być uzasadniana czy dowodzona przez rozum, w tym drugim, nieoczywistym, wiara zachowuje przewagę i sama oświeca naturalny rozum. Według Fłorowskiego, filozofia nie powinna więc ugruntowywać teologii, formułując argumenty za istnieniem Boga czy dowodząc spójności teizmu, ale raczej przyjąć teologię jako fundamentalną przesłankę i następnie rozwijać nowe, nie sekularne podejścia do starych filozoficznych tematów.

Key words: Florovsky; Christian philosophy; Post-Secularism.

Słowa kluczowe: Fłorowski; filozofia chrześcijańska; postsekularyzm.

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